

Samples of progressive programmes

By Benson Idonije

Sunday afternoon viewing on Channel 7 goes beyond the mere showing of programmes for their informative, educative and entertainment values, with artists and talents who have researched into information, rehearsed their lines, and generally perfected their presentation techniques, in action.

Neither is it all the usual display of specialised and general interest magazines where all the formats are employed, with phone-in devices to spice it all up, in the name of local productions.

Here is a situation in which viewers come face to face with life, its elusive possibilities, essence, mysteries, failures, realities, and the circumstances in which these real life situations unfold themselves.

Last week, we examined a regular package which usually sets out to explore in great detail, a subject or event with a view to perceiving and representing its reality with greater fidelity and accuracy.

The programme, which requires more than casual preparation, gives accounts of true stories, and goes beyond the possibilities of this weary world, far into the supernatural realm of principalities and powers, witches and wizards, and deals essentially with man and his environment - to educate, inform and instruct. Titled *Nkan mbe*, which means "strange things are happening," it is a powerful, but interesting documentary.

Channel 7 brings families together every Sunday afternoon at 4 O' clock to watch the proceedings of a people's court, well constituted with wise men, lawyers and a retired magistrate in attendance. Titled *Gboro me ro* - literally meaning "examine my case for me," it is a developmental programme that brings succour and redress to the common man by judging private quarrels between people, based on the rights of private citizens instead of going to where they cannot afford to employ the services of lawyers, and where justice is usually delayed because of protracted, and endless adjournments arising from the enormous volume of cases on hand.

The court listens patiently to complaints from all who are aggrieved, examines evidence from all concerned and investigates the cases beyond all reasonable doubts. At the end, they come out with sound judgements, and all parties go away fully satisfied in their hearts that justice has been done.

Two cases were beautifully disposed off on Sunday, 26 January 1997. A family leased out land to another for fifty years in 1954 for thirty pounds per annum. The person to whom it was leased, died in 1972, and since then, the lessors have not been paid. They were asking the leasee's daughter-in-law now residing in the house to pay today's equivalent of thirty pounds sterling. After careful consideration, the court advised the complainants to turn the heat on the leasee's children who have directly inherited the property, and not the innocent woman they brought to the people's court.

Secondly, they were assured that they could not be paid in today's equivalent of the pound

sterling, but in the old conversion of Nigeria's ten shillings to the naira, which makes their claim N60 per annum.

In another case, a widow who gave her TV set to a neighbouring radio repairer since 1995 and paid a deposit of N800 asked the court to urge the repairer to give attention to her job so that her children can watch television.

The radio repairer defended himself, but the court was able to see through his story as a pack of lies. He was instructed to give back the woman's TV set to her with the N800, which he paid on the spot.

Ni Faaji Kelele, (entertainment unlimited) is another very interesting Sunday afternoon special. A variety and entertainment programme, parades four sets of entertainers who act their lives and tell stories independently, with music to spice it all up.

What is particularly striking about their performance is that even though they sound light-hearted, and generate great humour, underlining it all is the element of seriousness, indicting corrupt and inefficient public utility operatives, pointing out lapses in public services, generally condemning some of the ills in society, and physically social services are made to work.

Last Sunday for instance, the pair of Akande Famoye and Olasunkanmi Ayomo scored a point with the programme. They had been decrying the plight of helpless victims of blackout in various parts of Lagos, especially places where some inhabitants claimed that they were asked to contribute money toward the purchase of transformers for themselves before they could have electricity.

From their own behind-the-scene investigations, the duo discovered that NEPA was not officially aware of this arrangement, and consequently warned the public not to succumb to the blackmail of these inscrupulous extortionists. but they finally succeeded in helping to secure a transformer for Somolu Local Government Area by approaching the engineers at the headquarters who delivered it even before the expiration of the two weeks that they promised.

Surely, Channel 7 is using these local productions to improve society, for national development. And this is what I think should be the aim of television in a developing country like ours, instead of indulging in foreign films and programmes that merely promote foreign cultures, or local productions that are imitative of foreign cultures.

The producers who want to venture into a production in a developing society should always ask himself: "Is this programme in the national interest?"