

Can't kill the presenter

By Benson Idonije

The success and viability of a commercial station are measured by the volume of patronage it receives in terms of commercials. The African Independent Television (AIT) has not only gained an upper hand over other private stations in this regard, but it also has the potentials for general acceptability, in view of the fact that it is positively forging ahead with creative programme ideas.

Like its blind medium, the image on which this astonishing success is predicated may have been built by foreign programme-oriented formatting which AIT, from its inception, carried out with innovation and great regard for relevance to the yearning of its target audience.

But the station is beginning to settle down to local productions. Worthy of commendation and emulation is *Our Time*, a teenage-production aired on Saturday nights. Last week, for instance, the topic of discussion was "Broken homes, its effect on the society". It was an exciting and rewarding experience, as the programme succeeded in all its ramifications.

A lot of sermonising and rhetorical moralising have been done by experts in the fields of philosophy and psychology - all of them pronouncing authoritatively on the effects of broken homes on offspring. Many programmes have been devised and broadcast by elite who claim to know all about family conflicts and how to resolve them. The impact of all these efforts put together pales to insignificance, compared to the concrete results that AIT teenage programme yielded in one production. The discussion programme was effective.

Discussants comprised boys and girls numbering over 15 and was moderated by a young boy of the same age. He took perfect control of this panel discussion in which all the discussants spoke frankly and willingly.

From all indications, about half of them happened to come from broken homes, and so their experiences were told from real life situations. They narrated quite vividly the cause of the unfortunate situation in which they find themselves, the effects and how they are coping. This firsthand knowledge, straight from victims of broken homes themselves made the programme all the more credible.

However, there is still room for improvement. The topic for discussion should be phrased into a positive statement so that the programme can come out with a concrete resolution at the end, based on all the inputs made by discussants in conformity with the topic.

Since it is not a free or informal discussion approach, all discussions should deliberately succumb to the authority and control of the moderator by indicating their intention to speak before they do so. Otherwise when two to three people speak at the same time, a cacophony of sounds is created and rowdiness and disorderliness take over.

Some words of commendation cannot be said about *Drug Scope* featured that same afternoon on NTA.

A magazine format, the programme started with a vox-pop designed to discourage people from buying drugs from mobile hawkers, especially *Molue* pharmacists, decried as murderers because they sell expired drugs.

The first vox-pop did not achieve its aim because of the four respondents, two were in favour and the other two, against. Another vox-pop followed in quick succession, this time highlighting the disadvantages of buying from places other than recognised chemist shops. A pharmacist suddenly appeared in a utility contribution, giving hints on how to maintain a

good skin. A representative of Evans products came in to promote the company's products; and there the programme ended.

All these items were rich in information and education, but they were just coming one after the other without any explanations. It all seemed like a precious waste of air time. The programme had no presenter.

The presenter is very critical to a magazine programme and so the producer of Drug Scope should find one to help tie all the items together for the purpose of selling them to the viewer.

A good magazine is like a pot of soup. Unless it is served, there is no way of knowing how palatable it is. The presenter serves the menu.

But, perhaps, the most ridiculous technique seen on screen last weekend was *Clean Talk* which opened with a pair of presenters advertising a brand of milk. They promised to come back but did not show up again - not even to conclude the programme. As it were, the viewer was subjected to a mere filler of sight and sound which included documentaries on how Nigeria is combating environmental pollution.

Like *Drug Scope*, *Clean Talk* is a specialised magazine, and the two of them have great potentials for popular acceptance. But they are begging and pleading for presentation.