

Aloys Niyoyita

STUDIO IJAMBO

Studio Ijambo was set up two years after large scale massacres broke out between the two main ethnic groups in Burundi. In 1994 in neighbouring Rwanda the hate radio RTLM (Radio mille collines) and Kanguka news paper to name but two, had been used by politicians to pour oil on the fire of the Rwandan genocide. The same danger was threatening Burundi whose ethnic components are the same as in Rwanda. From 1994-96 several newspapers were publicly inciting people to commit violent acts against officials and ordinary citizens. A hate radio called Rutomorangingo owned by rebels and operating from an unknown location started airing programmes focusing on ethnic issues, furthering the already existing mistrust between the two Burundian ethnic groups. According to this radio, violence was the only means to overcome Tutsi domination of the Hutu majority, and the latter's historical humiliation. Studio Ijambo was therefore created to try to show people that there is an alternative to violence and that compromise can be reached through dialogue. Studio Ijambo journalists were the first to bring together Burundi's two big antagonist parties, Uprona and Frodebu, by inviting them to a series of round tables to debate matters of political substance. Some people say that this ground-breaking work helped the peace talks in Arusha to get going.

In our programmes we focus on issues of socio-political and economic interest which directly involve people in their daily lives. We try to portray what the common interests of people at the grassroots are. A joint team of Hutu and Tutsi journalists produce balanced news reporting for some foreign media like VOA, BBC, AP, AFP and Radio Ukwizera. The latter broadcasts programmes for Burundian refugees in camps in Tanzania. We believe that a lack of true and balanced information hinders peace between communities particularly in a situation like ours where rumours feed communal hatred and fear. Letting people talk about their daily problems and express their views on the transformation of society is what guides us in our reporting.

The background

It's mid-March 2000, one year after the lifting of the total blockade imposed on Burundi by neighbouring countries following a military coup d'état on 25th of July 1997. This is the second military coup d'état after the one in 1993 in which the first democratically elected Hutu president was assassinated by some soldiers.

In a sub-regional summit on Burundi (Burundi is located between Eastern and Central Africa) two weeks after, neighbouring countries unanimously decided on an economic blockade against Burundi. In this context, the

standard of living has been decreasing drastically: prices of staple goods have increased, whereas peoples' incomes have continued to decrease.

Since then price of petrol has risen more than four times. For example, a litre of gas which cost 190 Burundi Francs in 1994 today costs 600 Burundi Francs.

The following radio programme was made in April 2000. After two months' speculation on oil prices by local businessmen, the government decided to raise the petrol price, for the second time in two months, from 470 Burundi Francs to 570 Burundi Francs. The story of how different people and sectors felt about this, is recorded through street interviews and studio discussions and presented here in radio programme format.

The story

Introductory jingle and the presenter's voice: 'What do you think?'

In the following fifteen minutes, Aloys Niyoyita will give you an opportunity to express your viewpoints.

- **On those things happening to you and around you in your daily life.**
- **On those decisions made which concern you.**
- **You will also suggest what, according to you, would be a suitable answer to the issues.**

Aloys: *For almost two months now, gas stations are as if they are closed. Some look completely closed, and where the gas is said to be distributed, they only give a tiny amount of it (no one can have more than 20 litres). The reason to close stations as put forward by gas station owners was to urge the government to rise gas and gasoil prices. As a matter of fact the government council made public a new decision to change the gas price from 470 Burundi Francs to 570, and from 420 to 520 Burundi Francs for gasoil¹. What do you think about the decision to add 100 Burundi Francs on gas and gasoil prices? To begin with, can you present yourself madame?:*

¹ Gas – petrol; gasoil – diesel.

Listener: My name is Vumiliya Tabu, I live in Bujumbura city in the district of Bwiza. In my opinion, before raising the petrol price, I think, it would have been better if they had waited until the country recovers normality, and people too. Now people are poor and there are no goods. Actually, for people like me who run a business, it has become difficult to find money to buy gas at such a high price of 570 Burundi Francs.

Announcer: The government says there is no other way around; in today's situation they have to rise the petrol price. According to you, are there any other alternatives you can suggest the government should take instead?

