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Rethinking citizen voice:

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Edem E. Selormey*

The concept of citizen's voice has gained popularity in recent times both in academic discourse and actual practice. An extensive literature establishes that voice is generally considered a good mechanism for demanding better service from public service delivery providers and also for holding those in authority to account between elections. However, some argue that voice alone is not sufficient in making governments accountable and responsive to those they serve. Voice alone does not have the power to ensure that governments will listen and respond to it. In this paper I make an empirical enquiry into a potentially new form of voice mechanism which occurs on radio in Accra. I explore how two radio programmes 'Feedback' and 'Wo haw ne sen' hosted on two popular radio stations in Accra are providing a unique form of public voice through creative radio programming where an 'on-air' platform is created for citizens to call-in (live) about their experiences with poor private/public service delivery. These radio campaigns take voice from the level of mere individual expression to actualizing results. The findings from the empirical enquiry enhance understanding of how voice when mediated through radio can unearth underrated resources for collective problem solving.

1 Introduction

The mass media, especially radio, can offer a unique form of citizen participation, and vertical or social accountability; they can also enhance the quality of governance¹ as well as collective problem solving mechanisms. Most empirical studies dealing with vertical accountability and collective problem-solving mechanisms tend to privilege electoral forms such as voting, or associational forms such as membership in voluntary associations and involvement in other communal activity, for example contacting public officials and participating in protests or demonstrations (O'Donnell, 1998; Rosenston and Hansen 1993; Schedler, 1991; Schlozman et al., 1999). Expressive or mediated forms of participation, such as writing about public issues in letters to newspapers or calling in to radio and television talk-shows to raise public issues, have been more rarely studied. Often, they are examined only to the extent that they may encourage, or hinder, involvement in the more traditional modes of political participation (Pinkleton and Austin 1998).

In Ghana, the opening up of the political space, after the ban on private radio ownership was lifted in the early 1990s (after a 12-year military regime), created a sprawling and vibrant industry in the electronic media, especially private commercial FM radio. Available data (National Communications Authority, 2011) show that there are 166 commercial privately

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¹ See Gunner et al, (2011); Bengali (2005); Hyden et al. (2002); and Tetey (2002) for studies on media in Africa which discuss positively the dividends of the media, particularly private media for deepening democracy and good governance.

owned radio stations operating in Ghana; of this number, 28 operate in Accra, the second highest in any region in Ghana. The proliferation of private media since the ban on private broadcasting was lifted has significantly changed the media environment in Ghana (Gadzekpo, 2008; Blankson, 2000; Tandoh, 1995). During the periods of military rule in Ghana, raising voice or expression of voice in any form was dangerous and people lived in what was then referred to as the culture of silence (Haynes, 2003: 63; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1999: 59; Gyimah-Boadi: 1990; Adu Boahen, 1988; Ankomah, 1987: 17-19). Therefore no public demands for public accountability existed. Today, Ghana has one of the freest media environments in Sub Saharan Africa (Freedom House, 2012) and is ranked 41st out of 179 countries in press freedom (Reporters without Borders, 2012).

Twenty years after Ghana embraced democratic governance, many new avenues for citizens' demands for accountability and improved service delivery as well as avenues for public officials to respond to those demands, have been created. The District Assembly system, for instance, makes room for citizen participation at the local level, at least in theory (Awortwi, 2010; Ofei-Aboage, 2008; Agyeman-Duah, 2008; Crook and Manor, 1998). Similarly, avenues for those demands have also been created on interactive radio (Blankson, 2002). Thus, radio programmes as well as good journalism are now potential platforms for the demand by citizens for better local government services or public goods. According to the Afrobarometer Survey Rounds 1- 4 (1999-2009),² radio is the mass medium most relied on in Ghana; the majority of Ghanaians, seven in ten (70%), depend on radio for most of their political, social, economic and other information.

Not surprisingly, many local FM radio stations in Ghana have become trend-setters in programmes that have large citizen's participation using land lines and mobile phones. A new type of programming referred to as radio call-ins or talk radio³ has also emerged (Tettey, 2011; Yankah, 2004; Boateng, 2004:16; Ruben and Step, 2000). These programmes are purposely designed to have listener participation by taking advantage of technological advancements in telecommunications in order to engage citizen and state in creative ways via voice calls, and more recently, text messaging. In some cases, they are populist programmes that direct citizen anger at the ruling party and government, at the political opposition or at each other. Nonetheless, and perhaps more importantly, the public has an opportunity to call into radio stations to express their concerns and views; challenge official positions; let off steam; listen and learn about political developments, the opinions of other citizens or personal problems; or simply create amusement for themselves (Mwesige, 2009; O'Sullivan, 2005). The call-in phenomenon had never been witnessed in Ghana prior to this.

Some critical discussions via call-in or text messaging lead one to observe the growth of civic input into discussions of national interest, especially those that relate to issues of service delivery and response from public office holders. Joy FM's '*Feed Back*', '*Ghana Speaks*' and '*Total Recall*'; Radio Gold's '*Ka na wu*' (Lit. *say it and die!*), and Peace FM's '*Wo haw ne sen*' (Lit. *what is your problem?*) programmes are some of the many examples of radio programmes that directly engage citizens and government on politics, policy, democratic development, service delivery and government accountability issues. There have been many instances where callers to prime-time programmes on radio stations have drawn attention to issues that have elicited some response from government. For example, in September 2010 a simple text message sent to the *Morning Show* on Joy FM⁴ raised the issue of an infestation

² For more on these surveys, see www.afrobarometer.org

³ Ruben and Step (2000) define talk radio as a radio format characterised by conversation initiated by programme hosts and usually involves listeners who phone in to participate in discussions about topics on politics, sports, current affairs and many other radio worthy topics.

⁴ For detailed evidence on this incident see: <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201012/57189.php>

by black fly⁵ at the source of drinking water in Asuboi⁶, after the Assemblyman of that area had tried without success on several occasions to draw the attention of health authorities to the problem. Public discussions and follow-up by Joy FM eventually led to redress of the problem (screening and medication to the affected, and provision of potable water).

There are indeed many examples of such incidents. For example, commenting on Ghana's year 2000 general elections, and how FM radio stations combined with the use of mobile phones in heated elections, Zuckerman (2008) writes: 'Voters who were prevented from voting used mobile phones to report their experience to call-in shows on local radio stations. The stations then broadcast the reports, prompting police to respond to the accusations of voter intimidation. Had voters called the police directly, it's possible that authorities might not have responded. Thus by making reports public through radio; voters eliminated the possibility of police announcing that there had been no reports of voter intimidation.'

The main argument of this paper is that radio phone-in programmes such as '*Feedback*' and '*Wo haw ne sen*' are a voice mechanism. I argue in this connection that, because this form of voice is expressed through radio programmes, it can be conceptualized as a 'mediated voice' mechanism. This should encourage us to think about the whole concept of *voice* mechanisms, at least in Ghana, from a new perspective. Secondly, this paper looks at a new way of improving the accountability and responsiveness of government provision of public goods, using a mechanism (radio) which is genuinely rooted in popular culture and can be considered to be one of the many underrated governance resources in Africa that the APPP is interested in discovering.

Data presented in this paper were collected in 2010 in Accra, Ghana, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods were applied at different levels of the study. First, initial results derived from content analysis of electronic recordings of '*Feedback*' spanning a period of three years and four months and similar data (a number of recordings) from '*Wo haw ne sen*' formed the basis for the selection of study sites. The qualitative approach consisted of content analysis, participant observation, unstructured interviews, document analysis, process tracing and countless informal conversations. Finally, a random sample survey comprising 615 respondents was conducted in the City of Accra to capture the popular views of listeners to the two radio stations and their programmes.

2 Concepts of voice and accountability

In democracies, the convention is that accountability mechanisms, whether horizontal, vertical or social are designed to ensure that public services address the needs of citizens in an equitable way by empowering citizens to demand accountability from government (Fox, 2007; Przeworski, 2003; Przeworski et al., 1999; O'Donnell, 1999; Schedler, 1999). However, horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms are not always effective in ensuring answerability and rapid sanctioning by citizens of public officials. Citizens are unable to exercise horizontal accountability mechanisms which are internal and ensured through formal institutions (O'Donnell, 1999). Vertical accountability on the other hand, which operates through external mechanisms by non-state actors to hold public officials to account, has well-known limitations. Mechanisms available to non-state actors such as periodic elections, and

<http://blogs.myjoyonline.com/sms/2010/09/23/asuboi-children-hit-hardest-by-blackfly-infestation/>
<http://blogs.myjoyonline.com/sms/index.php?s=Asuboi+residents+>
<http://lifestyle.myjoyonline.com/pages/health/201009/52532.php>

⁵ The Black Fly is the river blindness disease-carrying vector.

