Radio journalism and women's empowerment in Niger

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Abstract

The significance of radio as a provider of essential news and information in conflict-affected and fragile countries cannot be underestimated nor can its role in contributing to shifts in critical consciousness, changes in behaviour, and raising awareness amongst marginalised groups. This is particularly the case regarding the influence of radio on women's empowerment. In Niger, women suffer from widespread gender inequality with a 75% child marriage rate, low literacy rates, polygamy and gender-based violence. The most important source of information women have is radio. This article illustrates radio's impact on women's rights and empowerment in the world's poorest country. It draws on extensive fieldwork conducted in 2018-19 (workshops, semi-structured interviews and focus groups) and in-depth content analyses of women-related radio output broadcast by Studio Kalangou, a radio studio in Niger, set up in 2016 by the Swiss-based media development agency, Fondation Hirondelle. The article demonstrates how increasing and developing the targeting of radio programmes to include more women-related themes and improving the content will contribute to empowering women politically, economically and within society.

Introduction

Despite its increasingly broad and changing definition, radio remains an essential form of independent information in many regions in the Global South. It is particularly suited to reaching marginalised and isolated communities in fragile or conflict-affected settings and is extensively used for many purposes including providing news, information, and awareness campaigns, especially regarding women's empowerment. Given its potential influence and capacity to change behaviour and attitudes (for good or bad), it is important to determine whether the information radio broadcasts is accurate, independent, targeted, or even aligns with listeners' needs or wishes. This will help assess the significance of radio's role in society and whether improvements can be introduced to increase its potential impact on empowering women, and also whether claims to this impact and its effects can be measured, identified and felt within society.

The article aims to analyse the vital role played by radio in raising the self-esteem of women, triggering shifts in consciousness and evidenced by changes in normative beliefs and

expectations that keep women. Contributing to the existing theoretical discussion on radio and women's empowerment, the article examines the extent to which radio, through the steady provision of news, documentaries, and discussion programmes, can contribute to shaping women's beliefs, practices and values and but also those of society towards women with potentially transformational effects. The article focuses on radio output and women's empowerment in Niger, ranked lowest on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2018), yet the findings are transferable to other developing or fragile countries. Women in Niger are subject to widespread gender inequality. Early marriage, affecting 76% of girls (UNICEF 2017), often marks the end of a woman's education, reflected in low literacy rates and the 15.9% high school completion rate for girls (Save the Children 2016). Gender inequality in primary education is reducing through female enrolment campaigns but this has not extended to secondary education. In this religious and mostly patriarchal society, women are often subject to gender-based violence and polygamy is extensive and complicates a situation in which women have a lower legal status than men. Despite being important stakeholders in many aspects of daily life, women encounter widespread disempowerment. Yet, becoming empowered is not just a question of receiving assets from the many donor organisations operating in such environments to gain some presumed form of financial independence, but involves receiving more, and relevant, independent information to raise awareness and effect a desire to act. This information must represent women in a way that facilitates their empowerment and must be provided in such a manner that it promotes the best representation of women, to the widest and most appropriate audience, and across the broadest area. Drawing on focus groups and content analyses of programmes broadcast by Studio Kalangou, a radio studio based in Niger's capital and run by the Swiss-based media development organisation Fondation Hirondelle, the article highlights the significance of radio, as an empowering knowledge resource, to women in Niger. It investigates shifts in consciousness triggered by representations and characterisations of women in the broadcasts. It determines whether the alignment of discourses in these broadcasts with listeners' needs and wishes contributes to creating self-belief and building self-esteem in women to initiate change, and to supporting processes which increase the ability and capacity to make choices.

Female empowerment and radio

The definition of female empowerment as a concept is blurred at best (Kabeer 1999; Cornwall and Eade 2010; Ewerling et al 2017). It is used extensively in funding bids by non-

governmental organisations (NGOs) and other development organisations, which use it as a catch-all solution for all gender issues, or as a technical fix that is 'ahistorical, apolitical, de-contextualised [...] that leaves the prevailing and unequal power relations intact' (Mukhopadhyay 2007: 135-6). Yet few provide concrete definitions of this 'used and abused' concept (Batliwali 2007: 557), nor do they specify its measurability before starting projects, despite the desired outcomes of the planned empowerment being firmly in place.

It is, however, a subject that has been widely discussed with similar topic areas consistently being raised. These range from challenging existing power relations faced by women (in relation to men and society); ideological constraints leading to societal differentiation between men and women; the need to create self-belief and build self-esteem in women to initiate change; and supporting processes which increase the ability and capacity to make choices (Batliwala 1994; Bayissa et al. 2018; Cornwall 2016; Hartmann-Mahmud 2011; Kabeer 1994, 1999; Mosedale 2005, 2014).

