

## An Assessment of the Perceived Role of Radio in Women's Empowerment: the Case of Bonga FM 97.4

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study was to assess the perceived role of radio in empowering women in a rural setting. The study examined a rural radio forum that specifically targeted women listeners in two districts within the Kaffa Zone. A mixed research approach was adopted, employing a descriptive survey design and using questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussions as data gathering tools. Using purposive sampling, audiences in two districts, Decha and Gimbo, of the Kaffa Zone were selected. A total of 200 women from four group radio listeners in four Kebeles were chosen for the survey. Convenience sampling was used to select Kebeles and groups based on their proximity to the districts' centers. Moreover, to gather information and perspectives from a diverse range of participants, including key stakeholders and influential individuals involved in the radio programming and development initiatives in the selected districts, four FGDs and eight in-depth interviews were conducted. Relevant theories such as developmental media theory and diffusion of innovation theory provided theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to the research topic. The study found that Bonga FM 97.4 radio played a significant role in promoting women's social, economic, and political benefits through various programs that raised awareness among both organized group of listeners and regular women listeners. Consequently, attitudinal, behavioral, and practical changes were reported to have been introduced among the women audiences in their socioeconomic and political domains. However, challenges related with delays in court processes, lack of fairness in decision making, and problems with decision execution were highlighted as areas that require attention from the radio station. Additionally, there is a need to further strengthen women's participation in live radio programs. Recommendations are forwarded for Bonga FM to use investigative journalism to solve women's problems, particularly in the field of justice.

**Keywords:** *perceived role/ radio/ women empowerment / development media/diffusion and innovation*

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## Introduction

Women's empowerment is crucial for social development for women who need to have access to basic rights and improved social indicators. The media, including radio, plays a crucial role in creating awareness and empowering women. It serves as a tool to raise awareness about rights, advocate for marginalized groups, and shape social attitudes (Nirmala, 2015). Unlike other tools like television, the online media, and newspaper, radio as a mass communication device is particularly accessible to grassroots communities, including women in rural areas. It provides essential information and supports sustainable development efforts, especially in countries with high illiteracy rates.

Access to information through radio helps empower marginalized and rural populations by increasing awareness and finding solutions to local challenges (Jemal, 2016). Radio programs contribute to women's empowerment by raising awareness, providing knowledge, amplifying voices, promoting skills development, fostering social change, and supporting economic empowerment. These programs offer information on rights, resources, and opportunities, while also challenging norms practices that negatively affect sections or the whole of the community (Dahal, 2013). In general, radio serves as a means of raising awareness, facilitating participation, and empowering women in their communities for positive social change. By empowering women with knowledge, skills, and platforms for expression, it plays a vital role in promoting gender equality and improving the overall well-being of women.

Various studies have been conducted internationally and in Ethiopia on the role of radio for women's empowerment; in in the UK, Rimmer (2021); in India, Prasad & Deepak (2019) and Nirmala (2015); in Niger, Heywood (2020); in Kenya, Ochola (2015); in Rwanda, Niyonzima & Bhujju (2021). These researches highlighted the potential of radio to promote respect, dignity, and participation for women, as well as its significance compared to other contributors to women's empowerment. The studies emphasized the positive impact of radio in raising awareness, addressing challenges, and promoting social, political, and economic empowerment for women.

In the context of Ethiopia also, several researches addressed the role of radio (Mohammed, 2018; Beyene et al., 2021). Although these previous researches explored the role of radio in social development in Ethiopia in general, there is a lack of specific focus on the role of radio in women's empowerment. This study aims to address this research gap by examining

the role of radio in empowering women, particularly through the use of rural radio forum strategies. The study focuses on assessing radio's role in increasing women's awareness and encouraging their participation in development activities. The study aims to assess the perceived impact and challenges faced by Bonga FM radio in promoting women's empowerment. More specifically, it aims to investigate radio programs that focus on various social sector issues that benefit women audiences and identify the challenges faced by the Bonga FM radio station and its audience in sustaining the rural radio project.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **The use of media for societal development**

Media plays an important role in empowering citizens and fostering their participation in societal development processes. It has become a crucial influence in shaping the present society. Media serves as an educational tool, informing people about current issues, and shaping public opinion. The general population relies on media to stay informed about social happenings. Moreover, media has the power to critique and pressure democratic systems, shedding light on their shortcomings. It plays a unifying role among the masses and serves as the backbone of the nation (Lang, 2001).

Kumar (1994) emphasizes the usefulness of media as a tool for training and education. It serves as a means to transmit information to a large audience, contributing to behavioral and attitudinal changes within society. According to David (2004), media plays a vital role in social development of third world countries like Ethiopia, offering solutions to problems such as poverty, backwardness, hunger, diseases, injustice, and exploitation. The effective use of media is essential for communication and attitudinal change, both of which are crucial in the development process. Media acts as a catalyst for positive changes in society by providing influential information that shapes public opinion and raises awareness. It influences behavior across various social issues (Khan & Moin, 2013).

In general, independent media enhance the social and economic status of individuals by providing quality information that helps make informed decisions in everyday life. Among different forms of mass media, radio has emerged as a popular choice due to its affordability and accessibility, particularly for rural communities (David, 2004). Today, radio is easily accessible to rural audiences through portable devices such as tape recorders and mobile phones. The Bonga FM audience, predominantly

rural, relies on radio as their primary source of media, using devices such as tape recorders and mobile phones for listening purposes.

### **The use of radio for women empowerment**

Wegayehu (2012) points out that radio is the dominant mass medium in Ethiopia, with wide reach and a high audience compared to other media. Collins (2003) emphasizes that radio serves as a platform for identifying and addressing development issues, including agriculture, health, and politics. It is particularly effective in reaching rural communities and marginalized groups. Radio's ability to disseminate information and raise awareness has been successful in empowering communities and amplifying voices of isolated groups (McAnam, 1980; Peter, 2004).

Radio's advantages include its ability to overcome communication barriers, produce localized content, and reach rural areas cost-effectively (Lingela, 2008; Berrigan, 1979). It provides marginalized communities with a platform to express their views and be heard (Nirmala, 2005). Naaikuur and Diedong (2014) highlight that limited access to information is a communication problem faced by rural and marginalized populations, and radio can play a crucial role in meeting their information needs, especially in areas with low literacy rates.

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept that includes economic, political, and social dimensions. It involves granting women equal rights, opportunities, and power positions to participate on a par with men in society. Empowerment signifies a positive change in women's ability to make strategic life choices and pursue their goals, challenging gender dynamics and inequalities. It is particularly important for marginalized women in rural areas, as it enables their participation in socioeconomic activities and decision-making processes.

The local media, such as the Bonga FM radio station, are expected to play a crucial role in empowering women. They have to provide information that allows women to make informed decisions in various areas of life, such as health, education, family planning, and economic empowerment. Women's empowerment is vital not only for economic development, but also for advancing human rights. Media platforms are meant to contribute to women's empowerment by fostering self-reliance, raising awareness, and promoting their active participation in public life (Dahal, 2013; Nirmala, 2005).