⁶ Asuboi is a small village in the Offinso District located in the north-western part of the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

other associational forms of civic engagement do not provide citizens and other non-state actors with enough actions capable of monitoring and sanctioning political authority.

Citizens lack the capacity to demand what Schedler (1999) refers to as answerability and enforceability. For example, the time lag between elections leaves holders of public office unresponsive except for periods close to elections. Elections may allow citizens to hold public officials accountable; but may not succeed in making them responsive. Owing to this major limitation, there is a considerable body of work that argues for a reconsideration of 'traditional' public sector accountability mechanisms and relationships in order to include societal demands – informal vertical accountability mechanisms – 'directly in the workings of horizontal accountability institutions' (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000; Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2000; Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). For instance, Peruzzotti et al. (2006) suggest that in so far as representative democracy implies the existence of a fundamental gap between political representatives and citizens, it requires the existence of institutional mechanisms to ensure that such separation does not result in unresponsive governments. Therefore, in order to foster responsiveness from public officials, there must be mechanisms for citizens to regulate and reduce the gap between representatives and the represented. These mechanisms, they argue, are those that are fostered through instruments such as the media.

Paul (1992), in applying the concept of 'voice'⁷ to public sector organizations, argued that public 'voice' was a necessary requirement in influencing accountability, responsiveness and efficiency in service delivery in public sector organisations. He then defined 'voice' as the 'degree to which the public can influence the final outcome of a service through some form of participation, articulation or protest and or feedback' (Paul, 1992: 1048). He further argued that that form of increased voice (public influence) in governance will facilitate higher levels of citizen-oriented accountability, as well as better knowledge of and demand for it; and ultimately, more improved public sector responsiveness to their needs (Paul, 1996). 'Voice' is also considered a key 'check' on public organizations, and a vital tool if developing democracies are to meet their area-specific service demands. A World Bank framework (2004) also emphasises how strengthening citizen's voice enhances accountability of policy makers, motivating them to be responsive to the needs of communities and stimulating demand for better public services from service providers. Client power, it argues, can hold governments accountable for the quality and quantity of services provided.

Goetz and Jenkins (2002, 2005) also suggest that voice matters in holding governments and public officials to account for three interrelated reasons. First, voice has an inherent value; it is useful for people to have the freedom to express their views, rights beliefs and preferences. Second, voice is part of the essential building block for accountability; thus, it is only by speaking up directly or through specific informal or formal channels/mechanisms that the marginalised in society have the chance to have their views reflected in government priorities and policies and then to ensure that they get implemented. Third, the exercise of voice, and the discussions that result from it, plays an important role in enabling communities to achieve collective standards and norms against which the actions of those in authority can be judged.

Voice is best expressed through specific channels or mechanisms. Channels that are good conduits for expressing voice may be formal or informal. They may work through civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisation, trade unions and other civic associations; watch dog organisations; free and independent media; political parties; citizen's report cards; or parliaments (O'Neil et al., 2007).

⁷ Hirschman (1970) introduced (from an economist perspective) the concept of voice and its application in the private sector; arguing that voice constituted the likely tool consumers could use to counter the problems of performance deterioration in private production of goods and services.

However, some have argued that voice is not very effective in developing countries, even at the local level, where, the expectation that has often accompanied local government reforms is that closer proximity of officials and citizens will produce improvements in effectiveness and responsiveness. Rather, public officials are often not transparent, do not allow participation and are unresponsive to 'voice' (Blair, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2000). Also, voice alone is not enough, as it may become one directional (Rocha and Sharma 2008), meaning that for voice to have the necessary impact on developmental outcomes it needs to have a targeted approach. In this context, it is suggested that the media are likely to be a positive mechanism for citizen's voice and accountability engagements, given the right conditions and regulations.

Radio alone can be described as voice, depending on how it is used; a combination of radio and phone-ins can be described as a citizen-initiated 'voice mechanism' through which they can hold governments, and public service providers to account. Goetz and Gaventa (2001) rightly point out that voice must be 'heard' by government officials in order for it to be effective. Therefore, when individuals utilise the radio platform to raise community problems live on air, it is not only 'heard', but puts some kind of pressure on public officials to resolve public problems.

In this paper I take a critical look at how public voice has been expressed through two very popular radio phone-in programmes: Peace FM's '*Wo haw ne sen*' (broadcast in Akan) and Joy FM's former⁸ '*Feedback*' (broadcast in English). These are hosted by two of Accra's leading private FM stations⁹ and may constitute a new form of voice mechanism, which I call *mediated voice*. I ask two simple questions:

Are the FM stations simply acting as a conduit for individual voices or are they creating a collective voice by claiming to represent citizens in such a way that they are acting as a substitute for collective action?

Are the programmes effective at all in getting response from those to whom the calls are directed?

The *raison d'être* of the '*Feedback*' and '*Wo haw ne sen*' radio programmes is to provide a dedicated air time for callers to call-in about problems they encounter with services (private or public) in Accra. The interesting dynamic to the programmes is that the complaints do not end with the phone calls and a single edition of the programme; the radio stations follow up on the complaints and try to ensure that the institutions involved respond or resolve the problems where necessary, and then announce back to the caller on whether the problem was resolved.

3 Understanding and defining 'mediated voice' as a new indirect voice mechanism.

In this section I contextualize what the radio programmes are doing and how they work. To do this, I first define and examine what I argue is mediated voice – a new concept of voice mechanism – and discuss its attributes. The analysis also focuses on how the two radio

⁸ As at the time of fieldwork, the programme, '*Feedback*' had been suspended, however, recordings of the programme covering 2005 through to part of 2008 provided enough documentary evidence on issues this paper is interested in.

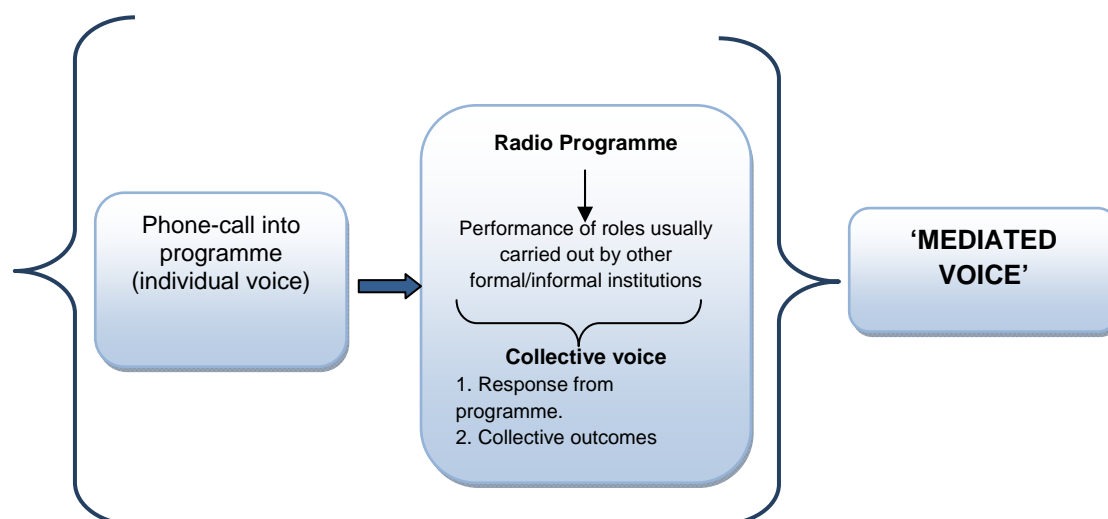
⁹ Peace FM and Joy FM are both located in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. '*Feedback*' and '*Wo haw ne sen*' are both interactive call-in programmes. *Wo haw ne sen*' is an Akan phrase which means 'what is your problem?' Akan (consisting of Twi and Fante dialects) is one of the six official spoken and written languages in Ghana; it is part of the Kwa group of languages and is spoken by over 45 per cent of Ghanaians.

campaigns go about creating this new form of voice. As already hinted at the beginning of this paper, this form of voice mechanism is a creation of radio stations; a large component of which is a direct result of ingenious radio programming and good journalism. Presenters or programme teams make a deliberate effort to intercede (on behalf of individuals who call) between citizen and state at the local level.