A dominant thread linking these areas is that empowerment cannot be reduced to simply handing out resources and assets; it cannot be 'bestowed by others' (Cornwall, 2016: 353). It cannot be done to, or for, anyone else. Women must accept change and must produce it themselves, but this change must go on to be transformative. Therefore, by providing information and allowing listeners to gain greater awareness and form opinions, radio can make significant contributions to women's empowerment, alongside those of money, resources or donated assets which seek quick, more tangible and more measurable outcomes. This is because radio can trigger shifts in consciousness evidenced by changes in normative beliefs and expectations that keep women 'locked in situations of subordination and dependency' (Cornwall 2016, 345). Simply giving women tools, training, and equipment to 'empower' them and possibly alleviate poverty and facilitate income generation is not sufficient. The above-mentioned shifts in consciousness must also be generated. Women must understand the context they are living in and the constraints it imposes on them to make changes and produce an enabling environment.

Radio's capacity to raise awareness through information provision can contribute to awakening and reinforcing women's critical consciousness and their ability to acquire self-esteem and self-belief (Kabeer 1994; Sen 1997). Many women, including several in these focus groups, are fatalistic or, at best, resigned to their situation of oppression imposed by imbalanced power relations dominated by males, society, and misinterpretations of religion. To become empowered, women must 'make sense of their worlds, their relationships, their assumptions and beliefs, practices and values with potentially transformational effects'

(Cornwall 2016: 344). They must acquire self-understanding (Kabeer 1994) and the capacity for self-expression (Sen 1997). Continuing to perceive themselves and be perceived as second-class citizens will prevent women from achieving this. Raising this self-esteem is at the core of realising empowerment and must be fully considered in projects. According to Mosedale (2005: 254-6), self-esteem (or 'power *within*') must be merged with both 'power *to*' (the ability to build on what a person can achieve without limiting what others can achieve), and 'power *with*' or collective action. Having the support of other disempowered women, now with similar aspirations and possibly with an inspirational and engaged leader (Sholkamy, 2010), strengthens the ripple effect of collective engagement (Cornwall, 2016: 349).

However, this appears generic and must be applied to the reality and specificities of the multi-level constraints imposed on women. Women must acquire the 'ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer 2001: 19). Strategic choices are either first-order or second-order choices and reveal two levels of empowerment (Kabeer 1999; Jansson 2014). First-order choices are on a macro level, for example, whether to engage in politics (Arestoff and Djemai 2016), and second-order choices focus on 'everyday decisions which do not affect the overall outcome of a woman's life' (Kabeer 1999, 437). The latter may be considered more achievable as less resistance may be encountered from men and families if their behaviour and attitudes are challenged. However, these basic understandings and prerequisites for empowerment cannot be applied universally. Building Heywood and Tomlinson's study (2019), which illustrates that female empowerment is specific in Niger and is different for different women across that society, the article stresses that women are not homogenous in any society because of differences in their ethnicity, class, religion, age and education. It also discusses the extent to which radio, as an institution and through its broadcasting, targets these two levels of choices.

Radio as an empowering knowledge resource

Radio is a significant contributor to promoting female empowerment because it acts as a 'knowledge resource', which empowers by providing information and stimulating the newly-informed. In addition to its extensive reach (Pease and Dennis 1994), radio can raise women's critical consciousness in Niger because of its relevance to illiterate and orally-based cultures. In a country with low literacy, especially amongst women (Save the Children 2016), and where multiple local languages are spoken, radio, which is also cheap and portable (Hendy 2000), provides information on relevant issues to specific communities, be they

physical communities or communities of interests (Girard 2007; Jallov 2011; Manyozo 2012). Not only can radio exhibit empowering characteristics through women-related information, its other features such as talk shows, phone-ins and debate programmes give listeners a voice thus contributing to developing and democratising society (Chignell 2009; Hartley 2000) and to strengthening weak public spheres (Agosta 2001). Whether on a one-to-one level or through listeners' associations, radio creates a separate 'time and space for women in which to collectively and critically examine their lives' (Batliwala 2013: 50). They can receive information, assimilate it and then discuss it together to organise and act for change. Its intimate nature (Shingler and Wieringa 1998:114) allows women to listen out for broadcasts on sensitive subjects, which may not be appropriate in mixed environments, for example, domestic violence, rape, or health issues but which they can listen to whilst occupied with domestic chores (Heywood 2018). The content of women-related broadcasts and the manner in which women are represented must be investigated to ascertain whether radio is supporting the patriarchal and traditional values of this society or whether it could instead facilitate increased freedom of choice amongst women.

In Niger, as in much of Africa, radio remains a principal source of information. It is characterised by being widely accessed by mobile phones increasing interaction between listeners and radios (Gilberds and Myers 2012; Nassanga, Manyoza and Lopes 2013; Sullivan 2011) and by a culture of listening groups, and fadas, which encourage citizens to participate in public life. Mostly men gather to listen to, and discuss, radio programmes in fadas (Masquelier 2019), whereas listening clubs and groups, associated with many community radios stations, are mixed or single sex. They enable listeners to discuss broadcasts, gain further information on given subjects through NGO and expert visits, contribute to selecting subjects for future programmes and give feedback to the radio stations. Such collectiveness, which supports Mosedale's concept of power *with* (2005, 254-6), underpins radio's ability to empower women.