Despite advances in education, politics, and the workforce, women, especially those in rural areas, still face inequality and vulnerability. The media acts as a catalyst for change by challenging negative social

constructions and enabling individuals to recognize their capacity and right to influence decisions. Empowerment involves personal development, building self-confidence, negotiating relationships, and participating in collective action. By empowering women, media platforms contribute to the dismantling of gender inequalities and the promotion of positive social change (Wei et al., 2021).

### **Strategies of radio**

McAnany (cited in Moemeka, 1994) identified five strategies for the utilization of radio in rural education and development. These strategies have been used separately or in combination in developing countries.

#### **Open broadcasting**

The open broadcasting strategy involves radio broadcasts that are directed towards an unorganized audience. The underlying assumption is that relevant messages have the potential to be accepted by the audience (ibid., 127). Consequently, the importance and quality of radio news and program content are considered crucial factors. According to Gunter and Theroux (cited in Moemeka), the open-radio strategy provides an opportunity for a larger population to access information and a variety of programs.

#### **Instructional radio**

The instructional radio strategy is used with the aim of facilitating social change and development. Unlike the open broadcast strategy, instructional radio targets organized learning groups that have someone capable of supervising, directing, and eliciting feedback. To implement this strategy, a structure is needed to organize listening and learning practices, the provision of support materials, the presence of monitors or teachers, and some form of evaluation. Collaboration between broadcasters and educationalists is essential in this strategy. Recording audience reactions can serve as a valuable guide for future programming. However, due to its relatively high investment requirements, such as transportation, personnel, and other resources, implementing this strategy, particularly on a large scale, may be challenging and uncertain.

#### **Rural radio forum**

The rural radio forum is a strategy that involves the use of radio to facilitate discussions and decision making among rural groups. Regular weekly radio programs, typically lasting 15 to 30 minutes, are presented to rural audiences organized into listening groups. These programs often cover news stories, provide answers to listeners' questions, and include

talks and discussions. After listening to the radio broadcast, the groups, guided by a group leader, engage in discussions and make decisions based on the key points raised in the program.

One advantage of the rural radio forum is that following up a radio message with localized discussions and decisions ensures a positive commitment to the agreed-upon decisions and, subsequently, to social change (Moemeka, 1994). McAnany argues that this combination of disseminating a message to multiple groups through mass radio and then localizing it through small group discussions and guiding it to a group decision aligns closely with existing theories of communication and social change (cited in Moemeka).

A second advantage of the forum strategy is its impact on participants. Membership in the group exposes participants to information that is important to rural communities, turning them into opinion leaders whose views are respected in the community. They can also spread this information to others through a classic two-step flow. In addition, forums provide written reports and messages that establish the often lacking feedback loop for the media.

Rural radio forums can also have an effect on nonparticipants, leading to changes in attitudes, behaviors, and practices (Moemeka, 1994). Additionally, forums ensure feedback by sending reports and messages back to the radio station. Finally, localized discussions and decisions empower people to be the subject and object of their own development.

### **Radio schools**

This strategy uses radio as a tool for the education of the rural community. Illiterate adults are organized into small listening/learning groups that meet in houses, essentially forming "schools." The primary objective of these schools is to provide a comprehensive education that goes beyond basic reading, writing, and cognitive skills. The intention is to foster a transformation in individuals, shifting them away from passive and dependent attitudes, and cultivating a stronger sense of dignity and self-worth, ultimately creating "new men and women" (Moemeka, *ibid.*).

Although radio schools have been widely implemented in Latin America, their application is often limited to literacy and basic education. This limited focus excludes the political, social, and physical developmental aspects of rural issues, thus failing to adequately address them (*ibid.*).

## Radio and animation

The strategy for participating in radio groups aims to cultivate decision makers within local communities by involving them in problem definition and solution-seeking processes. It emphasizes community participation and social action (Moemeka, 1994: 133). However, a weakness of this strategy is the challenge of organizing rural communities without external support and the potential manipulation of participation without substantial policy changes (ibid.).

Moemeka proposes an ideal strategy, referred to as the "Local Radio Strategy," which combines the strengths of multiple strategies. It aims to improve the well-being of rural communities by promoting literacy, raising aspirations, addressing problems, fostering dignity, and encouraging self-worth (ibid. 135-6). However, in Ethiopia, there is a lack of a clearly defined strategy to use broadcasting for development effectively and efficiently (Jamal, 2016; Moemeka, 1994).

In Ethiopia, radio has historically followed the Open Broadcasting Strategy, prioritizing the quality of news and program content to attract a large audience. This strategy assumes that listeners will accept relevant messages on health, agriculture, family life, and childcare (Moemeka, 1994). However, none of the five radio strategies used for rural development in other countries have been explicitly implemented in Ethiopia, and state radios operate without clear guidelines for using broadcasting for development (Jamal, 2016; Moemeka, 1994).

In conclusion, Ethiopia lacks a clearly defined radio strategy for rural development, although the radio participation group strategy and the concept of a local radio strategy have been proposed. The open broadcasting strategy has been historically followed, emphasizing the importance of relevant content to attract listeners. However, there is a need for more effective and efficient use of broadcasting for development in Ethiopia.

As Jemal Mohammed (2016) concludes, the use of radio broadcasting in Ethiopia is unlikely to be successful in informing, educating, and persuading farmers, pastoralists, and the general public about development issues as long as an open broadcasting strategy is used. This is due to various reasons, such as lack of experience in producing quality radio programs, adherence to a one-step flow of mass communication model, and interference from government bodies. However, Bonga FM 97.4, one of the regional radio stations, has implemented the rural radio forum strategy in collaboration with government and nongovernmental

organizations, including Action Aid Ethiopia's empowerment program and initiative working for isolated communities. Additionally, they have incorporated strategies such as radio schools and partnerships with organizations like Farm Radio to promote women's empowerment in various developmental sectors. However, there has not been evidence on the impact of such efforts on the targeted audiences.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Design**

The study used a descriptive survey research design, which allows for the collection of extensive data from diverse participants and is particularly useful to examine the opinions of the audience. This design, as emphasized by Kumar (1994), provides valuable knowledge about human behavior. Barrie (2000) further highlights that the descriptive survey design is commonly employed in the media field to measure audience reactions and assess the current state of affairs, such as public opinion or consumer preferences.

### **The research approaches**

The use of mixed methods in this study allows researchers to collect and analyze data in a way that addresses research questions with both depth and breadth (Enosh, 2014). This approach combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, offering the advantages of generalizability through large-scale quantitative data collection and methodological flexibility with in-depth qualitative insights (Maxwell, 2016). By integrating both approaches, researchers can leverage the strengths of each method, establish a logical foundation, gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, and achieve more nuanced and robust findings.

