

# Watchdog on the air line

By Benson Idonije

The programme Media in Focus has the potential to inspire the mass media towards nation building, especially at this crucial time of the country's political and economic development. The discussion programme, is currently aired on NTA.

Through the role of the media can be properly appraised with contributions by journalists from various media backgrounds; representing the various electronic and print media.

At the end of the series of programmes, all the ideas put forward would be collated and properly examined for the purpose of establishing a blue print.

However, I do not see how this programme can achieve the kind of objective that is envisaged with its present production approach.

I watched 'Media in Focus' for the first time last Friday night. Dr. Bala and another gentleman were on hand to discuss the role of the media, which the moderator said was intended to spill over into many weeks of spirited debate and discussion.

The two discussants tended to disagree with each other on several viewpoints, but Dr. Bala was more articulate and forthcoming with ideas in general and the fundamental problems facing the Nigerian media in particular.

But at the end of the discussion, nothing concrete was achieved. The viewer did not take away any point for consideration even though the guests had something to say.

The programme should not be allowed to drift without an aim. At the end of every discussion the viewer should be given food for thought; his imagination should be fired; there must be something concrete to hold on to, culminating in an awareness that is capable of provoking change.

The moderator is very vital to a discussion programme and the last week edition had a seasoned broadcaster, a veteran, in charge of affairs; he steered the discussion with experience and a deep knowledge of the subject.

However, the programme can only make the desired impact if the rules of the discussion programme format are strictly adhered to.

There are two types of discussions 'formal' and 'informal', and they both have their characteristics, even though they take on topic, moderator and discussants. Their production approaches are different.

The topic of discussion is very important, especially in terms of phrasing. It is a reference point and the theme around which the entire discussion centrally revolves.

In an informal discussion programme for instance, the topic poses a question, which by implication makes it a debate with 'Yes' and 'No' sides "Is the Nigerian Press developing the nation?"

The moderator introduces the topic and the discussants who are usually of equal number, one against one and two against two. The moderator does not control the discussion as such, but remains in the background. He however intervenes when the topic is derailing and participants, are veering off the point, put the arguments on course. He also interrupts when the debate is getting too rowdy or for comprehensibility for comfort.

At the end of the discussion, the moderator summarises the points made by each opposing discussant and leaves the resolution to the listener to decide which of the debaters made more convincing points; and the debate continues in his imagination long after the programme.

This should have been the format of the 'Media in Focus' under review, but the moderator's approach was formal. He controlled the discussion because he asked questions at every point and dictated the direction in which the programme should go with fact - finding questions.

However, the topic is usually a statement, like "Nigeria is an economically viable country" The moderator takes full control of the programme from beginning to the end, and the discussants do not speak until he gives the go-ahead. At the end of the discussion, the moderator draws a conclusion, based on the points raised, in conformity with the topic.

The whole idea is that any radio/TV discussion programme must have an aim, a definite one which should be achieved with every programme.

Two discussants cannot do proper justice to "Media in Focus" or any topic for that matter with a formal discussion approach. At least, three people would be representative enough to examine the issue exhaustively and objectively, by way of argument.

Apart from the fact that 'Media in Focus' is not a statement, it is rather wide and unwieldy and should better be seen in this context as an umbrella topic. In order to handle the subject more professionally, the various aspects of our 'focus' should be examined and executed with specific topics.