In Niger, there is the state radio, ORTN, which is widely accessible and accessed; 60 commercial and 184 community radio stations (CN-RACOM 2017), which, despite challenges from the authorities, succeed in providing critical journalism; religious radio; and several international radios such as RFI, VOA, BBC. Media development organisations also broadcast information and awareness campaigns via radio. One of these is Fondation Hirondelle, which, in 2016, created and now runs Studio Kalangou, which broadcasts two-hour daily information programmes in five languages from Niamey. It was selected as a case study because, according to several focus groups in this study, radio information cannot

always be trusted in Niger, yet Studio Kalangou is widely perceived as independent. Whilst funded by western donors and therefore subject to ideological constraints (Parks 2008), it is not under the direct influences imposed on the country's state and commercial radios. It claims to provide 'independent, professional, relevant and accessible radio news, information and dialogue programs' (Fondation Hirondelle 2019) and its information is broadcast by community partner radios that do not have the legal right to broadcast news themselves (CSC 2017). The Studio does not broadcast directly to audiences, but via 38 partner radios nationwide that retransmit programmes using their own FM networks, reaching 60% of the population.

In 2018, it broadcast two series of women-related programmes: one on women and politics and the other on child marriage. Each comprised 45-minute *Forums* (debate programmes) and 3-minute magazine programmes. The politics series discussed the background to women's involvement in politics, quotas, mobilising the (female) electorate, local governance, political participation by women in Niger, and women in the Executive. The child marriage series covered means of recourse, child marriage and Islam, health risks, the legal framework, the role of the police, education, NGO involvement, and traditional practices.

This article demonstrates how radio, as a knowledge resource rather than a financial one, contributes to women's empowerment by uniting the underlying principles of providing information to enable women to understand how to effect change, and how it contributes to conditions for women to associate with others to gain strength in numbers to transform that new understanding and knowledge into action. Following a methodological discussion, the article divides into three sections: the first discusses the broadcasts' quantitative analysis to demonstrate radio's contribution to women's empowerment, whilst also showing how its approach could be refined for better results; the second questions whether, to be effective in increasing women's decision-making abilities, broadcasts' discourses should align with listeners' needs; and the third examines shifts in critical consciousness, beliefs and expectations as a result of listening to the radio broadcasts.

Methodology

The study used a three-stage mixed methods approach. The first stage comprised a baseline evaluation, widely considered best practice when conducting assessments, which can then be used as a comparison with post-intervention data (Mosher 2011: 247; Taylor 2010: 2). The baseline (stage 1) consisted of 20 focus groups, each with five participants

(McCracken 1998; Lunt and Livingstone 1996) conducted in and around Niamey, Niger's capital. Ten of the 20 focus groups were organised at three urban radio stations and the remainder were at three, more rural radio stations, characterised by being outside the capital. Participants, all listeners of Studio Kalangou's partner radios, were selected from predetermined categories: rural or urban, married women, unmarried women, and men, thus ensuring representativeness. In total, there were eight focus groups of married female listeners, eight groups of non-married female listeners, and four groups of male listeners. These were equally distributed over the rural and urban locations. Each group lasted an hour and were conducted in French by the same facilitators. All participants were asked similar questions about their understanding of women's empowerment, their use of radio, their own role and status in society and that of women, principle influences shaping women's lives in the country, and how radio could be improved to better shape understandings of women's rights and empowerment. They were also questioned about their listening habits (ages, who listened, which radio stations, social media habits, devices, education level, marital status).

Whilst focus groups have their advantages, it was necessary to consider social desirability bias, or the 'tendency to say things which place the speaker in a favourable light' (Nederhof 1985: 264). To discourage participants from giving answers formulated to counter negative evaluation or gain endorsement from the interviewer, the facilitators asked neutral questions where possible. Female respondents, possibly disempowered themselves and not used to talking about their own empowerment, also had to be put at ease and allowed to talk freely. The focus groups (individuals and radio stations) were anonymised, audio-recorded and the data were transcribed and analysed in French using the software Nvivo. Codes were allocated to each focus group (see appendix). Both quantitative and qualitative data were produced.

Contrary to many assessments which, according to Noske-Turner (2015), are more qualitative than quantitative, stage two of the project provided rigorous quantitative data in equal measure to the qualitative data. This stage comprised content analyses of the women-related programmes detailed above. There were approximately 60 hours of programmes broadcast by Studio Kalangou weekly over two separate periods of ten weeks. A control week of programmes broadcast by the same Studio was also chosen at random for analysis. All the forums, magazines and news programmes broadcast in French during that week were examined to compare the findings with those from the women-related series. This was to determine whether gender equality emerged more in the control week or in the two series, and if so, to what extent.