### **Population of the study**

The study focused on two main populations: the audiences of the targeted radio forum of the Kaffa zone on Bonga FM 97.4 and the other stakeholders. These two groups were purposefully selected because of their pivotal roles in the study context. The audiences of the Kaffa Zone Targeted radio forum on Bonga FM 97.4 were specifically chosen as they represent the main recipients of the radio programming and directly experience the impact of the information shared through this medium. On the contrary, stakeholders were included to account for their influential positions and decision-making authority regarding the discussed development initiatives and policies discussed in the radio forum. By



encompassing these populations, the study aimed to capture the perspectives and insights of both the target audience and the relevant stakeholders, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

### **Sample and sampling techniques**

The study focused on the audiences of two specific weredas, Decha and Gimbo, in the Kaffa Zone, which consists of 17 weredas. Purposive sampling was used to select these weredas and a total of 200 women from four group radio listeners in four kebeles were chosen as participants. Convenience sampling was used to select kebeles and groups based on their proximity to the wereda center. The study conducted four focus group discussions with nine participants each, including facilitators, active participants recognized by the Action Aid Ethiopia NGO, and leaders of associations of women. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants, including group listener facilitators, Bonga FM manager, representatives from Action Aid Ethiopia NGO, Decha Wereda Education Office leader, Kaffa Zone Women and Youth Head Office representative, Kaffa Zone Health Office Head and a program reporter or producer for the target group audiences. Using both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, the study aimed to gather information and perspectives from a diverse range of participants, including key stakeholders and influential individuals involved in radio programming and development initiatives in the selected weredas.

### **Data collection tools**

For this study, a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The selection of these specific tools allowed the researchers to triangulate the findings obtained from each method. Using different data collection methods, researchers could gather a variety of perspectives and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The triangulation of data from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions enhances the robustness of the study's results and increases the credibility of the findings (Carter, 2014). The primary data gathering tools utilized in this study were questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussion guides. Each of these tools served a specific purpose in collecting data and generating insights.

### **Questionnaire**

Questionnaires were used to collect structured data from participants. The questionnaires were carefully designed to include relevant and specific

questions related to the research objectives. The structured format of the questionnaires allowed efficient data collection and facilitated quantitative analysis of the responses.

Questionnaires were used as a fast, efficient and effective means of gathering a large amount of information from 200 members of four radio groups. To measure attitudes, the researchers used a structured questionnaire based on the Likert scale, a commonly used tool in social science research. The Likert scale allowed for the measurement of perceptions and attitudes through questions with ordinal level of measurement, using a five-point scale.

The questionnaire was administered to a total of 192 respondents, 50 audience members selected from each of the two weredas and four kebeles. To ensure clear and accurate responses, the questions in the questionnaire were translated into Kafinoono languages, the mother tongues of the respondents. This linguistic adaptation facilitated better understanding and increased the likelihood of obtaining meaningful and relevant data from the respondents.

### **In-depth interview**

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain exclusive and detailed insights from a small number of participants. These interviews were used in conjunction with focus group discussions, questionnaires, and input from stakeholders who were geographically dispersed but had valuable perspectives to share. The interviews aimed to complement the other data sources, deepen the understanding of the viewpoints of the participants, and improve the overall validity of the findings.

Purposive sampling was employed to select eight participants for the interviews. This sampling technique ensured that individuals with relevant knowledge and experience, such as facilitators of group listeners, well-known audience members, and representatives from different organizations, were included. The interviews were considered suitable for capturing individual experiences, opinions and feelings, particularly when addressing sensitive topics. By adopting this approach, the study was able to explore the perspectives of the participants and gain valuable insights into the topic of women's empowerment in relation to radio stations.

### **Focus Group Discussion**

FGDs were organized to facilitate group interactions and generate collective insights on the research topic. A moderator guided the

discussions using a pre-designed discussion guide. The FGDs allowed participants to share their thoughts, exchange ideas, and build on each other's responses. This method encouraged open dialogue and enabled the exploration of diverse points of view within the group setting.

According to Kumar (1987), FGDs is a valuable and semi-structured data gathering tool that involves a purposively selected group of participants coming together to discuss specific issues and concerns based on key themes outlined by the researcher or facilitator. Four separate focus group discussions were held on different days, and each group consisted of nine participants. Participants were drawn from the audiences of the radio group, including facilitators, active participants who were recognized by the Action Aid Ethiopia NGO as exemplary listeners, and leaders of women associations. Discussions were conducted in the participants' mother tongue, the Kafaano language, to ensure a clear and accurate data collection for the study.

In general, the combination of questionnaires, interviews, and FGDs provided a comprehensive approach to data collection, capturing both quantitative and qualitative information. These tools were tailored to the specific research objectives, ensuring that a diverse range of data was gathered to effectively address research questions.

### **Technique of data analysis**

The study used the convergent parallel mixed methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed, and then the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is compared to see if the data confirms or disconfirms each other. Quantitative analysis was performed on the questionnaire data using numerical methods, while thematic data analysis was used for the qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and interviews. This dual approach provided a comprehensive exploration of the research subject, combining numerical representations of respondents' perspectives with in-depth thematic insights extracted from qualitative data. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, the study aimed to offer a nuanced and thorough interpretation of the data.

### **Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion**

This section presents and analyzes the data collected through questionnaire, FGDs, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the Kaffa Zone and radio personnel. The study aimed to assess the role of the Bonga FM 97.4 radio station in empowering women. Data collected using questionnaires is analyzed using SPSS software. The findings are

categorized into themes related to the radio station's activities in social, economic, and political sectors, as well as challenges hindering women's empowerment through the radio station.

This study included 200 women selected from four radio listeners groups in four Kebeles. The participants were part of the Rural Radio Forum or the Bonga FM target group audience. The study used questionnaires, FGDs, and in-depth interviews to gather the data. The questionnaire had a completion rate of 192 out of 200 participants. Four FGDs were conducted with nine participants in each, resulting in a total of 36 participants. Additionally, nine individuals, including key stakeholders and radio personnel, were interviewed. This diverse range of participants aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the radio's role in empowerment from various perspectives.

### Demographic distribution of respondents

Knowing the demographic (which is a broad term that carries many ideas but in this context deals with gender, age, education, and marital status) distribution of listeners in audience research seems to have considerable importance. With this in mind, the demographic distribution of the target Bonga FM listeners of this investigation is discussed below. Respondents were selected purposely; they all are female listeners of the programs aired by Bonga FM 97.4 which was working in collaboration with Action Aid Ethiopia, an NGO working in the Zone. The table below shows the respondents' demographic distribution in terms of age, sex, level of education, and marital status.

**Table 1:** Demographic information of the radio forum group

No	Item		Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Gender	Male	0	0
		Female	192	91%
2	Age	18 -25	50	26
		26 -35	80	41.7
		36-45	45	23.4
		45 and above	17	8.9
3	Marital status	Married	124	64.6%
		Unmarried	68	35.4%
4	Educational level	Elementary	43	22.4%
		High school	31	16.1%

	Diploma	22	11.5%
	Degree	5	2.6%
	Master's degree and above	0	0%
	uneducated	91	47.4%

The respondents were comprised of 100% of females, because the research aimed to access the role of radio for women's empowerment. Most of the respondents were aged between 26 years to 35 years (41.7%), which is followed by those aged between 36 years to 45 years (23.4%), and aged between 18 years to 25 years (26%), the remaining (9%) were aged above 45.