3.1 What is mediated voice?

For the purposes of this study and for future attempts at understanding what occurs when radio phone-in programmes help translate citizen's voice into public goods, I define mediated voice as: *the outcome of the activity (the voice) carried out by radio call-in programmes during which they receive and convert individual 'voices' into 'collective voice'*. The activity involves eliciting responses and solutions to problems through the performance of collective roles that are usually carried out by other formal/informal institutions such as the ombudsman, the client service departments of service delivery organisations or local elected officials (assemblymen/women); or else through collective efforts such as political or social associations. A key feature of mediated voice is that, for it to occur the mediator (in this case, the programme team) must have the ability to make the conversion; and the requestor (in this case, the caller) must believe that the mediator can provide 'Mediated Voice'. Figure 1 gives a diagrammatic impression of 'Mediated Voice.'

Figure.1: Diagrammatic representation of 'Mediated Voice'



3.2 When does it occur?

Mediated voice can only occur in certain contexts, and appears predominantly within certain kinds of democratic context. First, mediated voice requires free liberal airwaves in free democratic societies where citizens can exercise their right to free speech. It also requires a good understanding of democratic citizenship.¹⁰ The minimum condition of democratic citizenship is that people have access to issues that shape their lives, without which they may not be able to make informed democratic choices (Tetty, 2011; Norris, 2009; OD1, 2007;

¹⁰ Democratic citizenship includes but is not limited to participation, access and equity, and is not reducible to procedural features such as voting. It is also about the ability to shape the practices and understanding of citizenship. Democratic citizenship also requires that young people and adults are equipped to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society in order to be effective in influencing democracy either locally or nationally.

World Bank, 2007). Being a democratic citizen also requires that people are able to communicate their views and opinions in public debate and have spaces for public discussion on issues that most affect them; without this, democratic discourse cannot take place (Gaventa and Jenkins, 2005; Hyden and Okigbo, 2002). It is also what is generally required of good democratic culture (Bastian and Luckham, 2003).

Second, mediated voice is also better facilitated in societies in which there is access to both old and new Information Communication Technology (ICT). In this case, land-line and mobile telephony and, to a small extent, the Internet are tools enhancing an individual's access to free speech. In addition, mediated voice thrives when citizens (both facilitators of the radio programmes and callers to the programmes) not only recognise their rights as citizens (Gaventa and Jones, 2002), but also are able to access information and express themselves on issues that matter to them. It is only when rights are recognised that the use of ICT to demand those rights can occur. On the other hand, without access to and use of information, it is not possible to claim those rights and responsibilities (Cornwall, 2000:68; Isin, 2008; Isin and Wood, 1999).

Third, mediated voice, although it can occur on public state-owned radio¹¹ or television, is much more effective on non-state controlled independent private radio. This is because private radio has the ability to find resources to support the kind of service that mediated voice requires in order to operate effectively. Both '*Feedback*' and '*Wo haw ne sen*' have had substantial sponsorship outside of state funding. Also, private media, unlike state-owned media, have better ability to engage the state in a more neutral capacity (Azfar et al., 2004). In addition, mediated voice requires a fair amount of independence and political neutrality by the radio station offering it. This feature is also directly linked to why mediated voice is better situated on independent radio.

Mediated voice, is, by definition an aggregation of specific actions that individuals would normally perform either collectively or in groups. It converts a singular effort into a collective one and in effect by-passes collective action and to a limited extent its associated problems. Secondly, by providing mediated voice as a free service, except for the cost incurred from calling, the radio programmes take up the leg-work that individuals would have made. Finally, mediated voice also amplifies voice through a bottom-up media approach, which is about raising voices, but also about finding voice, preparing it, expressing it through diverse creative forms and creating the social and political conditions for making the expressions legitimate in order to elicit responsiveness (Pettit et al., 2009). This bottom-up approach also allows the radio programmes to collate issues from individuals and then send them upwards to the authorities on their behalf, which is similar to what one expects from grass-roots participatory activities.

4 What are the mechanisms for lodging complaints or expressing voice in Accra?

Democracies provide several formal or informal channels through which citizens voices can be used to demand accountability and responsiveness from those in higher authority. Residents of Accra have quite a plethora of mechanisms through which they can make

¹¹ Milligan and Mytton (2009) discuss many reasons why state-owned/run public broadcasting organisations in Africa are usually ill-prepared for public service role in new democracies. Among them is the fact that they are often poorly funded compared to their new, rival commercial radio station. Secondly, they are often still bound to the same 'old rules of the game' (government-centric). And, third, public broadcasters typically remain accountable to government rather than their listeners, and usually promote the interests and agendas of the political elite.

complaints about public and private services. Some are formal whilst a majority are informal channels that have become part of the *way of doing things*. The following are commonly identified routes that can be used to seek redress to community problems:

1. Directly through the clients service/complaints sections of public service providers
2. Through elected public officials (at the local level) – assembly men/women and parliamentarians
3. Through civil society-led actions: public protests and demonstrations, advocacy campaigns
4. Appeals to religious leaders
5. Appeals to traditional authorities
6. The Ombudsman

Media:

7. Newspapers – letters to the editor
8. Radio phone/call-in programmes (new)
9. Serial callers (repeat callers to radio programmes- new)

Table 1 shows the results from the mass survey conducted in the city of Accra between October and November 2010. When asked to list in order of priority the most important channels for lodging complaints about the community or expressing voice, the largest single group (34.1% of respondents) mentioned radio over other avenues available to them at the local level.

Table 1: Most important complaint mechanism (residents of Accra)

Channel	Count	Percentage %
Media (radio)	210	34.1
Local Government (Accra Metropolitan Assembly, AMA)	162	26.3
Police	108	17.6
Traditional Authority	53	8.6
Don't Know	4	0.7
Total	615	100.0

Source: author's sample survey

Respondents were then asked if they had used any of the channels they mentioned in the past 12 months and how often they used those channels. Of those who had actually made a complaint (60.2%), at least one respondent in three (33.2%) mentioned radio as the mechanism used to voice their complaints about community problems. Of these, 13.8% had called into '*Wo haw ne sen*' and '*Feedback*' about a community problem. These results again show that radio is a popular choice for residents of Accra to voice their complaints about community problems and problems that affect them. Also, a good number used '*Feedback*' and '*Wo haw ne sen,*' radio programmes that are designed specifically not just for the expression of voice but for ensuring that voice is carried forward in order to get results.

Table 2: Actual channels used for reporting community problems in the past 12 months

Complaint route/mechanism	Count	Frequency (%)
Radio programmes (mediated voice)	123	33.2
Traditional/religious leader	115	31.1
Assembly man/woman	73	19.7
Local Government (govt agency)	52	14.1
Newspapers – letter to the editor	7	1.9
Total	370	100.0

Note: the results presented in this table are an aggregate of responses for those who said they had used the channel mentioned: ‘once’ and ‘several times.’

To be sure, programmes such as ‘*Feedback*’ and ‘*Wo haw ne sen*,’ which are specifically dedicated to receiving and following up on complaints are not a regular feature of FM radio stations. At the time of the study, only two such programmes (including ‘*Wo haw ne sen*’) were airing. However, the fact that citizens of Accra think it is a viable voice mechanism in holding public officials to account is indeed a reflection of the extent to which people see it as a mechanism within their reach and for an expression of voice which is likely to go far.

The least-used complaint mechanism is the newspaper, accounting for a negligible proportion of responses. This finding is a reflection of the following changes in the Ghanaian society:

- a) Only a few Ghanaians write letters to newspapers (this finding is consistent with findings from the Afrobarometer Round 4 survey on Ghana, conducted in 2008). And even when they do, only a few of those letters get published.
- b) The advent of radio makes writing to newspapers redundant since the time it takes for a newspaper to go to print is much longer than it will take to make a call to a radio programme.

Whilst researching the various channels available for citizens to make complaints the following was noted: whilst all four state-owned newspapers (both daily and weekly) had columns for publishing ‘Letters to the Editor’, only two (The Chronicle and the Public Agenda) out of 13 private (general) newspapers in circulation in Accra had columns dedicated to ‘Letters to the Editor’ or a column dedicated to complaints about community problems and related issues. In addition the provision of online resources by radio stations means that those who have access to the internet can comment or write their opinion and views on any matter without writing to the press. This avenue is, however, limited to those who are both literate and have access to computers and the Internet. The question remains as to whether this form of expression of voice will generate enough attention to produce results.

The results in Table 2 go a long way towards establishing the extent to which radio programmes that allow phone-ins have become entrenched in the lives of urban residents. They also show the important alternative avenue that radio programmes creates for citizens to make their voices heard in order to engage with those in authority. This discussion is not by any means suggesting that radio programmes are necessarily the best channels through which complaints can be made; however, the argument is that radio has the potential to be a significant voice mechanism. In particular, programmes that allow for people to phone-in about community problems and then for issues to be followed-up on by the programme team are a new kind of voice mechanism.