All the broadcasts were transcribed from the original French then, like the focus groups, they were coded using Nvivo according to negative or positive terms for women, stereotypes, perceptions of women, gender of guests and presenters and airtime given to them, geographical references, dominant themes, representations of roles and positions of women and so on. On completion of the content analysis in stage 2, focus groups were then repeated (stage 3) with the same participants as in stage 1. Information from the content analysis shaped the questions for stage 3. Participants were questioned on the broadcasts, their opinions on them generally and their styles and contents. They were probed to determine whether certain information or styles had been absorbed. The responses were transcribed and coded and the information was compared with stage 1. The main aim of the article therefore is to analyse the role radio plays in raising the self-esteem of women, triggering shifts in consciousness, evidenced by changes in normative beliefs and expectations. It questions the extent to which radio, through the steady provision of information, contributes to shaping women's beliefs, practices and values and also those of society towards women with potentially transformational effects. To achieve this aim, the following sub research questions were addressed:

1. How are women represented by Studio Kalangou?
2. How are women characterised by Studio Kalangou?
3. Do perceptions of empowerment in the discourses broadcast by Studio Kalangou align with those of the listeners?
4. Does radio have any impact on women's empowerment?
5. What are the key insights that emerged and what are the implications for policy and practice?

Radio's contribution to creating self-belief and building self-esteem to initiate change

As stated above, radio, through its dissemination of information, can have a positive effect on female empowerment by shaping women's beliefs, practices and values. By describing women, what they do and their roles in society positively, by not stereotyping them, and by not reinforcing negative stereotypes, radio can build self-belief and self-esteem amongst women and promote a positive image of women and their capabilities amongst men, the main decision-makers in this patriarchal society. To assess this, we examined the broadcasts to determine who imparts the information, what is said in terms of the words, phrases and

rhetoric used, how it is said, what styles and devices are used, and what information and advice (if any) is given.

Radio is not just an information provider but also employs journalists and presenters and invites guests who convey a message. But if those individuals are all men or if women's involvement in broadcasts is uneven, the programmes' transformative potential (or the ability to encourage women to challenge the social norms, attitudes and constraints restricting their opportunities (Kantor, Morgan et al. 2015)) is reduced. It is not surprising that a radio studio created by a western media development organisation strives to guarantee gender equality in its programmes and to involve 'the whole population so that debates on gender issues can move forward' (Fondation Hirondelle n.d.). Yet this is also found in Niger's Regulator's Charter on improving the image of women in the media (CSC 2017), the first article of which states 'we commit to strengthening awareness of the importance of a positive image of women in broadcasting an egalitarian culture and combatting the marginalisation and all forms of discrimination to which women are subject' (CSC 2017). Whether the broadcasts support this aspiration given the range of 'overdetermined' social norms (Mackie and Le Jeune 2009), underpinned by religious, local customary, traditional and political factors, will now be examined.

Approximately 80 individuals appeared on the two women-related series (presenters and guests and correspondents) including seven female presenters and three male presenters with the bias towards the women possibly being justified by the broadcasts' subject matter. Nonetheless, this bias was not reflected in the airtime. Indeed, despite appearing on only 16% of the programmes, the male presenters talked for an average of 38% of the total airtime of all programmes. The percentages for female presenters' 'talk' only represented 7% of the total in contrast with their appearances which represented 22% of the total for the programmes. In other words, although there were fewer male presenters, their 'talk' was greater than that of their female counterparts. This was not the case in the October control week when figures for appearances were more balanced (women 47%; men 53%). Here, female presenters spoke more than the male presenters (54% and 46% of the airtime respectively). Despite this balance being slightly in favour of women in the control week, in the women-related series the male presenters spoke for more airtime than the women presenters despite the latter being greater in number, suggesting that women-related broadcasts need managing by male presenters.

In both series, when guests are also considered, male guests' talk is proportionately greater than their number of appearances. For example, in the politics series, male guests

appear on 9% of the programmes yet their 'talk' covers 53% of the content. Studio Kalangou invited large numbers of female guests onto the programmes and the number of their appearances dominates (69%) yet their 'talk' only represents 40% of the programmes. The discrepancy between males and females in the broadcasts is particularly important on radio, where, because of the lack of visual presence, appearance is signalled only by participants' spoken contributions. Also, because more female guests are invited on to the women-related programmes, it could be perceived that the issues being discussed only concern women. The guests are adamant in their discussions that this is not the case and that, for women to become empowered, men must be included in societal change. This suggests that the presence of more male guests would underpin their essential role in empowering women. However, drawing on the above, this may result in more male talk reinforcing acceptance of the prevailing self-perpetuating male dominance (see Spender 1985). Nonetheless, the inclusion of more men who have been involved in female empowerment may enable other men to identify with the broadcasts, underpinning the message that female empowerment does not just concern women.