Most of the respondents (about 65%) are married whereas 35% reported they were unmarried. Regarding the level of education, only 43 (22%) of the respondents had primary level education and 31 (16%) had high school level education. Of the respondents, 22 (12%) were diploma holders, while only 5 (3%) of the respondents were bachelor degree holders; the remaining majority of respondents 91 (48%) were uneducated. In developing countries such as in Africa, since most of the residents in rural areas are illiterate, radio is an invaluable medium that can speak to millions (Coldevin, 2003). This is also related to the study of Naa & Diedong (2014); the main communication problem in any country is that information does not reach the marginalized rural population of lower status. This can potentially cause these marginalized groups to be at risk and less empowered. Radio can therefore help meet the information needs of rural communities, especially those that are illiterate, since radio fits best for the illiterate.

### Audiences' listening duration

**Table 2:** How often the respondents listened to Bonga FM 97.4 in a week

NO	Time interval	Number of respondents	Percent
1	Twice a week	42	21.9
2	Once a week	6	3.1
3	Sometimes	61	31.8
4	Always	83	43.2
	Total	192	96%

The Bonga FM Radio station was established in 2005 and has been on air transmitting its programs every morning and evening since then, but The Rural Radio Forum began in 2017 EC and was on air for five years. The

members of the Rural Radio Forum group were encouraged to listen to Bonga FM regularly among their groups and also at their houses. As the above in Table 2 shows, from the total 192 respondents 83 (45%) were listening to Bonga FM radio always, 61(32%) of them listened to it sometimes, about 22% listened to it twice a week but only 6 (3%) of the respondents reported as they were listening to it once a week.

As the respondents expressed during FGD, most of them said they didn't have electricity to get power for their device to listen to the radio and currently the cost of battery has become so high. Thus they are listening sometimes when they bought battery. As the other respondents said, they had a wide time in the evening time and they recommend if the radio station transmission widens on evenings and on Sundays.

### **The perceived role of radio for women's empowerment in the social sector**

#### **Role of women's program for targeted group audiences**

**Table 3:** the audience response about the role of the women program

N O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
1	The transmitted program for our group called 'KUPHEBOT MAACHENAOT' develops my understanding and knowledge about women's rights to participate in any sector of developmental issues.	101	52.6%	67	34.9%	9	4.7%	7	3.6%	8	4.2%

The study emphasizes the importance of empowering women in various aspects of life. The media is expected to play a crucial role in creating awareness and enabling women to realize their potential. Bonga FM's women's program called *Kuphebot Maacheenaot* focuses on women's participation and benefits in agriculture, education, marketing, industry and health. The program shares success stories and invites stakeholders to provide awareness and guidance. The majority of the respondents (about 89%) recognized the significant role of the said radio program in empowering women by providing educational and instructional content in various development sectors.

The majority of FGD participants from all groups also agreed with this content; one of the participants in Beyemo Kebele said the following:

*The women's program has a multifaceted benefit for women. Many different issues were discussed in this program. Most of the*

*time, the role models of any sector, like model of education, model of health, model of agriculture, models of marketing and industry, etc. were invited to share their experiences. The women come forward to share their experience, which is used to motivate and create awareness for us to enhance our participation in public and governmental issues. (FGD, Code 2)*

In relation to the role of the women's program, an interviewee from the audiences' group, said that the women's program has a great role in shaping the misrepresentation of women in society:

*The women's program specially served us to break the spirit of 'It's Impossible'; for example, there is some misunderstanding in our society ... they think that women cannot hang a hive, women cannot farm or plow, women cannot be a leader, etc. After we began to listen to the program in our group, we got an awareness that we could break such a misunderstanding. (Interviewee, Code 1)*

The finding of the study is similar to that of Kabeer (2003), empowerment is a change and 'it refers to expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them'. According to an interviewee, a representative of Action Aid, the radio programs focus on the following issues.

*We transmitted different radio messages such as how violence against women (VAW) and harmful traditional practice (HTP) affect the development of women, the importance of girls' education, the importance of savings, reducing the magnitude of marginalization of the Manja community, violation of law such as family law, inheritance law, resource rights law, and land tenure law, and raising awareness of women in different issues. (Interviewee, Code 5)*

According to an interviewee from Bonga FM, their radio station contributes a lot to women's empowerment. As also stated in their editorial policy, the station paid special attention to women. They worked to create awareness for women and all society to correct stereotypes and misrepresentations of women to strengthen in social, economic, and political fields. The manager expression continued in the following:

*We have the women's empowerment program in collaboration with Action Aid Ethiopia in addition to the regular women's program we have. In this program, the issue that is directly related with strengthening the overall role, participation, and*

*benefit of women is presented. The program presents women's education, health, economic empowerment, etc. In the economic sector, the best experience of women who have succeeded is presented in this program; in the health sector, the program is meant to enable them to implement health extension packages. By this we were able to register many changes and we realize this from the feedback when we made supervision of the targeted group audiences' activities. (Interviewee, Code 8)*

As discussed above, *Kpphebot maacheenaot* programs are meant for grouped audiences to create awareness and strengthen their capacity in all sectors. According to Quebral (2012), one way of achieving empowerment of women is by giving women information that enables them to make informed decisions in all aspects of their lives, ranging from health, education, family planning, poverty reduction, hygiene, agriculture, and economic empowerment to participation in public life.

### **Participants' perception regarding the role of the health program for rural radio forum audiences**

**Table 4:** audiences' responses regarding the role of the health program

N O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
2	After listening to the program called, 'HEALTH' in my group, I understand how to apply different health extension packages.	93	48.4 %	78	40.6 %	7	3.6 %	12	6.3 %	2	1%

In the study, the respondents listened to the "Health" program on Bonga FM, and 89% expressed that it played a significant role in raising their awareness about hygiene and sanitation in rural areas. The program features role models discussing various health issues, allowing participants to learn from others' experiences, and covers topics like healthcare services and epidemic prevention. Development is seen as social change, introducing new ideas to enhance agriculture, health, education, and politics. According to the diffusion innovation theory, development communication involves influencing behavior by transferring ideas from a source to a receiver.

The perspectives shared during the FGDs further supported the positive impact of the program on the community's health-related knowledge and practices. One of the discussants in Beyemo's FGD said:



*Previously we did not have knowledge even about hygiene and sanitation; we did not maintain our personal hygiene but now when I began to listen to the radio program in my group and also in my home, I have been informed about how to use the toilet, how to keep our sanitation in our home and in our environment, how to use malaria protection net, etc. The Bonga FM radio station teaches us by presenting experiences of role models and inviting health professionals. (FGD, Code 5)*

As one of the interviewees from the audience group said, radio programs contributed a lot in awareness creation about how to apply health extension packages. They have come to interpret the knowledge they got from the radio in their day to day lives.

*In the health program, they teach us to go to the hospital early to give birth and also they teach us the negative impact of giving birth at home, the death of mothers and their babies. Now in our environment, nobody gives birth in their homes. They also taught us about different pandemics and their transmissions, how to avoid moisture and dust, how to cultivate children, how to take care of our family's health focusing on preventive mechanisms. In addition to this, I understand the benefit of using family planning programs and delivery care services in the health center. This is because we are regular listeners to the radio program in our group. (Interviewee, Code 1)*

One of the FGD participant from the Awurada Geter Kebele radio group has to say the following about the above issue:

*Previously, I didn't have the understanding on how to use family planning. I gave birth every year. I had delivered 4 children in 4 years. But now I have understood and began to use family planning. (FGD, Code 15)*

As an interviewee from the Kaffa zone Health Office expressed, Bonga FM has a significant role in the health sector.