5 The two radio call-in programmes in Accra (*'Feedback'* and *'Wo haw ne sen'*) providing mediated voice

'Feedback' and *'Wo haw ne sen'* are two unique phone-in radio programmes aired in Accra on two of Accra's most listened-to private commercial radio stations, Joy FM and Peace FM respectively. There are 28 private commercial FM stations in Accra; however, Joy FM and Peace FM are the most listened-to and trusted radio stations in Accra out of 19 stations mentioned by respondents. Both stations have gained listeners' approval since their inception in 1995 and 1998 respectively. They have both been adjudged the best radio station and have won awards for their work.¹² Nearly a third (29.4%) of the population of Accra listens to Joy FM and an almost similar proportion (22.4%) listens to Peace FM, whilst 48.2% of listenership is shared amongst 17 other FM radio stations. Of those who listen to Peace FM, almost 6 in 10 (59.2%) also listen to *'Wo haw ne sen'*; whilst half, (52.2%) listened to *'Feedback'* when it was airing. Table 3 summarises respondents' views on the stations.

Table 3: Why do citizens of Accra listen to Joy FM and Peace FM?

	Listenership share of 19 FM stations in Accra	Accurate and trustworthy	Programme quality	Like the presenters	Other reasons (including language)
Joy FM	29.4% (181)	28.7%	37%	22.1%	12.2%
Peace FM	22.4% (138)	30.4%	30.4%	11%	28.2%

Notes: Results shown in this table were extrapolated by cross-tabulating the variable 'listeners of Joy and Peace FM' with variable 'why they do so'. The question on why they preferred the particular radio station was an open-ended question. Cross-tab analysis was done to see what proportion of the listeners' of the two radio stations base their choice on 'why we listen'.

5.1 Characteristics of the radio programmes

Although the two programmes studied were located in rival stations and broadcast in different languages the findings show that there were more significant similarities between the two programmes and their teams than there were differences. This finding does not detract from the valuable service that the radio campaigns provide for the expression of voice. Rather,

¹² Joy FM has won several awards, of which most recent ones are: 2010, Joy News won the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) Awards for news Reporting (Radio category). In 2009, it was awarded the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana (CIMG) award for Media Organization of the Year 2008. The stations' 'Super Morning Show' was awarded the CIMG Best Morning Show of the Year 2008; as well as the GJA Programme of the Year. In 2006, Joy FM won the National Association of Broadcasters'(NAB) International Broadcasting Excellence Award in recognition of the station's leadership role in community service among operators not only in the Ghanaian radio market, but internationally. It was also adjudged the Best Radio Station in West Africa and the second best station on the continent in the first BBC Africa Radio Awards held recently in Nairobi, Kenya. Joy FM won the best 'Local On-air Campaign' award, a category designed to honour stations that have carried out or supported a social campaign or initiative that has had a positive effect on the lives of the listening community that the station serves. <http://www.multimeddiaghana.com/awards.asp>. Downloaded 2011-09-04. Peace FM was awarded CIMG radio programme of the year, 2001; Radio and Television Awards (RTV) favourite radio talk programme, 2002; GJA Radio programme of the year, 2010. Source, Peace FM, Accra 2010-10-09.

having two radio stations providing similar programmes only helps in widening the space available to groups (including, women) that do not usually get the opportunity to participate in affairs which help shape their lives (Odhiambo, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009). The few differences observed between them – that is, listener target, broadcast language, gender, participation via text messaging and style of presentation – provided useful opportunities for comparing and testing whether any of these variables had an influence on outcomes. Table 3 summarises the similarities and differences between the two programmes.

Table 4 Characteristics of the two radio programmes

Characteristics	'Wo haw ne sen'	'Feedback'
Location	Accra	Accra
Broadcast language	Akan	English
Target audience	Lower class	Middle class
Listener call-in issues (personal, public or collective)	Yes	Yes
Methods and equipment	Same	Same
Caller's gender	Mainly female	Balanced by gender
Text messaging	Yes	No
Volume of calls	High	High
Follow-up and response rate (complaints)	High	High
Public rating	High	High
Apolitical	Yes	Yes
Permanent studio panel	Yes	No
Moral appeal	Yes	Yes
Music	Yes	Yes
Dedication to duty	High	High
Success and popularity (radio station)	Yes	Yes
Public relations skills	Yes	Yes
Perceptiveness, knowledgeability (programme team)	High	High
Public trust	High	High
Team composition		
Gender	All female	All male
Education	Higher education	Higher education
Number	3-5	3-4

Source: Compiled from author's interviews and observation notes, June–December 2010, Accra

The main difference between the two programmes is that the broadcast language tends to determine which class of people listen to which station more. People with higher education as well as those with mid-level jobs tend to listen to 'Feedback.' The reverse is the case for 'Wo haw ne sen'. The results show that those in lower level jobs or those who have low education have a preference for 'Wo haw ne sen'. Tables 5 and 6 show the difference in listenership.

Table 5: Educational level of listeners of the two programmes

Educational Level	'Wo haw ne sen'		'Feedback'	
No formal education	38	10.5%	-	-
Informal education (including Koranic)	17	4.7%	-	-
Some Primary	40	11%	-	-
Primary completed	50	13.8%	-	-
Some Sec./High school	66	18.2%	37	11.6%
Secondary /High school completed	65	17.9%	73	22.9%
Post-secondary qualifications other than Univ.	59	16.3%	84	26.3%
Some Univ.	15	4.1%	60	18.6%
Univ. completed	12	3.3%	57	17.8%
Post graduate	1	0.2%	9	2.8%
Total	363	100%	320	100%

Note: Missing data = 2

Table 6: Occupational level of listeners of the two programmes

Occupational Level	'Feedback'	'Wo haw ne sen'
Upper level worker (e.g. lawyers, doctors large business workers)	14.1%	4.4%
Mid-level workers (e.g. teachers, nurses, supervisors)	48.4%	30%
Lower level workers (e.g. traders, artisans , manual workers etc.)	6%	47.1%
Does not work or never had a job	7.2%	7.2%
Student	24.3%	11.3%
Total	100%	100%

Differences between the gender of who listens to which programme, though minimal (shown in Table 7), reflect what a senior producer of said about those who call 'Wo haw ne Sen.' According to her:

'More women call 'Wo haw ne sen' [...] it seems men are able to keep quiet over some issues whilst women can't. Also, I think women call more because we broadcast in the local language, which makes them comfortable to express themselves.'

Table 7: Listenership: of 'Feedback' and 'Wo haw ne sen' by gender

Programme	% Total listenership in Accra	Male (% out of total listenership)	Female (% out of total listenership)
'Feedback'	52.2%	54.7%	45.3%
'Wo haw ne sen'	59.2%	42.8%	57.2%

In predominantly oral societies such as those in Ghana the ability for radio to broadcast in a language that allows participation by those who are not literate in English language is important (Yankah, 2006). Therefore, the medium in which a radio station broadcasts makes a lot of difference to preferences for that station.

5.2 Analysis of the calls received: producing public goods

A key feature of the radio campaigns is the volume and nature of calls they receive. To be sure, these radio programmes are almost like open-ended questions – anyone can call about any kind of problem (although the programmes make it clear what their *modus operandi* is). The nature of complaints received drives the programmes because without the calls and complaints the unique activity that the radio campaigns provide would not be complete. The more public-oriented the complaints are, the higher is the likelihood that the programmes will follow-up and make an issue out of them and hence get results.

The classic definition of public goods in economics is those goods that are: non-rivalrous, (one person's consumption does not reduce the benefit of another's consumption); and non-excludable (when one person consumes, it is impossible to prevent another consuming too, such as clean air, TV reception etc. (Hudson and Jones, 2005; Samuelson, 1965). In the development context, Leonard, (2000:7-8, cited in Booth, 2009:1) defines public goods more broadly to include those goods (including services) that tend to be under-supplied when their provision relies on the incentives available to private actors because their benefits 'spill over' to other members of the community. In this paper, I adopt the approach of the Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP). Public goods are thus the positive outcomes of a range of human activity, including concrete ones, such as the provision of sanitation and water services (services that are meant to be provided as state obligation) and more abstract ones such as ensuring that legislation surrounding the provision of services is upheld (Booth, 2010). I take this definition a step further by including the positive outcomes of specific voice mechanisms, such as mediated voice. Table 8 shows how the calls made on the programmes were further classified by type (as either **personal** or **public good** calls).

Table 8: Classification of calls

Public good calls	These were calls which had the potential to produce public goods, and in addition, whose resolution provided positive outcomes that were beneficial not just to consumers (complainant) but to the supplier of the service as well because they would also have fulfilled their part in providing a public good.
Personal calls	These are calls which were mainly personal in nature, mostly beneficial to just the caller and probably a few others and have no immediate public good benefits.