However, including (positive) female role models amongst guests and presenters is not sufficient in itself to build self-belief amongst female listeners. It may lead to women becoming onlookers and developing a stronger belief in the abilities of other women to act rather than in their own. Based on Sen's theory of development (1999), capabilities, or the range of things a person can do or be, must be shaped or framed in such a way that self-belief can be reinforced. To determine how women were framed in the series, the words used by the guests and presenters in the broadcasts relating to women were coded into five categories: active, inactive, positive, negative, and neutral. Different discourses prevail in the two series as they cover different subjects but it is through this that we can discern the power of labelling. We can determine whether any prevailing stereotypes have the effect of reinforcing, for example, 'African women' myths (Batliwala and Dhanraj, 2004); myths highlighting the 'condition' of women ('material state in which poor women live - low wages, poor nutrition, lack of access to healthcare, education training, etc.') rather than their 'position' (women's social and economic status as compared to men) (Young in Batliwala 2013: 47) and to the resultant image of inactive, powerless women with little agency in society, a situation which, while propagated through various media sources, is far from the case in Niger. Such stereotypes and categorising of women must be identified in order to be challenged. They are widely used in both series to characterise women and their actions. In the politics series, positive and active words emerge, originating in military or combative

semantic fields and underpinning the overarching message for women to assert their rights, be forceful and participate fully in political life. Whereas in the child marriage series, the prevailing discourse is of education, motivation and awareness-raising. Once facts have been presented, the overarching tone does not attribute blame to the population but provides clear information regarding child marriage, the law, finds and offers solutions, and raises awareness about the situation, focusing on the need for dialogue.

Whilst these positive terms could provide encouragement to listeners, particularly women and girls, they were isolated incidents and only dominated programmes specifically designed to target women or to cover women-related issues. The October control week, which broadcast general rather than women-related programmes, used a greater quantity of negative stereotypes for women and inactive or negative terms which negate, or at best dilute, any beneficial effects of the women-related programmes serving only to reinforce negative images of women in society. Positive stereotyping of women contributes to women gaining control over their lives and others' perceptions of them. It distances them from negative stereotypes, bringing about a discursive shift in the way (certain groups of) women may be represented.

Using particular words may motivate women to believe in their own agency and may produce a shift in consciousness in both men and women, but the information must be memorable to have the desired effect. This was achieved, particularly in the child marriage series, through the use of *témoignages* or short personalised statements by individuals recounting their experiences. The effect of the *témoignages* is reinforced by girls talking about their experiences of being married young whilst wanting to remain at school, by teachers who acted to prevent child marriages, and *chefs de canton* acting at a higher level to prevent early marriages. This personalisation technique proved effective and was recalled by focus groups when discussing this series. Many respondents accurately recalled the individual in the *témoignages* and the message being conveyed. Two such examples of audience recall were the story of a young girl married at a very early age and who suffered from incontinence after giving birth, and the story of a girl who was forced to marry but told her teacher that she wanted to stay at school. These were accurately recalled by several of the unmarried women focus groups. The personalisation of programmes, which increases memorability, was reinforced through by using names, roles and geographical references. Because guests were clearly introduced and had their names repeated frequently by the presenters, they were recalled by the focus groups. This contributed to the message discussed by these individuals

also being recalled, which, for the child marriage series, had the aim of raising awareness of the negative impact on women and girls of early marriage.

Radio's contribution to supporting women's ability and capacity to make first- and second-order choices

[Here] Figure1: Principal themes which emerged in Studio Kalangou's and focus groups' perceptions of empowerment

Whilst the Studio appears to provide information in an appropriate and memorable manner (positive lexical choices, testimonies) even if improvements could be made, do its chosen topics align with listeners' needs and wishes? If not, is this significant and can the imparted information still impact the lives of the listener by helping them have the ability to make strategic choices? This section discusses radio's contribution to women's ability to make choices and whether the divergence between the discourses of the broadcasts and the needs and requirements of listeners affects women's empowerment (as discussed regarding Niger by Heywood and Tomlinson (2019)). As stated, two orders of strategic choices exist revealing two levels of empowerment (Kabeer 1999; Jansson 2014): macro-level first-order choices, and second-order choices that do not necessarily challenge the social framework of daily life yet may be perceived as more achievable (Arestoff and Djemai 2016; Kabeer 1999). By comparing the discourses of the broadcasts and the focus group responses to determine the extent to which perceptions of empowerment aligned, it can be seen that some overlap emerged (see Figure 1) but the discourses presented by Studio Kalangou focused on first-order choices with one series promoting political participation amongst women to improve society and the other providing information against early marriage. They targeted long-term aims for women as a group whereas the focus groups perceived finances, petits commerces, employment, and educating the next generation to be at the root of their empowerment, in other words, issues affecting their daily personal survival on a micro level. The politics series covered abstract concepts such as leadership, participation in politics and general education for all women. There was little direct information about increasing women's involvement despite some guests' lofty aims that they would like to see a female president of the Assemblée and more women in the Commission. Similarly, abstract references to education being essential for empowerment were broadcast, yet led to requests for specific 'go-to' information from focus groups. This series did, however, provide considerable historical

background and information on legal texts and procedures enabling women to understand their own context. Despite this topic appearing remote from the realities of women's lives, listeners appeared highly interested and were able to recall much of the information. This suggests that although this topic choice does not align with the listeners' interest, the series can still be successful. Indeed, broadcasting information on new topics appeared important for effective broadcasting.