*We worked closely with the radio station, and our sector achieved significant progress in implementing the 16 health extension package. Bonga FM played a crucial role in this accomplishment, particularly through its health extension program. The radio station prioritized the health extension program in rural areas, addressing topics such as personal and environmental hygiene, child rearing, and family planning. (Interviewee, Code 6)*

The data suggest that the radio has played a significant role in bringing about changes in the health sector, particularly in achieving rural health extension packages. By creating awareness, the radio has contributed to positive transformation in health-related behavior and thinking. Kumar (1994) also supports the idea that the media, including radio, is an effective tool for training and education. Media have the power to transmit information to a wide audience, leading to behavior and societal changes. It acts as a catalyst for positive changes by providing information that shapes the public's opinion. Media exposure heightens awareness and can alter behaviors across various social issues (Lang, 2001).

### Perception of the audience towards the role of the education program for the target group audience

**Table 5:** Audiences' response regarding the role education program

N O	role of radio programs for educational program	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
3	Bonga FM radio station produces educational programs for our group to enhance women's educational participation	86	44.8%	80	41.7%	8	2.4%	12	6.3%	6	3.1%

According to data from the participants, Bonga FM Radio station actively works to reduce illiteracy among women, which is a key factor in poverty and underdevelopment. Through programs aimed at women, the station promotes the importance of education for children and the advantages of acquiring basic knowledge and skills for success in various sectors. The data indicated that the Bonga FM educational program is making a significant contribution to empower women through education, with about 87% of the respondents confirming its positive impact.

The issue discussed in a group of Awurada Geter, Ermo, Ufa and Beyemo FGD is as follows:

*To improve the results of female students, the Bonga FM Radio station motivates us by presenting the best experience of successful female students with better results. To minimize school dropout of female students, it teaches the women to minimize the burden of female students and strengthen them to improve their performance. In addition to this, the radio program is encouraging the women audiences to participate and benefit from adult education. (FGD, Code 4)*

One of the radio group listeners who participated in the individual in-depth interview said the following:

*After participating in this group, I started learning adult education now, as you can see, at 46 years of age I began to write my name and can identify numbers. I gained an understanding of how to be successful. For example, I can easily save one's phone number on my phone. I am very happy now because I have got a recognition certificate and a radio award. (Interviewee, Code 2)*

According to an interviewee from the facilitators in the *Awurada geter* radio listening group, members of the radio group joined adult education program and became certified:

*In our radio listening group, we provide adult education for 50 women; they have begun to write and read. They are able to write their names properly. They know the numbers. They began to write and read their phone numbers on their own. Most of them were previously unable to put their sign with a pen; instead, they used to paint color on their fingers to sign. Now they began to put their sign on with the use of a pen. By this, 50 women passed from round 1 to round 2 and got a certificate from the Education Bureau. (Interviewee, Code 3)*

Another interviewees expressed his view as follows:

*In our Wereda, the best performance is achieved in those three Kebeles where the radio listeners exist. 90 women were certified along with other men and passed from level one to level two. There are 10 women in each group, and totally 30 women received radio and solar awards for their achievement. In addition to educational achievement, the award was given for their achievement in health, saving, chicken and cattle production, garden work, etc. (Interviewee, Code 4)*

As reported by the focus group discussants, when local government bodies engage with communities to address educational issues such as school dropout rates, student ethics, and student participation in education, they have observed that women are well informed about these agendas. This awareness can be attributed to the information disseminated by the radio station. This indicates that the Bonga FM Radio station is reaching out to women effectively and is addressing various developmental issues, including education.

Denis McQuil's (2010) development media theory is applicable in the context of developing countries because these countries have specific economic, political, and social requirements. McQuil (2010) emphasizes that the media in developing countries should align with the needs of the state in order to promote development across all sectors. In this case, the programming of the Bonga FM Radio station aligns with the development needs of the community, including women's education and empowerment.

### Audiences' perception regarding the role of justice program

**Table 6:** The audiences' response regarding the role of the justice program

No.	The role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
4	Justice programs give focus to minimize crime against women and to have justice	84	43.8 %	48	25.0%	7	3.6%	48	25%	5	2.6%

Crime and violence against women are prevalent issues in our country that require attention. The media need to play a significant role in raising awareness and addressing these concerns. The Bonga FM station's program focusing on minimizing crime against women and promoting justice received strong support, with approximately 69% of women respondents indicating that it contributed to reducing harm and crime against women.

Participants in FGDs also highlighted that the radio station provided a platform for women's voices to be heard, leading to less violence in their communities. This exemplifies the positive role of Bonga FM in raising awareness and inspiring action against such practices. This explanation can be supported by the narration of one FGD participants in the Ufa FGD group who said:

*Previously, there were harms committed to the women, by husbands to their wives; there were also abduction and rape of under-aged females. But after we are listening and discussing on the transmitted programs, we began to seriously follow up the issue and, if it happened, we brought the person to the law. Now such crime has come to disappear. This was achieved through the educational programs conducted by the radio. People feared to*

*be involved in gender-based violence because of fear being of being exposed through the radio station. (FGD, Code 22)*

According to Peter (2004), from the types of media radio has played a vital role in building vibrant communities and sensitizing group action. It has been identified as the most accessible mass communication device for grassroots people, more specifically for the women.

Among the audience interviewees, one of them said:

*I am from the members of the Manja tribe; previously abduction and rape were committed especially in our tribe, but after we were involved in this radio listening group, we gained an understanding about how to keep our rights, how to avoid such crimes against women. For example, personally, I was afraid for my son if he committed abduction or rape; because it was habitual practice in our community before. Thus, I teach my son not to commit such a bad thing. (Interviewee, Code 1)*

However, from among the respondents asked, 53 (28%) disagreed with the item: Justice Program focus on minimizing crime against women and having justice. In light of this, a participant from Ermo had the view of:

*Of course, the station tried to teach the public about crime and harm against women. But it has a problem to conduct an investigation on such an issue; for example, there is the problem of an imbalance between the sentence and the crime committed. Sometimes a person who committed rape is sentenced to a very few years of imprisonment. There is also harm committed to women by their husbands. Mostly, it is passed down by only the elder's decision and becomes an experience. There is the delay in the court process that wastes women's time, energy and money; therefore, most poor women lose hope and do not get justice. Thus Bonga FM should not only teach the severity of violence, but it has to challenge the harm committed to women and execution of decisions passed by using the investigative journalism approach. (FGD, Code 16)*

The findings indicate that the Bonga FM 97.4 radio station has made strides in amplifying women's voices to reducing violence against them. However, challenges persist within the legal system, including delays in court processes, inconsistent criminal sentences, and issues with the implementation of court decisions. To address these problems, it is recommended to implement investigative journalism. By conducting in-depth reporting, the station can expose inefficiencies, promote transparency, and advocate for necessary reforms to enhance women's rights and justice.