The '*Feedback*' data were analysed to show the proportion of complaints in each of the categories defined in Table 8. For instance, more than half (over 50%) of the calls received from 2005 to 2007 were public good calls except in 2008 when personal calls were more (52.7%) than public good calls (42.3%), as shown in Table 9. These calls usually related directly to public services such as the provision of sanitation services, electricity and water supply, faulty traffic lights, bad roads, corruption and other malpractices at public institutions. Below are some examples, which cut across different public concerns.

1. Lamisi, Accra. *You complained that a huge refuse dump is developing at the P&T Flats at Darkuman and if care is not taken, it will overrun the residents there. You also want to know if that is designated rubbish dump because other Sub-Metros bring their refuse there too.* ~ '*Feedback*', 13/09/07

2. Anani, Osu. You want to know who is responsible for removing the heap of rubbish behind IKETECH at Osu. That heap of rubbish has become an eye-sore; and all those responsible for its removal should act quickly before an epidemic breaks out. ~ 'Feedback', 10/01/08

3. Worlanyo from Dansoman: You complained that the lights go off at Dansoman everyday and you want the ECG to rectify the problem. ~ 'Feedback', 06/09/07

4. Son-of-God, Dansoman. You complained about the traffic light at Flamingo and Mamprobi. You said that lights have been off for some time now. ~ 'Feedback', 20/09/07

5. Sam: You complained that when you are driving from the Broadcasting House going up to Ako Adjei (Sankara) Overpass, there is a large Fan Yogo bill board advert on the left, which blocks the view of drivers. The only way to see traffic coming on your left properly is to position the car on the pedestrian crossing, which also hampers pedestrians, so why was the advert allowed to be placed in that location? ~'Feedback', 12/04/07

6. Ebenezer, Sakumono: Your concern is the Nungua-Tema Beach Road. The potholes on the road are getting terrible and frightening. It caused an accident not too long ago and you are urging the authorities to repair it before it causes more harm. ~ 'Feedback', 7/6/07

7. Frank, Lapaz: You are complaining that the road from Ofankor Barrier to Taifa Junction is really bad, it's full of potholes. Also there is a bridge being constructed on the road leading from Pokuase to Kwabenya ... the contractor has left the job undone. ~'Feedback', 7/6/07

Oti, Abbosey Okai: You complained that the Metro mass transport conductors do not give tickets to passengers, and that sometimes they pocket bus fares paid to them. ~'Feedback', 25/7/05

Careful analysis of the responses to personal problems showed that a tenth of the personal calls (5.1%) were somehow turned into public good issues by the presenter or the programme team. These calls tended to be about such matters as high readings from electric meters, information on how to get employment, or problems with an individual's employment; health and personal legal issues. One example is given below of a typical personal problem call received:

Complaint: John from Asesewa, you are a teacher under the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) and for five months your have not been paid. ~ 'Feedback', November 1, 2007.

In other instances many of the personal calls were creatively transformed by the programmes to wider public concern issues. They did so by creating discussion out of the issues in order to create a public appeal, and also by inviting officials to the studios live to answer calls and questions from the public. For instance, the following extract from 'Feedback' shows an example of a personal call around which the programme managed to get wider public appeal and discussion by inviting the Motor Traffic and Transport Unit (MTTU) to explain and discuss issues about illegal parking of commercial vehicle in Accra on the following week's edition of the programme.

Adams Dansoman	Personal problem that has wider public appeal	Two complaints: (1) <i>Trotro</i> Drivers ¹³ cause a lot of problems to the Bank customers besides the security risk posed to customers cars (2) Difficulty parking at The Trust Bank, Trust Towers Branch
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Source: 'Feedback', 3 May, 2007

It is very plausible that the programme team realised that although they could not prevent people from calling about personal problems, they could raise the profile of the programme by creatively turning personal calls into public issues for wider public listening benefit. This confirms what a presenter of 'Feedback' said about globalising personal problem calls.

On 'Wo haw ne sen' this kind of wider appeal for personal calls is achieved through the in-studio permanent panel consisting of a legal and medical practitioner, and the so-called 'computer man',¹⁴ who provides answers and solutions to calls about health, legal matters and on dates. These calls are mainly personal in nature; but by speaking generally about the problems raised the presenter globalises the issue to a wider audience.

To be sure, the radio campaigns would not have a wider public appeal if they were dealing with only a niche market. For them to have a continued market appeal they have to solve the problems in a way that appears to benefit everyone. According to a presenter of 'Feedback',

'whether the complaints were parochial or collective, I always tried to lift things to the more global broader platforms. We get individual/personal specific issues but the design and model was to lift it up so that we create an educative platform. For instance, if you have an issue with Melcom,¹⁵ I want to look at it within customer service, although that specific case requires some kind of individual resolution I can follow it up but, I can carve something out of it'.

Table 9: Percentage of complaints/calls by type on 'Feedback' (over 39 months)

Type of compliant	Year				Total
	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Personal calls	43.5%	46.7%	45.7%	52.6%	47.1%
Public good calls	56.5%	53.3%	54.3%	47.4%	52.9%
Total number of calls	576				

Note: This table shows analysis of 'Feedback' transcripts 2005-2008. The individual calls were categorised according to type of complaint and assigned numerical values in order to compute data that shows variation and change over time.

In addition, although the programme was aired for only a short time (3 months) in 2008 before it was suspended, a high number of calls were received on 'Feedback'. The year 2008 was an election year in Ghana, the Kufuor-led NPP administration was ending its full eight year term, and therefore the likelihood that citizens would be making more demands and making public

¹³ *Trotro* is the popular name for privately-owned mini vans used for commercial public transport in Ghana.

¹⁴ This individual is called the 'Computer Man' because he has the ability to tell and recollect dates and events on the Julian calendar without referring to any document or equipment. Callers to the programme with specific request about dates call the programme asking for dates. For instance, a caller asks for the fifth Saturday in March 1912, or the day of the week of October 13, 1920; and this man is able to give the precise date in seconds (almost instantaneously) without referring to any document. He is on the panel to serve those who do not have any records of their birth or dates. He serves as an informal document depository of dates, a role that should be carried out by the births registry or the national archives.

¹⁵ Melcom is a popular high street shop in Ghana.

all kinds of issues was high. Most of the public good calls received in 2008 were about infrastructure (road, water, sanitation and electricity etc.), which were clearly meant to emphasise issues that citizens wanted contesting parties to take seriously. On the other hand, personal calls were heavy on employment and other labour related issues. Again these issues mirrored general views about unemployment in Ghana at the time.¹⁶ Finally, the likelihood that the radio programme was using those issues to make big stories was also high. The distinctive features of election time calls are not restricted to *'Feedback'*; *'Wo haw ne sen'* also experienced high volumes of calls during election years. According to a senior producer of the programme, election period calls were as high as election period response by public officials to calls relating to public service delivery.

6 Creating mediated voice: the role of FM radio programmes

'Mediated voice' is an abstract concept that expresses a concrete reality. There are a number of specific factors that make it possible for it to work in the way that it does as well as give it form. These factors are largely a creation of the radio programmes.

6.1 The radio station's success linked to popularity and longevity

Private radio, particularly FM, is highly competitive in Ghana, especially in the regional capital cities. Accra has twenty-eight FM stations currently on air.¹⁷ The most successful ones are those that have been in existence longest and which are recognised as trendsetters for other stations. Both Peace FM and Joy FM have been operating for over ten years. The teams of the radio campaigns depend on the popularity of the station in their dealings with public officials – they would usually say, *'My name is [...] calling from Joy FM or Peace FM. We would like to speak to you about [x issue] raised on 'Feedback'/'Wo haw ne sen' rather than 'I am [...] of 'Feedback' or 'Wo haw ne sen'.* This is not to say that the programmes do not wield influence in themselves; however, the identification goes first to the radio station and then to the programme. The rating of the radio station as well as level of trust for their products is what consumers remember first; this is evident in the results from the mass survey presented in Table 2.

Although these programmes are part of the general programming of the radio station and ride on its successes, they have a life of their own, in which listeners and patrons of those programmes place a lot of faith. The life they assume is largely a creation of both presenters and producers and to some extent the callers – *'I wanted a programme that was dynamic, interesting, entertaining, versatile and yet result-oriented. I put everything into it [...] I am doing a programme, which I want to have a life of its own even if I am not there'* (interview with former presenter of *'Feedback'*, 11 Aug 2010, Accra).