This finding addresses tensions regarding female empowerment, which may arise between the demands of donors, those of local editorial boards and those of listeners. Some 'empowerment' topics such as increased female political and electoral involvement are integral parts of donor funding applications. They may be perceived in the countries as imposed by West or the Global North and not a priority. For example, they would not be included in the news, yet they have become a priority through their inclusion in debate programmes. Editorial boards might resist including these topics in programmes considering them to be of little relevance to their audience, resulting in reduced engagement, and listeners do not proffer these topics on their broadcasting wish list, wanting, instead, information on topics they know and feel would contribute to their second-order choices (finances, petits commerces, and so on). Yet the findings demonstrate that what listeners want is not necessarily what they need, taking us back to the donors' stance and, to some extent, confirming the accuracy of the latter's demands.

The child marriage series covered topics to which many listeners could relate and which aligned more with their needs. Its main themes focused on promoting associations and solidarity, educating young girls, and the facilitating role of NGOs. Contrasting with the abstract approach of politics series, this series broadcast specific case studies using *témoignages* in which all members of a family appeared thus reaching all listeners, both male and female. The legal context was provided helping listeners better understand their rights and to whom they could turn if necessary, and the names of particular NGOs and other organisations were mentioned, reinforcing the importance of solidarity and support to promote empowerment. The services of NGOs and associations, discussed by representatives on the debates and magazines, were positively received by the respondents, as they would empower women particularly regarding education, training and literacy classes. Many of the respondents were members of associations and stated they gained vital information from associations and from NGO representatives who visited them. This information was then used to the benefit of families. Many female respondents stated, however, that associations

did not always represent an empowering choice as they could not join them if they were mixed.[1]

The lack of education permeating society was widely blamed by the focus groups for the inadequate understanding of the consequences of child marriage and it was thought that greater awareness could contribute to solving this. This aligned closely with the needs of older female respondents as many had not been educated themselves and did not want their own daughters to be similarly disadvantaged. They considered that educating their daughters would lead to their empowerment. Male respondents, however, used education as an excuse to keep women at home as they were needed to educate their children. By striving to empower their children through education, many women were prevented from pursuing their own education or from becoming politically active, either of which would be empowering, as it would lead to their absence from home and from educating the children.

Although some overlap between the subjects covered by Studio Kalangou and listeners' requirements exists, a divide remains between the first and second order choices permeating the respective discourses of the broadcasts and the respondents. The broadcasts do not systematically consider finances, employment or petits commerces, which are of primary importance to listeners and their empowerment given the extreme poverty levels in the country.

Radio's contribution to triggering shifts in critical consciousness evidenced by changes in normative beliefs and expectations

By conducting focus groups before and after the broadcasts, it was possible to determine changes in behaviour and beliefs and also increased awareness of a given subject. Shifts in critical consciousness emerged, amongst women and men - society's main decision makers - effecting women's ability to choose.

As stated, many of Studio Kalangou's programmes were on a 'macro' or first-order choice level. When discussing these themes in stage 1 prior to listening to the broadcasts, there was a certain resignation and a lack of self-belief and self-esteem amongst women, particularly the older, married women. The topics chosen for the broadcasts were not the second-order choices, which women could make without challenging social norms. Regarding politics, for example, there was a general distrust of politicians. The female

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[1]The research project helped set up a women-only listening association at one of Studio Kalangou's partner radio stations in the capital to overcome women being refused permission to attend mixed associations by their husbands.

respondents knew they could vote, indeed most, except those who were too young, had voted previously. They felt that women were underrepresented and were included in the system because of the quota system (see Kang 2015 and Alidou 2008) and that the likelihood of them reaching high levels was remote. Yet, general awareness was limited and this lack of comprehension was dismissed: 'Here in Niger, a woman can't be a district chief or village chief. That's just the way it is' (RMW4). A similar sentiment, revealing a lack of empowerment amongst women, emerged regarding the child marriage series: 'It's the husband who decides that he's going to get married. The woman has no say. She has to accept it' (RMW1), but mainly that decisions were culturally and religiously driven and were ingrained in the values, beliefs and attitudes of society: 'It is God's choice'(RUMW1); 'Our religion's like that' (RUMW4); 'You have to accept it. We're in Niger, we've no choice' (UMW4). External forces were therefore considered by the female respondents to be greater than their own ability to partake in decision-making on any level, highlighting society's unequal power dynamics. However, they stated they would welcome additional information from radio, particularly regarding politics ('we'd like to know more about politics, we don't know how to do it, we don't have the information' (UMW1)), indicating the lack of information being disseminated on this topic in contrast with child marriage, which is widely covered by many campaigns.

Male dominance over decision-making was consistently cited in stage 1 in the married women's groups. Regarding politics, although education and lack of finances were also raised, it was men who prevented female political participation as women have to request permission to become active. Indeed, several older male respondents affirmed that they were prepared for their wives to vote but not become politically active reinforcing the sentiment amongst women that 'it's not encouraged' by social norms. Similarly, a woman's marital state would never be determined by the woman herself, rather by men or the extended family, which included female relatives, revealing how women, themselves indoctrinated, emerge as tools perpetuating male dominance within society.