### **Audiences' perception regarding role of the radio to avoid harmful traditional practice**

**Table 7:** Audiences' response to the role of radio in minimizing harmful traditional practices

N O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
5	The radio program I listen in our group helps me stop harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation and abduction	99	51.6%	64	33.3%	7	3.6%	17	8.9%	5	2.6%

The aggregate result of the data in Table 7 above shows that the highest number of respondents 163 (85%) agreed with the statement 'The radio program helps me stop harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation and abduction' and only 22(12%) disagreed, and the remaining (4%) undecided. The above explanation can be supported by the narration of one FGD participant in Ermo who stated as follows:

*Previously, there were so many harmful traditional practices committed in our surrounding like genital mutilation, throat cutting, tooth uprooting of children, isolation of women from home during menstruation, double marriage, abduction, traditional midwife service, etc. Previously, mothers did not bring pregnant women to the health center; rather, they gave them a traditional midwife crevice at home. Because of this, many mothers and their babies lost their lives, but after we learn from the radio program in our group, we even taught other members of our society together with the facilitators. Now we stopped traditional practices like abduction, double marriage, etc. If it happened, we bring it to the law. This is the result of*

*understanding from listening to Bonga FM and Action Aid Ethiopia program. (FGD, Code 11)*

The above explanation is supported by an interviewee from the reporters working for Bonga FM.

*Unfortunately, Decha Wereda is known for its traditional beliefs; therefore mainly the so-called 'Kallicha' belief isolated women during their menstruation period and when giving birth. Most of the time, women are isolated outside in a mini hut until they pass their menstruation period and when they give birth. But now after they began to listen to the radio and discuss on it, they take a decision as a society, and now it is highly minimized, we realize this in our supervision of the radio project. (Interviewee, Code 9)*

The results highlight the critical role of Bonga FM in raising awareness and preventing harmful traditional practices against women. The radio program enables women to learn about these practices and participate in group discussions, leading to reductions in practices such as maternal deaths, genital mutilation, and abduction. This finding aligns with the two-step flow theory of media, where media messages are filtered through the mass media and transmitted to influential individuals who shape decision-making. Bonga FM's programming not only raises awareness, but also empowers individuals to take action and address these practices in their communities. By fostering dialogue and providing information, the radio station drives social change and upholds women's rights and well-being in society.

### **The issue of divorce and equal property division in Bonga FM**

**Table 8:** Audience response to the role of radio in creating awareness about divorce and equal property division

N O	The role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided			Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
6	Bonga FM 97.4 radio station teaches our listening group by producing programs about divorce and equal wealth division that gives awareness and power for me	78	40.6%	78	40.6%	3	1.6%	26	13.5%	7	3.6%

From the total of 192 respondents 156(81%) agreed with the statement 'Bonga FM 97.4 radio station teaches us by producing programs about divorce and equal wealth division that gives awareness and power to

women.' According to data from all FGDs, most of the time women went empty handed after divorce; they had no right to share the property equally with men. As a participant in the *Awurada geter* radio listening group explained, the knowledge she got on this issue from the Bonga FM Radio station has brought a practical change in her life.

*Previously, the husbands made different influences on wives during divorce; for example, we did not have the right to share the property we produced together, the right was only for men. He took all property for himself. We had no power to enforce our right because we didn't have the understanding, but now we have the power to enforce our right. (FGD, Code 7)*

An interviewee also explained how Bonga FM brought them a power to enforce their rights by raising her experience as follows:

*For example, my husband married someone else on me and I accused him. But he denied it many times; I fought hard until I got justice. Then we divorced and shared our property. After that, he believed his fault and came back to me to ask for apology. Now we are together; listening to the radio has given me the power to protect my rights and get justice. (Interviewee, Code 2)*

This finding relates to that of Sharda (2014); the media has significant role to raise the voice of marginalized segment of society to promote awareness among masses about their universal, constitutional, and social rights.

On the other hand, a significant number of respondents 33 (17%) disagreed with the statement. Hence, there is some problem in the field of justice that needs to be worked on by Bonga FM Radio station. This thought is supported by some of the FGD participants. One of them from *Awurada* said the following:

*According to the law, when couples divorce, they need to equally share all the property they have. Most of the time, the Bonga FM Radio station made programs by focusing on it. In the previous time, the issue of sharing property after divorce was highly challenged. The women went out without sharing property. In this regard, Bonga FM played a great role by transmitting the court process, the impact of divorce by interviewing the persons, etc. But they have lack of transmitting the problem of execution. For example, in our community, when a husband and wife made a divorce, and after sharing their property, the husband would get married to a new wife, but he would not allow his former wife to*



*get married to a new husband. The husband influences her not to marry again. This by itself is an oppression of women. (FGD, Code 20)*

This result indicates that, although Bonga FM is working for the women to have equal justice as the men, there is a problem conducting investigation on problems such as the delay of court decisions, execution of the passed decisions.

**The role of culture program**

**Table 9:** The audience's response about the role of culture program

N O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
7	Bonga FM radio produces different cultural programs that develop my understanding and knowledge about our culture and history.	91	47.4%	81	42.2%	7	3.6%	7	3.6%	6	3.1%

The *no qoco* program on Bonga FM radio station aims to promote the local culture, values, and language of the community, with a specific focus on empowering women. The data show that a significant majority of respondents (about 90%) agreed that the radio program helped them understand their culture and history. This finding is supported by feedback from the FGDs, where participants emphasized the role of the radio station in facilitating knowledge and awareness of language, culture, and history. By dedicating this program to the promotion of local culture, Bonga FM contributed to the preservation of the community's heritage, sense of identity and belonging, and improvement of cultural understanding, particularly among the women. The program incorporated elements of entertainment and education, presenting fables, riddles, and parables that engage and educate the audience.

This is explained by a participant in the *Ufa* FGD as presented below:

*There are different cultural issues transmitted by the culture program of the Bonga FM Radio station, such as the preparation of cultural food, the wedding ceremony, the culture of mourning and funeral ceremony, the inauguration ceremony of different areas. We know a lot about our history and language after we started listening to the radio; for example, previously we were not informed about the Kafficho Kingdom; we didn't know how he*

*was administering Kaffa, how many kings were leading Kaffa, etc. We didn't have information. But now we can tell others about the history of the Kaffa Kingdom because of listening to the culture program. (FGD, Code 23)*

An interviewee has additional thought about the culture program of Bonga FM Radio station:

*The radio helps us to know forgotten cultures, history, our language; especially the general knowledge questioning program is amazing. Mr. Worku Woldemariam's father of fairy tale program is very educational for children to learn about their culture. Even we understand our forgotten history and cultures. The program helps us to develop our language since the transmission is in our local mother tongue. (Interviewee, Code 2)*

The introduction of radio programs in ethnic languages has addressed the information gap experienced by those who did not understand Amharic, the language primarily used by the national radio station. Before this development, women had limited access to information and had to rely on interpretation or translation. Providing information in accessible languages is crucial for sustainable social development, as emphasized by Park (2014). Bonga FM radio station has successfully filled this gap by broadcasting programs in ethnic languages, enabling women to learn about their culture and history. This fosters a sense of identity, cultural preservation, and empowerment among the female audiences, aligning with the notion that local languages in the media contribute to sustainable social development.

