

## RADIO RURALE: EDUCATION AND INFORMATION FOR AN ILLITERATE PEOPLE

Edmun B. Richmond



In the summer of 1980, I was in West Africa, engaged in a functional literacy project in The Gambia.<sup>1</sup> During my stay, I was invited to Upper Volta, to meet with officials of that government to examine and discuss their language-by-radio service to the rural population. The meetings were arranged under the auspices of the United States International Communications Agency. The services provided by the Voltaic government are both innovative and unique in solving an urgent problem which is found extensively throughout Black Africa, and other areas of the Third World.

Upper Volta is a land-locked nation of some 5,380,000 inhabitants, located in the Sahel-savanna region of West Africa. It is bounded by Mali in the north and west, by Niger and Benin in the northeast and southeast, and by Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Togo, in the south. The country has an area of 106,000 square miles, (about the size of Colorado), and is comprised of forty-four indigenous peoples. There are only two cities of any size, Ouagadougou, the capital, and Bobo Dioulasso. The rest of the country consists of over 7,000 villages, most of which are located in the central and southern areas.

All of the indigenous languages of Upper Volta are contained within the Niger-Congo family, which includes the Voltaic sub-branch (Gurma, Grunshi, Lobi, Mossi, an Senufo), Fulani, and Dyola. The major language of the country is Mossi, spoken by 50 percent of the population as a

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<sup>1</sup>See Edmun B. Richmond, "Literacy and Language Teaching in The Gambia," *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), pp. 416-421.

<sup>2</sup>1970 estimate.

first language. In spite of the diverse cultural and linguistic groupings, however, French remains the **only** official language.

The country has a 95 percent illiteracy rate. In view of this problem, and coupled with the fact that the country has a great oral tradition, government officials decided upon a means to reach the illiterate population by offering certain radio services, since the written word is available to only a few. The solution to this problem was the creation of **Radio Rurale**, whose primary role is to disseminate information and educational programs to the rural populace.

Created in 1969 as an integral part of the national radio network, **Radio Rurale** became responsible for the majority of indigenous language transmissions to the all areas of the country. In 1970, it consisted of four persons lodged in an office of the national radio, and produced one and a half hours of daily programming. Eight years later, it blossomed into a production staff of fourteen, and a staff of fifteen announcers and interpreters in the indigenous languages. Now housed in a modern self-contained building with offices and studios, **Radio Rurale** produces fifty-one hours of weekly programs. Since 1975, technical assistance to the service has come from France, Canada, and Germany. The technical capabilities are now handled by a joint German-Voltaic project under the direction of the national radio service.

**Radio Rurale** offers a series of six program types in seventeen indigenous languages. These programs include micro-programs, chronicles, radio magazines, radio game shows, transmission for local radio clubs, and special cultural transmissions. In addition, pedagogical programs for teachers are transmitted during the school year.

The micro-programs are constructed in the style of spot announcements, and last two to three minutes. These programs are repeated several times during the broadcast day, and contain messages of national and regional interest, including personal short messages and governmental announcements. Chronicle programs last from four to six minutes, and are designed to present interviews, reports direct from the villages, and indigenous music. Radio magazines are more detailed programs lasting from ten to thirty minutes, and are addressed to special interest groups, such as farming cooperatives, women and youth programs. These programs provide information as how to open a bank account, how to purify water, dates of regional markets, and other subjects necessary for daily living.

The radio club is a unique feature of the service. The average peasant cannot afford to purchase his own radio. However, **Radio Rurale** supplies radios to villages for the purpose of disseminating their programs to a greater number of the population. One can imagine the enormity of such a project, since there are so many villages in the country. At this writing, there are radio clubs (each with one radio) in ten percent of those villages. These clubs are the backbone of the educational and informational training programs. Each week, special programs are beamed to the clubs.

They are clubs in the true sense of the word. Each club elects officers, holds meetings, and makes the radio available to the village members. Each club meets on a regular basis with a representative of the Ministry of Rural Development to discuss the program content, and to give feedback to the production staff of **Radio Rurale** for future programming in line with the needs of the community. For that reason, the programs treat more complex subjects, such as crop rotation and fertilization, well construction, hide and tanning techniques, machinery repair, etc. These programs last a half hour, and are followed by discussion groups in the villages.

**Jeu Voltaique Varietes**, are games conducted in the villages and are based on past programming. Teams try to answer questions which identify a certain program or information within a program, and receive points for each correct answer. This is done not only as a game-show, but mainly to ascertain the impact of the programs, i.e., are the people listening, do they understand the themes, are they utilizing the training in their daily life.

Special cultural programs are broadcast during national or regional events, and contain programs based on the folklore of the various indigenous peoples. These programs can be transmitted directly from the village through the use of a mobile unit, which can reach the local populace within a radius of 20 to 30 miles, or can record the events on magnetic tape, to be transmitted at a later time from the main transmitter in Ouagadougou. To record and transmit these regional events, **Radio Rurale** personnel travel over 20,000 miles a year.

Transmitting frequencies for the service include one transmitter with 20 KW in the 41 meter band during afternoon hours and in the 62 meter band during nighttime hours, one transmitter with 100KW in the medium wave band on 746 kHz, and one FM station on 99mHz. These stations are located in Ouagadougou. In addition, a regional transmitter with 50KW on medium waves is located in Bobo Dioulasso. An additional shortwave transmitter for 50 KW is being constructed in the capital.

In a recent survey, it was established that 88 percent of the Voltaic population listens to these broadcasts. This has led the government to expand the service by constructing a special national network which will broadcast entirely in the indigenous languages. This network will be completely autonomous from **Radio Rurale** and the national radio station. Such a service goes far to bring peoples of many ethnic backgrounds and languages into the mainstreams of the nation as a whole. These groups can identify not only with their own unity, but also with the national unity. **Radio Rurale** provides a service unique to its population, and should serve as a model for other developing nations the world over.

Edmun B. Richmand  
Dept. of Modern Languages  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
Atlanta, GA 30332  
(404) 894-2425



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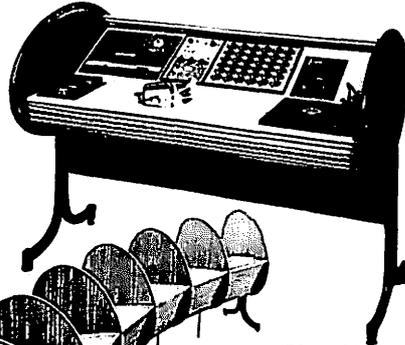


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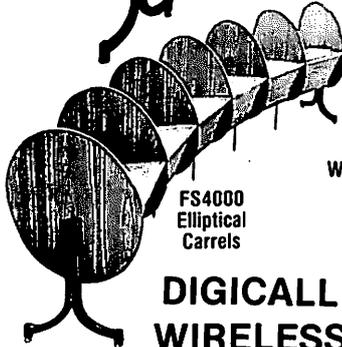
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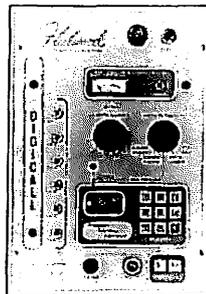


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