


The Liberian Rural Communications Network

RADIO

Reaching Rural Liberia

The Rural Liberian Communications Network



The USAID-sponsored Liberian Rural Communications Network officially began broadcasting in August 1986 in Voinjama, when radio station ELRV started its daily six-hour transmission, followed by ELRZ in Zwedru and ELRG in Gbarnga. At the inaugural ceremonies, large crowds flocked to see inside 'their stations'. Groups of singers performed 'live' for the many small communities listening within the 75 mile primary signal radius but they could also be heard in Monrovia, 150 miles away. Within days, the Voinjama station received requests for messages and music from Mende speakers in neighboring Sierra Leone. All stations now receive 60 to 70 letters *daily* from listeners. Recorded messages of congratulation from the Voice of America, and radio stations in France, the Netherlands and Canada have been received and broadcast. The first truly local radio network in Africa has not only become a reality, but is being celebrated internationally.

The radio stations broadcast in local languages, three hours in the early morning and three hours in the evening. In each station, small production staffs of six producers get to work at 5:30 in the morning and work until 9:30 at night with a break in the middle of the day. They provide 80% of the programs; the other 20% comes from the Central Production Unit (CPU) in Monrovia. The CPU makes programs with a national perspective, and concentrates on producing material which is more carefully researched and crafted, and that can be repeated in subsequent years. In the first month of operation, the Planned Parenthood Federation has signed a contract for six months; the Expanded Program of Immunization will do a two-month intensive campaign in all languages, consisting of frequent spots and a series of dramas; Phebe Hospital, a small rural hospital with limited resources, has signed up for a year; the Nimba County Rural Development Project wants a year's programming in three languages; the Forestry Development Authority will broadcast for three months; the Central Agricultural Research Institute has signed a three-month contract; and agencies concerned with oral rehydration therapy also have agreements with LRCN. The first commercial sponsor, Rainbow Soap, has commissioned a series of radio spots.

In consideration of the role the local radio stations must play in our development efforts, we wish to assure all our people that Government will do everything possible to ensure the continued maintenance and operation of these facilities. To our rural residents, I call upon you to make maximum use of the facilities made available by Government; for development can only come to a people if they participate in making it possible.

— The President,
His Excellency
Dr Samuel Kanyon Doe

Why are these agencies so interested in the radio network? Radio has been organized in Liberia for more than fifteen years. Why did a health specialist say recently: "Now that LRCN is here, everything is different...?"

First, the network reaches rural communities in their own languages. National stations also have broadcasts in the 16 local languages, but primarily broadcast in English. LRCN stations are dedicated to vernacular broadcasts.

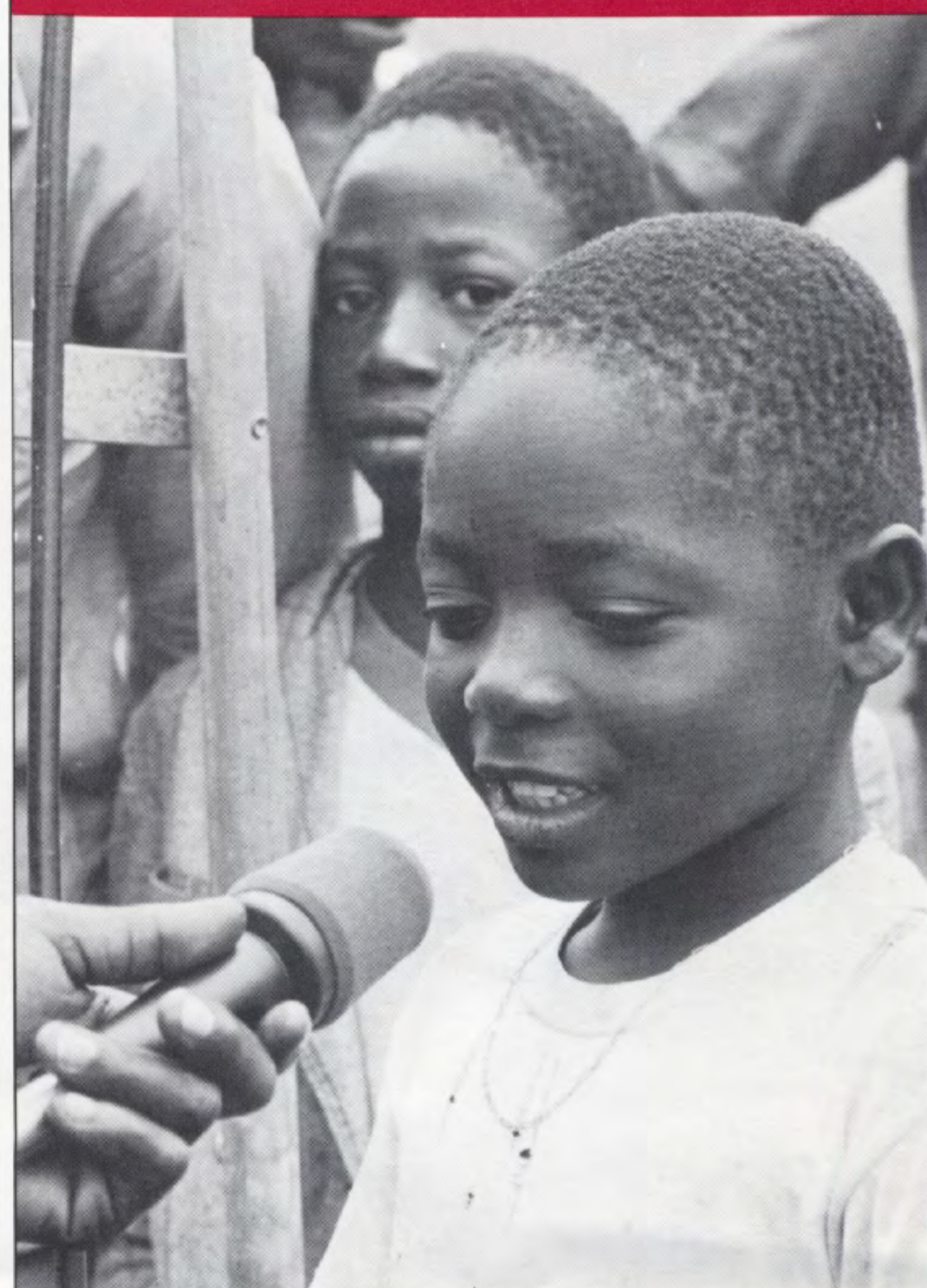
Second, the stations are situated in their rural locations, not in Monrovia. They are accessible. People can visit the stations, identify with them, and in a very real sense 'own' them. Station Managers are assisted by Program Advisory Committees, representing a cross-section of each region. Village listening groups provide information and feedback to producers.