6.2 Providing evidence and truth

A lot of attention is given to ensuring that complaints are genuine and based on evidence. The radio presenters' responses are also carefully crafted based on thorough investigations and official responses from the most appropriate source. According to a senior producer of *'Wo haw ne sen'*, they have to investigate some of the complaints thoroughly, particularly the ones that have to do with public services; because it is on the radio, listeners can take

¹⁶ The Ghana Afrobarometer findings of 2008 showed that 44.8% of Ghanaians thought the government had not handled job creation well.

¹⁷ Source: Ghana National Communications Authority, List of Authorised VHF-FM Radio Stations in Ghana, 2010

advantage, and if they are not careful will be led on the wrong trail. She told a story of when they received a call from a street hawker who said she was calling from *Rawlings Park* (a commercial and extremely busy area of central Accra) about how employees of the city council were maltreating them and stealing their wares under the guise of keeping them off the pavements. According to her, it was illegal for the hawkers to be on the pavements; however, molesting them and stealing their wares was unacceptable. In order to follow-up on the complaint she needed to investigate and arm herself with evidence, so she disguised herself as a hawker and joined the other hawkers on the pavement. Although she did not experience what the hawker had complained about, she at least managed to get evidence on it and then carried the issue forward.

The former presenter of *'Feedback'* was even more aggressive about how he ensured the validity of what callers complained about. He said to me

'we are not in the business of ruining peoples businesses or putting government officials on the firing line because somebody called and complained about them. Or because we are a radio station, and have the advantage of blowing the issue out of proportion or over sensationalising it. We are in the business of resolving real problems and hopefully help in making institutions more accountable [...] so I make sure I go to some of the places myself and usually, I find out the problem is truly there and I even find other problems' (interview with former presenter of *'Feedback'*, 11 Aug 2010, Accra.)

Table 10 gives some examples from *'Feedback'* which illustrate some of the evidence-based responses.

Table 10: A sample of evidence-based responses

Name	Complaint	Response
Maame Akua	Says that the traffic lights at Osu cemetery intersection are not working properly because when it's 'red' all the traffic lights at all the junctions turn red, and when it's green all of them turn green as well.	The <i>'Feedback'</i> team has gone to the location to check, there seems to be a slight problem with one of the lights. We have spoken to Mr. Lazzie ... and he says all the traffic lights are not faulty but just only one which is close to Intercontinental Bank. He says when the lights are on red it will be working alright but when it is supposed to be on green the lights goes off. He says there are plans to change all the traffic lights because they are old. ~ January, 6, 2005
Michael	Complained about a huge rubbish dump at the back of Kaneshie market, close to the Kaneshie police station. You said the rubbish has taken over the road and want the authorities to clear it.	Mr. Samuel Kpodo, in charge of solid waste in Accra says they are aware of the problem and even last week they went there to remove the rubbish heap from the road. He says they are supposed to send the refuse container back to the lorry station but they have to make a platform for the container which is not ready yet. He says hopefully by next week they will complete the platform and the container will be send back to the lorry station. ~April, 13, 2008

6.3 Public relations skills and contacts

Having good public relations skills is important in eliciting cooperation from public officials, especially those who are called to the studio to respond to citizen's complaints or those who are called on the phone to do the same. At Peace FM, for instance, I observed how the producer would hold small-talk with a public official in an attempt to get cooperation before they are finally put live on air. This is well cultivated over time to the extent that the producer becomes very well known to the various institutions. An informal relationship is then built between them, so that they themselves provide unsolicited information or call the producer when there are issues they wish to inform the public about or for public relations purposes. According to the producer at Peace FM, having done it for so long gives her confidence to approach any institution without fear, knowing that by using the right skills she can get through to the right person and hence get a problem resolved.

6.4 Branding – the use of appellations and local expressions

Idiomatic expressions and appellations are a part of Ghanaian oral culture. The use of such expressions is common in everyday communication, but how they are used, and the context in which they are used makes all the difference in adding value to spoken language. The presenters of the two programmes not surprisingly use a lot of appellations in their presentation. To them, the use of local idioms and appellations added local authenticity to the outlook of the radio campaigns. For instance, the presenter of *'Feedback'* would at the beginning of the programme use the following to describe himself: *'I am your on-air assembly man, your radio vigilante, your consumer protector, your on-air radio ombudsman.'* The *'Feedback'* data analysed shows that his use of such descriptions increased over time from only one, *'your consumer protector,'* to four harder-hitting ones such as, *'your on-air radio ombudsman,' 'online-assembly man,' 'your 'consumer vigilante,'* and *'the man who puts the fuse in your light'* over a period of three years. According to him, 'there must be some kind of retention, some form of identity [...] and that identity must connote certain things which the listener can have affinity with'.

The duties of an Assembly Member as stipulated in the Local Government Act 1993 include but are not limited to: maintaining contact with the electorate, representing the electorate, holding meetings with the electorate before assembly meetings in order to collect their views, opinions and proposals, and solving the problems of residents in the electoral area.¹⁸ In Ghana an Assembly Member is perceived to be 'honourable' and is taken seriously at least at the community level – they are the most accessible members of the local government system. At the local and community levels people rely on these local elites. They not only expect them to deliver development to their communities, but also look to them to meet other, more personal, needs of community members. Thus, if a radio programme first of all provides a platform and a short-cut to getting community problems resolved as well as having a presenter who calls himself *'an on-air assembly man'*, it is taken seriously and must live up to the accolade. The same applies to the reference to being an ombudsman. According to a former presenter of *'Feedback'*: *'[...] if you know what an ombudsman does'¹⁹ [...] it tells you we are there to fill the gap where there are failings in the system.'*

¹⁸ Local Government Act, 1993, Act 462, section (1)

¹⁹ The role of an ombudsman in administration was classically described by Rosenthal (1964) many years ago as 'a people's representative'. The ombudsman is an impartial government officer whose job is to receive complaints from citizens against administrative decisions. Although that individual does not have the power of enforcement the ombudsman has the power to critique and makes recommendations to other government offices. For supporters of this system, the ombudsman is a non-political and easily accessible channel for citizens. Similarly, in mass media the media ombudsman is 'an advocate of the audience, and a link between the editorial board and the audience'. The media ombudsman aims at establishing a link

Such re-adaptation of this classical role of an ombudsman, as well as the appropriation of the *assembly man* title, by the former presenter of *Feedback* evokes powerful imagery in the minds of listeners. The same applies to the use of local idioms on *Wo haw ne sen* when the presenter cites two well-known Akan idioms: *'me nko me tiri mu prɔw'*; *'eyebia wo haw ye safoa ebue obi asem'* (literally, *'if you have a problem that needs to be resolved, it is better to share it; [...] for all you know, your problems might be a key that opens the solution to somebody else's problem'*). The use of local idioms according to a producer of *Wo haw ne sen* is part of their local appeal:

'[...] you see, we are a local radio station, we need to use expressions that people identify with locally, so what better way to say it than use our own local idioms?'

This unique method of branding creates some form of imagery in the minds of the listeners. It is aimed at making the listener believe that the radio campaigns do have a way of creating avenues for solving their problems. This self-defined position also ultimately forces the programme team to deliver on the brands they have created.

6.5 Dedication (presenters and producers) and service rendering approach

Both programmes have a team of very dedicated individuals. Either the presenter or the producer has a high problem-solving or result-oriented approach to work. This is not to say that the radio stations do not have other programmes where the teams show dedication to what they do. However, for a programme run on a private radio station without any financial input from the public or public purse (their funding is solely from advertisement sponsorship), it is remarkable that the job goes beyond presenting a programme for entertainment to rendering a required service.

'For me it is serious business, once I sit behind the console, I know I am giving the platform to people out there who need problems resolved or think public officials are not within their reach. I also know that I am speaking and doing this on behalf of the many people who are faced with the daily challenges of dealing with poor public services; this I know because I experience some of them myself' (interview with former presenter of *Feedback*, 11 Aug 2010, Accra).

This feeling of providing a service that needs to be well packaged and done well was evident in Peace FM's *Wo haw sen* team. Although the programme is constantly inundated with calls both during and after the programme, the approach to dealing with the complaints was echoed in the view of a producer at Peace FM:

'[...] if you don't give them the feedback, they will bombard you with the same questions week after week preventing other people from getting through to put their concerns across. So you are forced to work for them.'

between the public and the media houses, clarifies misunderstandings, and answers direct questions of the public, so providing credit for the media (Ziegenfuss and O'Rourke, 2011; Pritchard, 2000). The ombudsman has the power to criticize the media house that employs him/her. The press ombudsman role appeared for the first time in 1967 among the editorial staff of Louisville Courier Journal in the USA. Another example of the media ombudsman is Didier Epelbaum of the French public television station, Chanel France 2 (Duplat, 2003).