Listener: Before taking such a decision, the government should first consider peoples' income. Let's just consider the case of public sector workers, who don't have businesses and have little income. I think that before taking such a decision, the government should have increased these peoples' salary. If I were the government, actually, I would not have raised the petrol price. I would have considered the country's economic health in general and how people are, because the country has become very poor.

Announcer: But those who import petrol say that the price rose a lot in countries where they buy it.

Listener: Gas station owners must not compare how prices can rise abroad with here, because our countries are not equally rich. Our country is very poor due to war and now things have got worse because peasants aren't growing crops. You've seen yourselves how people in the hills are displaced. We do not have money now. Actually, they didn't need to raise the petrol price. You know one month before they had already increased it from 350 Burundi Francs to 470 Burundi Francs – I think they should have waited till people have money to buy petrol.

Announcer's voice: That was Mrs. Vumiliya Tabu. According to her, before taking the decision to raise the petrol price, the government should have considered first the state of people's incomes. Let us now listen to what transporters think about the decision, can you please introduce yourself to begin with:

Listener: My name is François Nsanzurwimo, I live in Kinama district. I am a bus driver. We see that the government has raised the price of petrol, but gas station owners do not want to distribute it. It would have been better if they increased the price and distributed it at the same time.

Announcer's voice: According to you, you have no problem with whether the price rose or not?

Listener: I see no problem in that, even if they raised it to 1000 Burundi Francs a litre, because if they raise it, we will raise the price for a ticket. If the government denies us the right to raise the ticket price, we'll park our cars... and people will walk or the government will give them buses to transport them. I see no problem; even if they put a litre to 2000 Burundi Francs... I see no problem in that. Because I compare what my bus does, and the profit I make. You can not let your car go on the street if you know you will not make a profit. Let's talk about the 20 litres that they give. It is not enough. Even if you stay in town, it isn't enough. What about those who are going up country? That is another problem the government needs to consider.

Announcer: You are a mini-bus driver; what do you think could be a satisfactory solution?

Listener: Now that they have raised petrol prices, they should distribute it as before; giving people the quantity they need when they need it. That would be fine for us private transporters.

Announcer: Nsanzurwimo François, according to you, raising the petrol price is not a problem at all as in return you will raise the ticket price. I talked to a taxi driver at the central market; Karuta Joseph, what do you think about the decision to raise the petrol price, as recently announced by the government?

Listener: The decision they have taken is not bad at all. The only problem is that even though they have raised the petrol price, we do not get it. Even though they raise it to 600 Burundi Francs if it is distributed as they used to without having to line up at the gas stations, it will be alright.

Announcer: According to you, the price matters less as long as you can be served as normal at the gas stations?

Listener: You did not get my point. You understand that we cannot work if a litre is 5000 Burundi Francs. If they make it 600 a litre it's alright, we can buy it, and as long as we can get it without having to line up at the gas stations, it would be ok! The government said that they will make lists of cars to be supplied at each station but they said we have a right to only 20 litres per two weeks! What can you do with 20 litres per two weeks with a transportation car? Better to get rid of it.

Announcer: You make two points: One, they have risen the price to 570 Burundi Francs, two, what they give is not enough, am I right?

Listener: It is a real problem. 20 litres per two weeks; it is incomprehensible to us transporters. It is as if we are wasting our time.

Announcer: *Let's finish, you are a taxi driver what according to you can be a satisfactory solution for you transporters?*

Listener: *What we ask the government is that they can even put a litre of petrol up to 600, but consequently urge gas station owners to serve it as usual without making us line up. You understand that if you have to line up for two days without working when you have to pay taxes at the end of the month, something is wrong!*

Transition (Studio Ijambo)

Announcer: *At the beginning, gas station owners closed their stations. They asked the government to raise the price per litre. They explained that countries which produce and sell petrol have recently decided to rise the price. Now a barrel was US \$11 but has now risen over an 8-month period to US \$30. The government has therefore decided to rise the price per litre to about 100 Burundi Francs. Still gas stations remain closed, and people wonder why there is gas shortage when the government has recently announced the decision to raise the gas price. We have a reaction, may you present yourself to begin with?*