### Entertainment program transmission in Bonga FM

**Table 10:** the audience's response on the transmission of the entertainment program.

N O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
8	Bonga FM radio station produces different entertaining programs to fulfill the interest of women	40	20.8%	54	28.1%	15	26%	84	43.8%	9	4.7%

The above table is audiences' response about Bonga FM entertainment program. Of the total of 192 respondents, only half of them, 94 (49%) agreed with the statement 'Bonga FM radio station produces different entertaining programs to satisfy women' and the other half of the

respondents (about 49%) disagreed. Only 5(3%) were undecided. This shows that the radio station's entertainment function has not been that much satisfactory. This can be exemplified in the words of an FGD participant:

*Of course, the radio station broadcasts different entertaining music. During holidays, they broadcast drama, which is very entertaining, and the message with a drama broadcast is not forgettable. But most of the messages of the radio station are always educational. It is better if they have dramatic content instead of being only in the form of educational programs. Thus, we like Bonga FM to focus on teaching and entertaining. (FGD, Code 17)*

It can be understood from the above finding that most of the programs of Bonga FM Radio station are educational and it is not performing its role of entertainment sufficiently.

### **Role of the radio program for minimizing workload of women**

**Table 11:** audiences' response regarding the role of the radio in educating about the sharing of household responsibility as a family.

N	O	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
10		Radio station creates awareness about familial issue to share household responsibility as a family.	5	30.2%	45	23.4%	5	2.6%	62	32.3%	15	7.8%

As depicted in the above table, 103 (54%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that the Bonga FM Radio station creates awareness of family issues to promote shared household responsibility among family members. This finding indicates that the Bonga FM Radio station is actively involved in awareness creation programs aimed at reducing the burden of women's domestic work and promoting a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities within families.

However, it should be noted that a significant number of participants, 77 (36%), disagreed and expressed the opinion that the radio station should intensify its efforts in this regard. These participants believed that more intensive programming and initiatives are required to address the issue of

unequal distribution of household responsibilities and further promote shared responsibility within families.

The differing opinions among the participants highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue and the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality and shared responsibilities within households. Bonga FM Radio station can use this feedback to further strengthen its programming and develop targeted initiatives that address the concerns and needs of the community. By doing so, the radio station can play a vital role in fostering positive change in familial dynamics and promoting more balanced and equitable household responsibilities.

This idea is also raised among the FGD discussants in the *Awurada geter* group:

*In our society, women are working a lot more. She is busy with seemingly simple responsibilities at home. She has the responsibility of taking care of her husband, her children, keeping cattle in the field, fulfilling important things in the house like preparing food, washing clothes, etc. If the husband helps his wife at home, it is considered as taboo or something shameful. Thus, the The Bonga FM radio station should work in breaking this perception. (FGD, Code 11)*

Another FGD participant said that the negative portrayal of women and the thinking of household works as if they were only for women has affected the participation of women in every sector:

*Even we have not had enough time to listen to the radio at home. We are busy with seemingly useless work all day long. Our husbands do not share household responsibilities. Everything is left to the woman. Now we want the radio station to focus on this issue. Because the pressure of household responsibility in rural women keeps us from participating in different developmental activities. (FGD, Code 7)*

It can be understood from the above data that there is yet lack of understanding that household chores are given to women only. This keeps women from participating. According to Bala (2017), the media plays a crucial role in the empowerment of women. It promotes respect and dignity for women by avoiding the highlighting of negative portrayal of women. To some extent, the Bonga FM Radio station is working on awareness creation programs to reduce the burden of women's domestic work, but it is not paying enough attention to this issue as it does to other programs.

## Radio role for targeted group women to have information about current issues

**Table 12:** The audiences' responses regarding the transmission of current issues on Bonga FM

NO	the role of radio programs for women's social participation and benefit	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
11	Bonga FM program brought information on new and current issues like pandemic that benefited my life	7	38%	95	49.5%	9	4.7%	9	4.7%	6	3.1%

Of 192 respondents, 168 (about 88%) replied that Bonga FM program brought information about new and current issues like pandemic that they use for their daily life. Similar responses were given among FGD discussants. Below is what one FGD participant in the *Ufa Kebele* radio group said:

*To tell the truth, our radio station provides us with current information about our surroundings, our country, and the situation of our world. Since our only option in our mother tongue is this radio, we get information about our country's political, social, and economic issues. For example, when there was the Corona pandemic in the past, we used to get information from the radio. It also transmitted messages about different pandemics like how to keep ourselves from malaria disease, etc. (FGD, Code 12)*

On the basis of the above finding, one can conclude that Bonga FM performed well its information function by providing the women audience with the current information about the situation in their surrounding and in the world.

### Challenges that hinder the process of empowering women using Bonga FM radio

As the findings based on the perception of the women audiences reveal, Bonga FM Radio station has played a significant role in empowering women through the rural radio forum; however, there are challenges that both the audience and the station are facing. Participants in various FGDs highlighted the lack of electricity as a primary challenge, preventing them from powering their radio devices at home and listening to the programs

regularly. The high cost of batteries further hinders their ability to engage consistently. The continuity of the rural radio forum program is crucial, as it provides ongoing support, empowerment, knowledge sharing, and building economic capacity for rural women. Infrastructure development, particularly access to electricity, and the affordability of batteries are essential to ensure uninterrupted access to radio programs in rural areas. Maintaining the rural radio forum program is vital to empower women and drive positive change in these communities.

An interviewee from the *Ermo* Radio group, said the following: “We don’t have time to listen to the radio during the day since we are wives of farmers; thus, we like if the evening and morning transmission times are extended” (Interviewee, Code 2). Regarding the problems, a women’s program producer and chief editor at Bonga FM Radio station had to say the following:

*There are so many problems that need to be solved; one is the accessibility problem. The station doesn’t cover all districts; for example, from the Kaffa Zone, Adiyu (district) doesn’t have access to the radio and part of Tello district also doesn’t have access. Therefore, a woman in Adiyu and Tello districts doesn’t use what a woman in other districts has used. The other problem is that the value given to the media by political leaders and stakeholders is very low, or based on the way they used the media, the culture of working together and providing necessary support to the media is problematic. Mostly NGOs are working with us. (Interviewee, Code 9)*

The interviewee from Kaffa Zone Women and Youth Office said the following:

*In fact, we didn’t properly understand this important role of the radio, and we have assessed that we have shortcomings in working closely with the radio station. For example, we bought air time last year to work together, but we failed to achieve. We know that this is our biggest gap, so we are preparing to work together again. (Interviewee, Code 7)*

According to Musa (1997), media organizations and professional and government agencies and officials are expected to work closely together to achieve national goals rather than assume an antagonistic relationship. In support of this view, a participant from the radio station said the following:

*We have so many problems; our media should be able to modernize. It must provide uninterrupted service to its audiences. Sometimes we are faced with interruptions in our transmission due to lack of equipment. Therefore, there is a problem in terms of manpower, equipment, and budget. Our reporters need to reach rural areas to encourage the participation of women in all sectors, but that needs budget. Our equipment needs maintenance. We also need modern equipment. To fulfill those things, our media needs adequate budget. (Interviewee, Code 8)*

Overall, Bonga FM Radio station faced challenges in its mission to empower women, including accessibility issues, budget constraints, and limited manpower. The audience also encountered obstacles such as a lack of electricity and difficulties in accessing live calls.