Although not all complaints are successfully resolved, putting oneself in the shoes of the caller, or the belief that they are rendering a service to the public is crucial, especially for a private FM radio which does not depend on public funds to operate. For programmes like *'Feedback'* and *'Wo haw sen'* whose revenue is generated from sponsors' advertisement one would think that the first obligation would be to make the sponsors happy by dancing to the piper's tune. Interestingly *'Feedback'* received over 30 calls between 2005 and 2007 relating to its long-time sponsor, all of which were treated the same way as complaints about other service providers. Similarly *'Wo haw sen'* also treats its sponsors just as they would complaints from people about other service providers.

7 Mediated voice: measuring success rates

How well is mediated voice doing? Can claims about its usefulness or otherwise help us rethink the expression of voice in general and in Africa in particular? Is mediated voice measurable? As indicated earlier in the definition of mediated voice, an attempt to measure how well mediated voice can convert *'individual voice'* into *'collective voice'* to produce *'public goods'* is a daunting task. It requires painstaking examination of how well the radio programmes succeed in making the conversion. I attempt a response to the question of the viability of mediated voice by looking at the outcomes of mediated voice.

The programmes have their own way of measuring how successful they are. For them, success is measured in terms of the volume of calls they receive and traffic on the phone lines, continued sponsorship, popularity of the programmes and the level of success they achieve with resolving the complaints that come through. According to a presenter of *'Feedback'*:

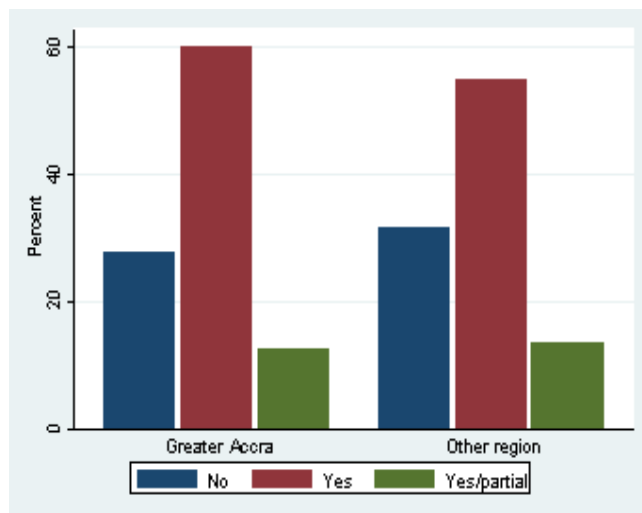
[...] with just the volume of calls and the range and breadth of the cases or issues [...] they suddenly felt that we could go into anything, ask about anything and it constituted feedback. It constituted a consumer platform and that for me is an awesome measure' (interview with a former male presenter of *'Feedback'*, 11 Aug 2010, Accra).

And according to a producer of *'Wo haw ne sen,'*

'Although we are only able to take a fewer calls because of time constraints, we have over 20 to 30 calls coming through when we open the phone lines, most of the time, the lines get jammed within minutes of announcing the phone numbers. We had to introduce text messaging because of this problem. Even that is not enough; some of the callers find our private numbers and call us demanding to be put on air to speak about their problems' (interview with a female producer of *'Wo haw ne sen,'* 26 July 2010, Accra).

Whilst these claims may be enough to show how successful mediated voice is, it is not enough to justify claims about why this variant of *'Voice'* may be better than (or a useful complement to) other voice mechanisms in engendering accountability and responsiveness from the those in authority. In order to explore this, I present and discuss results derived from analysing raw data from *'Feedback'* (transcripts of calls, responses and resolutions). A careful study of *'Feedback'* reveals very interesting things about the level of success that the programme achieved over the period of three years. Figure 2 shows the success rate of complaints/problems for *'Feedback'* for the data analyzed for the period 2005-2008.

Figure 2: Success rates of complaints (for Accra and other regions)



Legend	
Yes	Means 'Feedback' successfully had the complaint resolved in so far as (a) it contacted the institution, (b) it received answers, (c) the problem was resolved, and/or (d) it gave a definite resolution/response to the caller on subsequent edition of the programme on air.
No	means the problem was not resolved because (a) no attempt was made, (b) not enough information was provided, (c) the issue did not require a response, and/or (d) the data did not show any response at all from 'Feedback'
Yes/partial	means that: (a) an attempt was made, i.e. contact with institution, but problem not resolved, (b) the team is still working on the problem and will get the results in due course, (c) complainant calls back and says problem still, exists even though they were told it was resolved, and/or (d) institution to which complaint is directed gave assurances of working on the problem within a certain time frame.

Notes: Listeners' problems or complaints are categorized as resolved when the problem was duly investigated by the team, key contacts in institutions made and followed up on and final feedback given live on air that the problem had been resolved. The *legend* explains how success was determined.

8 Why mediated voice sets an agenda for rethinking voice: who uses mediated voice and by-passes collective action on radio?

Which people express their voice through the radio? Ordinary people complaining about abuses of power, or participating in service delivery in order to better monitor providers, are hardly new occurrences. Parent-teachers' associations around the world have long enabled clients of public schooling to contribute to performance improvements (Goetz and Jenkins, 2004). However, what is new in this study is that the initiative of holding service providers accountable is individual-led through a medium (radio) and not what people usually do collectively as groups.

This new form of individual-led voice leads one to ask, who are the individuals using 'mediated voice'; are they working on behalf of pre-organised groups or even partisan interests? Are they acting alone or are there underlying reasons why a group of people chose to solve community problems through radio? And, finally why have they opted to use mediated voice (a new form of citizen action) as opposed to any other form of citizen's action?

The analysis presented in this section is mostly based on quantitative data from a survey conducted in Accra in October 2010. The unit of analysis is individuals who had either called or sent a text to 'Feedback' or 'Wo haw ne sen' about a problem in their neighbourhood, community or within their household. The analysis is therefore based on 14% (85) of the total sample of 615 respondents. Although the survey results show that at least 20% (198) of the sampled population had sent a text or called a radio programme for various reasons including discussion programmes, the analysis in this section is based on only those who had called 'Feedback' or 'Wo haw ne sen' about a problem. It is also supported by individual in-depth interviews with some individuals who had called into the programmes.

8.1 Callers belong to the liberal airwave generation (LAG)

Very indicative of the era of FM radio, the growth of mobile phone technology and participatory radio in Ghana, the majority of those who use mediated voice to solve community problems belong to the age group I describe as the *Liberal Airwave Generation* (LAG). Ghana's airwaves were liberalized in 1994, over eighteen years ago. Interactive and listener participation became fashionable in the mid 1990s when radio stations such as Joy FM, the first private commercial FM radio in Accra, and Radio Universe, a university based FM radio station, introduced listener-interactive programmes. These programmes largely provided listeners with the opportunity to participate and add their voice to many discourses of national interest. The LAG consists of the age group of people who grew up listening to the new generation of FM stations and innovative participatory radio in Ghana, particularly in Accra and other regional capitals.

Table 11 shows the age distribution of callers to 'Feedback' and 'Wo haw ne sen'. As highlighted in the table, the callers are predominantly in the age range 25 to 44 years.

Table 11: Age group combined: users from both programmes (LAG years)

18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	Total
13	32	25	7	6	83 ²⁰
15.7%	38.6%	30.1%	8.4%	7.2%	100.0%

Second, the LAGs fall within the age-group of people who have witnessed and recognise how private radio is credited for contributing to events that led to the peaceful alternation of governments (through elections) in the past decade and a half. For example, the private media in Ghana are documented to have played very useful roles in Ghana's elections by highlighting and making public issues of electoral malpractice, potential violence and up-to-the-minute observation of vote-counting. All of these activities helped ensure transparency of the ballot in the country's general elections; particularly, in the critical year 2000 elections²¹ and subsequently in 2004 and 2008 (Gadzekpo, 2008; Prempeh, 2008; Zuckerman, 2008). Hence, the belief in the 'power of the media' is strongest amongst the LAGs.

Third, LAGs fall within the age-group of people who witnessed or have seen how FM radio in Ghana is capable of holding the state to account – a form of social accountability mechanism. The electronic mass media in particular have been in the forefront of exposing some of the high-profile corruption cases in the recent past in Ghana. These crusades were usually championed by younger journalists and radio presenters. Joy FM in particular, has been in the forefront of many such exposés. On October 10, 2000, for example, a popular morning show presenter (and winner of Best Journalist Award, 2003) at Joy FM, Komla Dumor, filed a complaint with Ghana's Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) against the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT), citing alleged instances of mismanagement of funds, corruption and conflict of interest, among other things, by some directors and board members of SSNIT who were closely linked to the political party then in

²⁰ The total number of cases adds up to 83 instead of 85 because two of the callers had called into both stations about a problem

²¹ It was a critical election year because, for the first time in Ghana's political history, power was going to be alternated between one democratically elected government and another. Jerry John Rawlings, who was president at the time, was constitutionally barred from standing again after two terms in office. Thus, whether his party won or not power was to be transferred from one democratically elected leader to another. Be it, ruling government or opposition party.

power. Although Komla Dumor eventually lost the case, it drew attention to all manner of official corruption. It also shored up the reputation of Joy FM and its presenters as individuals who could take on corrupt officials even if they were in government.