A generational divide emerged regarding both topics. Concerning marriage, the younger respondents, both male and female, challenged the attitude regarding having little choice. The unmarried younger women stated that they could influence decisions about their marital future and could even choose their husband, and younger male respondents agreed, saying, 'There's a consultation between the suitors, the parents and the girl. If the girl doesn't like it, she can say no. She has the last word' (UM1). In contrast to the general interest in politics amongst the older generation despite their lack of actual knowledge, the unmarried

focus groups displayed little interest in politics, claiming they were too young (It's for older women' (RUM2)). They also demonstrated extreme perceptions (both positive and negative) regarding politics. On one hand, one group grandly suggested, 'You need determination, patience, good manners, and the ability to listen. We need fairness too. The system must guarantee fairness and equal opportunities' (UUMW2), without mentioning any negatives which might exist and hinder these idealistic characteristics, and on the other, that 'It's dangerous for women. There are threats. You're not going to please everyone. I don't like it. And it's not encouraged' (UUMW2).

After listening to the radio broadcasts, in stage 3, a clear shift from awareness to a desire to act emerged, particularly amongst the married women. Through the debates and analyses of the various points of view broadcast by Studio Kalangou, listeners became informed of broader possibilities from which to make choices. The women acknowledged the programmes had given them information on politics and that the broadcasts had clarified elements of confusion : 'They listen to Studio Kalangou's broadcasts on politics, on women. It's changed lots for them because now they understand what they didn't understand before' (UMW3). Such clarifications could now lead to increased participation. There was a stronger belief that they, as women, could participate in politics because they had acquired a better understanding of the power structures in place in society and how to challenge the status quo. One woman stated,

> They didn't understand politics, how to do politics, how to get into politics, what to do in politics, what not to do in politics. But after the broadcasts, they said, "Oh yes, that's how it is!" Before, for them, politics meant nothing, but now they've realised that politics can mean a lot of things for women. They want to do politics. (UMW2)

In contrast with their earlier resignation, women appeared prepared to speak out, which was attributed to having a stronger and clearer grasp of their rights. Rather than apportioning blame to other aspects of life (men, a lack of education and finances), they now felt that change could 'come from within' demonstrating a shift in their own critical consciousness because of radio journalism. Mirroring information broadcast during the Studio Kalangou debates, female respondents vehemently stated that their advancement should not be hindered by a lack of education or illiteracy, whether or not this was the case currently. After listening to the politics series, rather than mentioning the low representation of women in politics, they were able to cite examples of women (educated or not) who were

in politics and who were mentioned in the broadcasts. Their awareness had thus been raised and they displayed a greater interest in politics generally. They suggested that the programmes had demonstrated that women were 'allowed' to do politics, illustrating a shift in their indoctrinated view of society and its inequalities. A clear sentiment of collective engagement with this interest for action emerged and it is this support and its subsequent ripple effect that can underpin the effects of empowerment, leading to greater change.

Listeners also recounted many of the *témoignages* in the child marriage series and the messages they contained, such as laws against child marriage, information on legal documents, what to do, or to whom to turn if in a similar situation. Such a change in consciousness may not be at the core of other forms of aid, which might only represent a technical fix and not trigger any fundamental adjustment to prevent women perceiving themselves as second class citizens and being perceived as second class citizens.

The abovementioned ripple effect was also evident in the change in listening habits which occurred after the programmes. Following the politics series, respondents stated they could discuss politics more easily. Several focus groups stated that, previously, households or groups of friends would either not discuss politics or women and politics or would discuss them, with acrimonious outcomes. Now, because they understood the subject better, people could talk about it more easily:

> It's really changed women. We've evolved. We come, we listen to the programme, me and you, I'm in such and such a party and you're in another. Yet we're still talking. We didn't talk before. Before we used to insult each other, we didn't talk. Now we've got it all figured out. But before, we didn't understand. (RMW3)

In order to impact women's empowerment, the broadcasts need to reach society's decision-makers, at whatever level, and encourage them to accept changes, and shifts in activities and thinking, and also that these changes would not threaten their own notions of the power they are accustomed to holding. Stronger impact on both genders emerged as a result of the child marriage series. Studio Kalangou's inclusive approach through testimonies and broadcasting men's stories led to a broad appreciation amongst listeners that the subject had been approached both seriously and holistically, and had targeted all sectors of the population. Generally, the programmes were well received: 'For me, these programmes provide lots of information' (UM2); 'We're interested in the subject and the style' (RUMW1); 'All the approaches, all the styles. The main thing is what's said is accessible to everyone.

The questions aren't so technical that we can't follow them. It's early marriage after all - we're talking about age, the damage it does, none of that's too technical' (RMW1). Changes in critical consciousness were not limited to female listeners. Regarding the child marriage series, one male respondent stated,

> I've learnt some new things because before, I didn't know much about early marriage. It's changed how I think. I knew it's not good, but I didn't have much information, but with the involvement of everyone, because in the programmes there are lots of people, not just one person, and everyone tells their own story or their own view according to the experiences they've had. (UM2)

It is unsurprising that radio in Niger is facing similar disinterest amongst youth as in other countries (EBU 2019) and that the younger listeners were not significantly affected by the broadcasts. There was little change amongst the younger unmarried respondents regarding politics after hearing the broadcasts yet some did show some readiness for women to become more politically active: 'at university, even at union level, there are girls who'd like to take up positions on the various committees' (UM1). Not only are new ways of attracting youth to radio needed, be it through new technology or new approaches, but techniques to close the generational divide must also be implemented. The older generation had clear opinions about what the younger generation should be doing and also what they wanted to do, yet contrasting opinions emerged amongst the younger respondents indicating that they obtain their information from somewhere, but not necessarily radio.