Third, LRCN is not just a mass medium providing general information to large numbers of listeners. It also promotes specific and smallscale activities. For example, LRCN campaigned to increase visits to one rural clinic, tripled its clients over a four-month period, and contributed to mothers' increased use of Oral Rehydration Therapy at home. We believe that development happens in small and manageable increments, whatever the ultimate vision may be.

Fourth, the stations are trying to meet the total information needs of rural people. They are not focused on a single sector such as agriculture, as is the case in other countries' development radio. LRCN is local development radio, responding to its audience as people, taking all their needs and aspirations into account.

Finally, the local audience has obligations to its radio station. Listeners must support the station by paying individually small fees for messages. Local development agencies and shopkeepers must contract for programs. With subscription comes commitment.

For all these reasons, LRCN must remain close to its audience. Therein lies its challenge and its main prospect for success.



What kind of programs is LRCN broadcasting?



The plans for the first six months of broadcasting from the three rural stations and the Central Production Unit amount to forty pages of program topics and titles. They include programs in health, agriculture, population, teacher education, pre-school education, and how to set up and manage local development committees.

LRCN'S CHARTER

LRCN has been charged with fulfilling these objectives:

- To promote the increased use of Government services by rural people and to a greater portion of Liberia
- To foster increased communication between villages, and local, regional and national government
- To promote the participation and involvement of rural people in well-organized self-help activities and national development
- To educate rural people in development-oriented activities such as health, agriculture and literacy
- To serve as a medium of exchange of information and experience between rural people

LRCN will achieve these objectives by taking a lead in promoting and explaining development activities; by working with and facilitating the efforts of other development agencies; and by transferring the knowledge present in every Liberian community to its neighbors.

Agriculture Health

LRCN is concentrating on improving the quality of the family diet. This policy reflects the current state of agricultural marketing in Liberia and the attendant risks faced by small farmers in investing in cash crops such as rubber, coffee and cocoa. Rice is the Liberian staple food in most areas, so LRCN is focussing on upland and swamp rice development. For reasons of nutrition and the potential for selling surpluses, we are encouraging vegetable gardens and household fishponds.

LRCN is working closely with the county-based agricultural development projects, and has provided fifteen extensionists with nine-month fulltime training courses in broadcasting.

In addition, both the Central Agricultural Research Institute and the Forest Development agency have signed long-term contracts for regular radio programs.

Health

Health programs are of high priority to Liberia and to LRCN. The international focus has been on programs to promote good health in young children: oral rehydration therapy, immunization, breastfeeding and growth monitoring. Of these health measures, only breastfeeding requires no operational support. It has been practised for thousands of years, and our intent will be to encourage breastfeeding and to modify some of the beliefs that promote resistance or abbreviate it. When serious programs of immunization and oral rehydration are implemented, we will promote and support them. Growth monitoring is a complex process, and LRCN may be involved in future training health aides.