Listener: *Yes, my name is Aimé Rwankineza-Uwimana, I am Hatungimana Company's commercial manager (it is a local gas station). It's true the government has raised the petrol price. But the petrol shortage prevails in the country, the quantity we have is not enough. In order to have enough petrol at the gas stations there must be enough petrol in the country. That is, even though the price per litre has been increased, it will take about a month to resupply the country with enough petrol and sell it normally at the gas stations. It will take a whole month. That is why even though the government has made public the decision to raise the price we did not distribute it immediately. But within a month, I think, we will be receiving some.*

Announcer: *Excuse-me Aimé, 100 Burundi Francs has been added to the former price; remember the price had already been raised a few months before, and you know that prices for all goods follow, whereas people's incomes do not. Don't you think it's too much?*

Listener: *Sure but people here have to know that when prices in foreign markets go up, that is something petrol dealers here are unable to control; that is why when prices abroad go up, we too have to raise them otherwise we won't be able to import. Let's talk about the price of a barrel. Within the last eight months, it has gone up from 11 to 30 U.S dollars. It is the first time we have such an increase. That is why if a barrel goes up again abroad, I am sorry but we will have to raise it again here.*

Announcer: *The news today is that in a recent meeting which was hold on March 28th in Vienna, Austria between petrol-producing countries producing petrol, the latter accepted that they would increase petrol production by about 150,000 barrels per day. Production will be 1,700,000 barrels per day from April 1st. They also agreed to lower the price per barrel from 30 to 25 U.S dollars. Iran did not agree with the decision and Iraq is not concerned.*

Transition (Music + title repeated in jingle 'What do you think'.)

Announcer: *David Niyungeko, you are the representative of the Transporters' Association. How do you react to the government's recent decision to raise petrol prices?*

Listener: *In our association, we think that the government has not been fair as they did not take into consideration our suggestions in the last meeting we had in January when they rose the petrol price, which triggered a strike. The government promised they would consult us next time before raising the price so that we could discuss the bus ticket price. We were very surprised to hear that they had decided to put up the price again.*

Announcer: *Do you mean the government also had to raise the bus ticket?*

Listener: *That is not my point. One of the points we agreed upon during our last meeting with the government was that next time they wanted to raise the petrol price they would convene a meeting with us to decide the next ticket price, as petrol and transportation are two inseparable things. However, the government has unilaterally decided to rise the petrol price again.*

Announcer: *Just to be clear; you are saying the government decided to raise the petrol price but did not as a matter of fact raise the ticket price, is that right?*

Listener: *What I am saying is that the government put up the petrol price. As far as the bus ticket is concerned, it would have been a matter of discussion between the government and us. But they decided to raise the petrol price before we had agreed on the bus ticket, so that the two could be increased at the same time.*

Announcer: *I am sorry to interrupt you, but public transport users say that they can't afford price rise these days and therefore that you should not rise the bus ticket price... hold on and listen to the following:*

Listener: *My name is Gatete Prosper, I live in Jabe district in Bwiza area. I am a civil servant. If I consider my monthly salary, this decision is another burden for us.*

Because even before we were paying a lot of money and it was hard to make ends meet. Now I can foresee that following the petrol price rise staple commodity prices will also rise whereas our means do not follow.

Announcer: *David Niyungeko, Gatete Prosper says that when bus tickets are risen, consequently, prices at the market place follow. However you know that as far as civil servants or other people are concerned, their means remain the same?*

Listener: *People have to understand us. We are not asking the government to raise the ticket price. What we want is that the government consider some of the harsh measures that prevent transporters from making a profit. You understand that it is not necessarily needed to rise the ticket price.*

Announcer: *Thank you Mr. David Niyungeko; we are running short of time this is the end of today's programme.*

For our next programme: What do youngsters think about the idea of a general amnesty and former rebels joining the army as has been suggested by the new mediator in the Burundi peace process now on in Arusha? Rendez-vous next Thursday at the same hour.

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