Finally, the LAGs fall within the ‘youthful working age’ category, defined as those between ages 25 to 45 years.²² This group, who probably find themselves tied to their busy work schedule or other economic activities, may not have time to go through the bureaucratic processes of getting public service-related community problems resolved. This assertion conforms to evidence from in-depth interviews during the qualitative study with key informants (who had called accessed mediated voice) whose ages also fall within the LAG. This is extensively discussed in subsequent sections on evidence of why people use mediated voice.

8.2 Callers are usually in an ‘economically disadvantaged’ position

The majority of those who call into the radio programmes are mid-level to lower-level workers²³ (see Table 12). These are generally not ‘high earners’; and they are people who usually find themselves disadvantaged with regard to service provision.

Table 12: Occupation of callers to the radio programmes

Occupational level	Frequency	Total %
Mid Level	41	51.2%
Lower Level	28	34.9%
Upper level	6	7.5%
Does not work/never had a job	4	5%
Student	4	5%
Total	83	100%

Note: N = 83 instead of 85 because 2 of the respondents had called both stations about problems.

The data in Table 12, above, are instructive and show that the concentration of callers and texters is around those categorized as mid-range income earners. It is not uncommon in urban areas, particularly, in Accra at present times, to hear the distinction being made between people who have the means to ‘solve public problems through private means’ locally or abroad (Booth, 2010) and those who cannot. For instance, if roads leading to one’s house are bad, for those who have the means, the choice is rather to own a vehicle which can traverse a bad or pot-hole ridden road. The propensity for the well-to-do to solve public problems through private means cuts across most sectors of public service delivery, whether it is water, electricity or even crime prevention. For electricity, they either get high-powered generators or solar panels. With water, they develop huge water reservoirs or private boreholes; and for security, private security and a number of exotic-breed guard dogs. Thus, the disadvantage is higher for those without the means when dealing with public services than for those who have the means.

²² The Ghana Standards Living Survey (GSLs) of 2008 report puts the working age in Ghana between ages 15 to 64 years; 75.3% fall within ages 25-45 in Accra.

²³ Middle level formal sector workers are nurses, teachers, accountants and other professional workers in NGOs and other private organisations. Low level workers includes but not limited to traders/hawkers, artisans, manual workers etc.

8.3 High listenership to radio

A significant proportion of those who use radio platforms as a voice mechanism listen to radio daily and listen to programmes with call-in segments probably with the hope that the opportunity will arise for them to call in or hear about issues that are of interest to them most. Radio has a *lived* influence on people. High listenership of radio and equally high interest in talk show radio programmes give a strong indication of why they choose to use mediated voice. There is generally high interest in radio in Ghana, particularly in the capital cities and larger towns where several FM radio stations are located. However, this interest is also highest amongst those who listen to, and participate in mediated voice. The likelihood that they will tune in, if an opportunity is created, is therefore high. These are people whose source of news and information is mainly from radio. A good majority (92.8%) get their news and information from radio daily, 60% from TV daily; and 28% from newspapers daily. They are those who listen to all programmes on radio from morning till evening or listen mostly to talk shows and programmes with call-in segments.

Table 13: Source of news and information

	Every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Less than once a month	Never	Don't know
Radio	77 (92.8%)	4 (4.8%)	2 (2.4%)	-	-	-
TV	52 (60.3%)	25 (30.1%)	7 (8.4%)	1 (1.2%)	-	-
News-papers	24 (28.9%)	23 (27.7%)	16 (19.3%)	6 (7.2%)	13 (15.7%)	1 (1.2%)

Table 14: programme preference

All programmes from morning to evening	49	59%
Listen to talk only shows with call-in segments	34	40%
Only news	-	
Only music	-	
Other selected programmes (sports and religious)	-	
Never	-	
Total	83	100%

They are also individuals who are well plugged into communication technology. Almost all of them (91.6%) own a cell phone which has an in-built radio.

8.4 High interest in public affairs

Those who called mediated voice have a high interest in public affairs. Almost all of them (90.4%) said they were interested in public affairs, whilst only a marginal 9.6% of them said they had no interest. Interest in public affairs by mediated voice users contrasts strongly with those who had never called a radio station, where 50.2% and 49.8% respectively said they were 'interested' and 'not interested' in public affairs.

8.5 Active citizens: high interest in community affairs

The survey also shows that the majority of those who use mediated voice are those I describe as active citizens – defined as those who take interest in issues affecting their communities. They are people who feel they have an innate duty to take up or find solutions to problems which affect their communities. To show this, I looked at the variables²⁴ that best measure this understanding of active citizenry.

Whilst making a clear distinction between the duties of religious and traditional leadership, a clear majority (73.2%) of those who use mediated voice had raised concerns about how local government is run, or discussed problems affecting their community with other community members. More than half (61.7 %) had also joined others to try to resolve community problems. These groups of people again show a strong preference for the speed and voice that radio provides – the majority (73%) of them have never written to a newspaper column or to a public official about problems in their communities, but have called radio shows about a problem. See Table 15.

Table15: Actions taken by users of mediated voice

Active citizenship (actions): How often?	Several times	Once or twice	Never
Discussed about local government with community members	41 50%	19 23.2%	22 26.8%
Joined community members to address a problem	33 40.7%	17 21%	31 38.3%
Discussed community problems with religious comm. or traditional leaders	13 15.9%	25 29.3%	45 54.9%
Made a complaint to municipal assembly (either in person or by writing a letter)	6 7.7%	15 19.2%	57 73.1%
Written to a news paper	-	-	-

Note: N = 83.

8.6 Strong belief in citizen voice and power

They have a strong belief in citizen's power, although it is not exactly clear how and by what means – perhaps radio. When asked: '*When there are problems with how local government is run in your community, how much can an ordinary person like you do to improve the situation?*' A resounding majority (75.9%) (combined total of those who said '*some amount*' and those who said a '*great deal*') said that ordinary people like them could contribute to improving how local government is run.

²⁴ In order to capture this concept, and measure the variable, respondents were asked: 'If you yourself have seen problems in how local government is run in the past year, how often, if at all, you did any of the following? (a) discuss about local government with community members; (b) joined community members to address the problem; (c) discussed community problems with religious or traditional leaders; (d) made a complaint to municipal assembly (either in person or writing; (e) called a radio show; (f) write to a newspaper; and, (g) Make a complaint to your municipal authority officials, for example, by going in person or by writing a letter?'

9 Concluding thoughts about rethinking voice

The objective of this paper was to take another look at voice by critically evaluating a new form of voice mechanism which occurs through the radio phone-in programmes, 'Feedback' and 'Wo haw ne sen' broadcast on two popular Accra-based private commercial FM radio stations, Joy and Peace FM. This form of voice is new and interesting in a country which until recently had virtually no avenues for the expression of voice or for citizens to be 'heard' because of many years of periods infamously referred to as the 'culture of silence'. Now the country has liberal airwaves characterised by an explosion of private media. Radio in particular dominates the provision of avenues for the expression of voice and for citizens to engage the state in many different ways. The uniqueness of how 'Feedback' and 'Wo haw ne sen' programmes operate and how they go about translating individual voices into collective outcome is what sets them apart from other phone-in discussion programmes. They have in a way created informal channels through which citizens can solve collective problems (an indirect voice mechanism).

I have argued in this paper that the two programmes have not only created avenues for the expression of voice, but are providing what I conceptualise as mediated voice. That is, the representation of individual voices as if they were a collective voice. Second, that mediated voice is a new way of expressing voice through the mix of processes, which combines the key characteristics of both radio programmes and the programme teams to create a unique way of interceding between citizens and those in authority.

Finally, mediated voice, by converting individual 'voices' into 'collective outcomes', produces public goods. The nature of the public goods produced as a result of mediated voice fits well with APPP's objective of discovering underrated governance resources that actually work well in African societies.

Although this paper helps us rethink voice within the context of what is current and popular (radio and phone-ins), particularly in Ghana and some other African countries, we still need to consider how this rather unique, and frequently successful, voice mechanism can be sustained in such a way that it can become a permanent way of making government officials more responsive to ordinary people. It is hoped that findings, arguments and discussions presented in this paper will open up the debate and lead to further research in this area.

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