LRCN will emphasize health care in the home since rural clinics are still few in number and poorly staffed and equipped. First aid programs for such common problems as dealing with small cuts and burns, snake bites, shock, obstructions in the throat, or bleeding will be dealt with, along with measures to prevent sickness. Our agenda will include traditional home cures and popular beliefs, and take account of such traditional health workers as bone setters and birth attendants.

LRCN is fortunate to have the cooperation of many agencies including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Christian Health Association, and of projects such as the Combatting Communicable Child-

Nutrition

We will link agricultural programs to nutrition, and show their relationship to maintaining good health.

hood Diseases Project and the Primary Health Care Project in Grand Gedeh and Sinoe Counties.

As one example of cooperation, ELRZ is working with the USAID supported Primary Health Care Project in Grand Gedeh to establish a community health system, supported and controlled by the community.



Population

Population pressure is a critical problem in Liberia at present. Population growth rates are high, and traditional agricultural practices and low soil fertility require large areas of land for each family. Services such as primary education and health care are inadequate for the existing population. LRCN will therefore work with agencies such as Family Planning Association of Liberia to control population growth.

In addition to promoting immediate measures, we will take a longer-term view, targeting male as much as female behavior. We will seek to educate as well as provide technologies and services. Radio programs will try to demonstrate, for example, the relationship between family planning and individual, community and national development, and between family spacing and maternal and infant mortality.

Family Life Education

LRCN defines its audience as being the family and the community, rather than the nation or the county, when program policies are conceptualized. Much of our practical education in health and population is aimed at young people as family members, and will not neglect ethical issues.

Programs will discuss human growth (physical, emotional, accepting responsibility, maintaining good health); teenage pregnancy; population education (implications of population growth); marriage, resolving conflicts; parent/child relationships. These programs will have national relevance and will be produced at the Central Production Unit.

Village Development

Many self-help programs go awry for reasons of poor management of funds or a lack of appropriate administrative structures to implement community programs. An ambitious objective of LRCN is to assist communities to set up community health programs (mentioned above) and parent-teacher associations.

Parent Teacher Associations

Schools exist for most communities, but they are poorly managed and underfunded. Basic equipment, such as benches and blackboards, is lacking, as are instructional materials, pencils and paper. We hope to involve communities in the support of education, reducing the reliance on teachers and central government to solve school problems.



Education

As well as promoting community participation in economic and administrative support for education, LRCN is planning two direct interventions: first, support to teacher training; second, direct instruction to pre-school children to prepare them better for primary school. Both of these programs will be tested on a pilot basis.

News

LRCN tries to serve the total information needs of rural Liberia. National and international news are broadcast daily from Monrovia, along with local news and current affairs features. National and local sports are presented as well as a rich blend of cultural and music programs. Listener requests are encouraged. Many programs originate outside the studio, such as ELRZ's popular Saturday morning "Man on the Street" broadcast from the city market.



LRCN represents a new, bold and creative attempt to take radio to rural dwellers like we have never done before. Sure, we will be talking to them; but more importantly, they will be talking to us, telling us and national decision-makers what they think and want, thus creating a real two-way stream of communication in Liberia.

— Olivia Shannon,
Director-General
of the Liberian
Broadcasting System



We are all cognizant of the fact that LRCN is here only because of the tax-payers — both in the US and in Liberia. Therefore, LRCN must fulfill all of its objectives.

— Florida Kweekah,
Director of LRCN

*An
Acknowledgement*

LRCN would not have been possible without the support of the people of the United States, working through the Agency for International Development. Through USAID's assistance, lowcost and effective communications with rural people are now possible in Liberia for the first time.

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LRCN FACT SHEET

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RADIO ELRV IN VOINJAMA

Broadcasts on 585 AM in Lorma, Kissi, Bandi, Mandingo and English
Transmission times: 6am - 9am, 6pm - 9pm
Station Manager: Mr James Morlu
Executive Producer: Mr Josephus Karbar
Postal address:

RADIO ELRG IN GBARNGA

Broadcasts on 558 in Kpelle, Mandingo, Bassa, Mano, Dan, and English
Transmission times: 6am - 9am, 6pm - 9pm
Station Manager: Mr Rufus Kaine
Executive Producer: Mr Kolleh Velemee
Postal address: P.O.Box 16, Gbarnga, Liberia

RADIO ELRZ IN ZWEDRU

Broadcasts on 1260 AM in Krahn, Sargo, Grebo and English
Transmission times: 6am - 9am, 6pm - 9pm
Station Manager: Mr M. Flomo Juasemai
Executive Producer: Mr James Flomo
Postal address: P.O.Box 145, Zwedru, Liberia

CENTRAL PRODUCTION UNIT

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