### **Discussion of Key findings of the study**

Based on the presentations of the perceptions of the women audiences and responses of interviewees and FGD discussants, it is evident that Bonga FM radio has played a crucial role in empowering women in the political, social and economic sectors through its information and education functions. This is consistent with findings of Akhter & Naheed (2014) who studied the perceptions of educated women about the role of media in women empowerment. Pandey's (2020) study on the role of media towards women's empowerment in a society also has similar findings: by assessing the relationship between the role of media and the social, economic and cultural aspects of women's decision making, self-reliance, capacity building and exposure to information media, he found out that mediated education enhances self-confidence of women and young women to be self-reliant.

Bonga FM radio station has employed both the open-air broadcast strategy for regular unorganized audiences and the rural radio forum strategy to target specific groups. This finding differs from a study conducted by Jamal (2016) that highlighted the lack of clearly designed strategies in Ethiopian radio broadcasting. However, according to the perception of its audiences, Bonga FM seems to stand out as a regional radio station that has successfully implemented the rural radio forum strategy, of course in collaboration with various governmental and nongovernmental organizations. This approach has resulted in attitudinal, behavioral, and practical changes among the targeted women audiences.

The study aligns with findings of Rahman et al. (2018) and Bala (2017), highlighting the crucial role of the media, including radio, in the

empowerment of women. According to the perception of its audiences, Bonga FM has contributed significantly to women's social participation and benefited them in various developmental sectors. The research participants have all confirmed that, by disseminating information, raising awareness, and promoting positive representations of women, the radio station has helped challenge traditional gender norms and empower women.

Furthermore, the participants affirmed that Bonga FM has played a vital role in minimizing violations of women's rights, promoting justice, and addressing harmful traditional practices. It has also enhanced women's political participation, representation, and decision making. In the economic sector, the radio station has facilitated the development of economically independent women by promoting saving culture, access to credit services, and participation in income-generating activities.

The study highlights the importance of radio as a multiplier of change, speeding up information dissemination, and facilitating mindset shifts within the community (Nangooba, 2020). Hence, Bonga FM's efforts align with development media theory and diffusion innovation theory, aiming for economic development, social change, and modernization.

Despite the positive role that Bonga FM perceived to have played, however, the study also reveals a low participation of women in live calls or programs. This is consistent with the findings of Narayan & Ahmad (2016), indicating a low overall use of media by women. Against these challenges, however, the study confirms the significant perceived role Bonga FM radio has played in terms of empowering women socially, politically, and economically. The station has made meaningful contributions and played a pivotal role in facilitating women's achievements in various sectors. The findings demonstrate the positive outcomes resulting from the efforts of Bonga FM, creating an environment enabling women to thrive and succeed. By disseminating information, providing education, and addressing women's needs, the station has been promoting gender equality and empowering women in the community. Hence, in line with the goals of development media theory, the overall contribution of Bonga FM to nation building and development remains significant.

In conclusion, the Bonga FM radio station has been perceived to have played a key role in the empowerment of women in various sectors. Through its information and education functions, according to the women audiences, it has contributed to social, political, and economic changes,



challenging traditional norms, and promoting gender equality. Although there are areas for improvement, Bonga FM's efforts align with theories of development media and diffusion innovation, making it a valuable contributor to the nation's women empowerment.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

The study findings highlight the perceived significant role Bonga FM 97.4 radio played in promoting women's empowerment in the social, economic, and political sectors. The radio station has implemented the rural radio forum strategy and produced educational programs to raise awareness among listeners of women about their rights and gender equality. As a result, it is perceived that attitudinal, behavioral, and practical changes have been observed among women audiences.

In the social sector, Bonga FM has contributed to education, health, justice and the reduction of violence against women and harmful traditional practices. Women's empowerment involves creating awareness, building capacity, and promoting greater participation and decision-making, leading to transformative action.

The study also identifies the challenges faced by Bonga FM in promoting women's empowerment. In the field of justice, challenges such as delays in court decisions, problems with court decision execution, and discrepancies between the committed crime and the court's sentence have been noted. Women audiences recommend that the radio station address these issues and engage in investigative journalism.

The study further reveals a low participation of women in live calls and programming productions. This aligns with the findings of Narayan & Ahmad (2016), indicating a low overall use of media by women. In addition, challenges such as lack of access to electricity, limited access to the radio station, lack of attention from stakeholders, and interruptions in transmissions due to inadequate equipment have been identified. Manpower, equipment and budget constraints hinder reaching all rural areas and maximizing women's participation in every sector.

In conclusion, Bonga FM radio station has been perceived to have made significant contributions to women's empowerment in various sectors. Despite the challenges faced, the efforts of the radio station in raising awareness, promoting education, and encouraging women's participation have resulted in positive changes. Addressing the identified challenges and improving accessibility and resources related constraints could further enhance the role of Bonga FM on empowering women in Kaffa Zone.

### **Recommendations**

Recognizing the achievements and addressing challenges could help enhance Bonga FM's role in empowering women and driving positive change in the community. Based on the findings of the study, therefore, the following recommendations are proposed to effectively continue with women's empowerment activities using the Bonga FM radio station:

1. ***Implement the Rural Radio Forum Strategy***: Other radio stations should consider continuing with the implementation of the rural radio forum strategy to empower rural communities on various development issues. This strategy has proven successful in creating positive changes in society when working in collaboration with different NGOs.
2. ***Engage government stakeholders***: The government of the Kaffa Zone should use radio as a tool to accelerate the development of women and society. Collaboration between the radio station and government bodies can help address key issues and promote women's empowerment more effectively.
3. ***Implement investigative journalism***: Bonga FM radio station should incorporate investigative journalism to address social problems such as infrastructure related issues and the lack of justice for women. By shedding light on these issues through investigative reporting, the radio station can contribute to positive change and advocate for solutions.
4. ***Improve accessibility***: Bonga FM Radio station should work with relevant organizations to address the problem of accessibility. This may involve improving the infrastructure, expanding transmission

coverage, or exploring alternative methods to ensure that the radio station reaches as many women listeners as possible.

5. ***Challenge gender roles and responsibilities:*** Bonga FM Radio station should raise awareness and challenge the misconception that all household responsibilities are solely the duty of women. By promoting a more equitable distribution of household tasks, the radio station can help reduce the workload on women and promote gender equality.
6. ***Adopt an edutainment approach:*** In addition to the current educational approach, Bonga FM Radio station should consider adopting an edutainment approach, combining education and entertainment. This approach can make the transmission of messages more engaging and captivating to the audience, increasing their interest and participation.
7. ***Encourage women's participation:*** Bonga FM Radio station should actively encourage women listeners to participate in live phone-in programs and other interactive formats. By creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, the radio station can empower women to voice their opinions, share their experiences, and contribute to discussions on relevant topics.

By implementing these recommendations, Bonga FM Radio station can further enhance the perceived role it has been playing to women's empowerment and contribute to positive social change in the community it serves.

## **Declarations**

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors (s) declare that there is no any potential conflict of interest.

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