By interviewing listeners before and after broadcasts, we could determine the programmes' impact. Radio contributed significantly to strengthened self-belief amongst female listeners, and to shifts in critical consciousness amongst both female and male listeners, reflected in changes in normative beliefs and expectations.

Conclusion

This study analysed whether radio, through its information provision, can contribute to shaping both women's beliefs, practices and values and also those of society towards women with potentially transformational effects (Cornwall 2016: 344). It contributes to existing theoretical discussions on radio and women empowerment by focusing on women-related radio output in Niger.

Although there is rich research literature on women's empowerment (Batliwala 2013; Kabeer 1994, 1999; Mosedale 2005; Sen 1997), up to now there is little scholarly interest in radio's contribution to this. Research has focused more on understandings of empowerment (Batliwala 1994; Bayissa et al. 2018; Cornwall 2016) and the use of radio in development (Jallov 2011; Manyozo 2012). What is particularly pertinent in this study is that radio, when associated with female empowerment, can be shown to trigger the very environment needed to enable changes in self-belief in women.

The findings support and develop Kabeer's (1999) concept of first and second-order choices by connecting them to the significance of radio's reports on women and women-related topics. Radio may focus on second-order choices in its broadcasts, but in doing so, it responds to the daily realities of women, which is important, yet risks reinforcing stereotypes of the 'African women' myth (Batliwala and Dhanraj 2004) or the 'condition' that women are in the home, cooking, looking after children, and so on. The findings show that in order to also influence first-order choices (Kabeer 1999), or the more strategic needs that call for a transformation of gender roles and the distribution of power, radio must broadcast a correct balance, responding to the different concerns and groups of women. They also consider the capacity of men to accept these choices without feeling disempowered themselves, or that their societal framework has been challenged (Heywood and Tomlinson 2019).

The study demonstrates how, as an empowering knowledge resource, radio actively contributes to the supporting processes which increase women's ability and capacity to make choices through collective engagement (Sholkamy 2010). Indeed, the findings discuss how radio's influence can be optimised and transferred to the work of similar media development organisations in other developing countries in other areas such as youth, security or government, suggesting an extension of the research.

The very definition of empowerment as a concept is vague (Batliwali 2007; Cornwall and Eade 2010; Ewerling et al 2017; Kabeer 1999), yet this study contributes to clarifying it through the comparison of broadcasters' and listeners' definitions. It goes further by proposing practical solutions, building on theoretical concepts, to reinforce the already significant impact of radio on women's empowerment. It suggests, prior to broadcasting on empowerment, broadcasters should have a clear definition of both their own and listeners' definitions of this concept and gaps must be recognised and addressed. This could be through detailed listening profiling, emphasising paths to empowerment of women from less privileged positions to enable female listeners to identify better with them, or providing more 'go-to' information through partner radios or associations. The study also shows that

empowerment cannot be 'bestowed by others' (Cornwall, 2016: 353) possibly through the provision of resources and assets. Instead, it enables women to become informed, create self-belief and build self-esteem to initiate change themselves (Batliwala 1994; Bayissa et al. 2018; Hartmann-Mahmud 2011; Kabeer 2000, 2001, 2005; Mosedale 2005).

Also noteworthy, is the study's mixed methodology combining focus groups and content analyses of both women-related broadcasts and control weeks over an extended period. This provided rigorous qualitative and quantitative analyses addressing criticism that many such assessments are more one than the other (Noske-Turner 2015). It found that, in order to contribute to women's empowerment, broadcasters should be aware of the possible disparities between the numbers of appearances of (male/female) guests and presenters and their airtime, noting that appearances on radio without 'talk' equate to silence and thus absence. During debates, presenters should be encouraged to ask more, and better targeted, follow-up questions to facilitate better structuring of guest responses. They should also be aware of the positive use of lexical tools and devices (*témoignages* and personalisation) as they increase the memorability of messages. Greater accent should also be placed on geographical references and this information should be repeated to ensure a broad range of locations and promote inclusivity. The challenge, finally, is in targeting future generations of listeners to continue the empowering role of radio. Efforts should be made to raise listenership amongst youth, by raising awareness through music and sketches, incorporating young people's voices into broadcasts, directly talking to young media, and promoting integration with social media.

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Appendix

Codes used for each focus group

CODES	Married Women	Unmarried Women	Men
Urban	UMW1 UMW2 UMW3 UMW4	UUMW1 UUMW2 UUMW3 UUMW4	UM1 UM2
Rural	RMW1 RMW2 RMW3 RMW4	RUMW1 RUMW2 RUMW3 RUMW4	RM1 RM2