

Agakiza Radio Station

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The Adventist message reached Burundi in 1925. As part of the Adventist Church's efforts to reach all the regions in Burundi with the message of salvation, Agakiza Radio Station broadcasted its first program in 2007.

Background

The forerunner to the Adventist radio project in Burundi was a 15-minute broadcast called *Ijwi ry'inzamba y'iherezo* (Voice of the Last Trumpet) that was launched by the Church on the waves of the National Radio on Friday, September 11, 1998. The producer was Pastor Lambert Ntiguma, the then Communication director of the Adventist Church in Burundi. The program was appreciated and cherished by many auditors, including the non-Adventists. For that reason, people demanded that the program be extended to half an hour every Friday after Kirundi News at around 7:30 p.m. It was in this context that an idea of setting up an FM radio station belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Burundi was born.¹

Organization of the Agakiza Radio Station Project

The dream of creating a Seventh-day Adventist Church radio station in Burundi as a tool of proclaiming the good news of salvation and mass education was first suggested in January 2001 by Elder Church Max, who, at that time was the director of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency in Burundi (2000-2003). The idea was welcomed and explored by the church leaders, including Pastor Uzziel Habingabwa, the president and legal representative of the church in Burundi (1995-2005), and Elder Samuel Nteziryayo, the secretary-treasurer (1995-2005). Pastor Jethron Nsabiyaemye, the Communication director (1995-2002), was tasked to lead the actualization of the project. Working with the division Communication director, the Adventist World Radio (AWR) leadership in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A. was contacted for help. In response AWR granted the basic equipment for an FM Station. It also offered to send a team of skilled personnel to train local workers on the condition that the church in Burundi did whatever was necessary to obtain a license to operate an FM radio station and the frequency of broadcasting from the Burundi government.²

In keeping with the agreement made with AWR, the Adventist Church in Burundi contacted the representatives of the Burundi National Council of Communication about a license for the radio station. The Council advised the Church to set up an association from the church members that would be responsible for running the radio station. Accordingly, a board of eleven church members was appointed on September 12, 2002. Among the members of that board were the president of the Church in Burundi, the executive secretary and the treasurer. Other members were the Communication director, the ADRA manager, two people from the business community, two other lay members and two skilled people in radio maintenance and an aeronautic engineer³

History

On Sunday, October 6, 2002, the Board held its first meeting and chose the name of the radio station – Radio Agakiza (Voice of Salvation). It was agreed that the Board would be called Agakiza Radio Association. In the following meeting held on October 20, 2002, the Board studied the Internal Working Policy and the Radio Agakiza Organogram. In the same meeting they decided the salaries of the Radio Agakiza employees. After the internal details were done, the next step was to register the Radio Agakiza on October 14, 2003. This was followed by an application for an exploitation license from the National Council of Communication. The exploitation license was granted on June 4, 2004.⁴ The frequency of broadcasting was granted on Tuesday, July 19, 2005 but broadcasting did not start until April 6, 2007.⁵

Funding

A radio ministry requires funding. For this reason, an action was taken to promote the project in all churches. The Association of Adventist churches in Burundi through the existing three missions invited all leaders and district pastors to promote the radio among the church members. Church members welcomed the project. It was decided to write a message in the Bible Study Guide so that on the fourth Sabbath a special offering was collected to support the radio. In the meantime, AWR donated the necessary equipment and Elders Ray Allen and Samuel Misiani trained 30 volunteers in the running of the radio. On November 22, 2007, after some months of activities, an electric shock due to a thunderstorm damaged all the radio equipment which caused the suspension of the program. However, the division Communication Department and the Adventist Word Radio helped with a new transmitter and some accessories. Thus, in October 2008 Elder Enock Mogusu, the Hope Chanel technician in East-Central Africa Division, brought the equipment and installed it.⁶ Though some church members do not receive the waves of Agakiza Radio in their regions because Burundi is very hilly, they keep on giving offering to support its programs because they know that they are doing evangelism in others corners of the country and in the region. This special offering is given in all churches in Burundi.

Territory Covered

In 2004 Women Ministry Department in Burundi Union conducted a fundraising in all churches in Burundi and bought a new transmitter for the radio station so that it would expand its coverage. Later in 2006 the Communication Department in East-Central Africa Division gifted Agakiza Radio another transmitter. With the three transmitters Agakiza Radio currently covers about 60 percent of Burundi territory. In order to cover the whole country, Agakiza Radio should have six relay transmitters at Manga, Birime, Inanzegwe, Mutumba, Kaberenge, and Bujumbura. Currently, Agakiza Radio has three transmitters at Manga, Inanzegwe, and Bujumbura.⁷

At the beginning of broadcasting in April 2007, the broadcast was for six hours a day. In 2010 broadcasting moved from six hours to eight hours a day. From 2011 to 2015 the broadcast was eighteen hours a day. And since 2016, broadcasting is 24 hours each day. The programs on the Internet allow auditors using mobile phones to capture Agakiza Radio wherever they are. Thus, Agakiza Radio can be received all around the world. Its website is www.radioagakiza.org. An application to Android and an iOS system are available on Playstore and Appstore.⁸

Impact of the Radio Agakiza

Since the first broadcast in April 2007 Radio Agakiza has been supported by church members because they are aware that it is a powerful tool for evangelism. They regularly give an offering to support it. The church choirs record their songs and have them played on the radio. The songs and messages have been appreciated by many people, including non-Adventists. Apart from the Seventh-day Adventist choir songs, the auditors of Radio Agakiza are also attracted by its broadcasts about Bible prophecies, and Adventist teachings on temperance and health, family life, social welfare, and community development.

Agakiza Radio receives daily letters of encouragement and questions from many auditors. Agakiza Radio reaches not only many regions in Burundi but also people in the whole plain of Rusizi River in Democratic Republic of the Congo up to Bugarama town in the Republic of Rwanda. For this reason, the leaders of Agakiza Radio have been compelled to add some broadcasts in Swahili to accommodate people who do not understand Kirundi or French languages.

Challenges and Future Plans

Though Agakiza Radio has made remarkable progress in producing and broadcasting its programs, it seeks to expand its coverage to reach more people. The plan is to install three other transmitters at Birime, Mutumba, and Kaberenge in order to cover the whole country of Burundi and beyond. It plans to launch programs on Satellite so that its broadcast in Kirundi language can be listened by Burundians and others in Europe, America, Australia and Asia. One of the future goals is to establish Agakiza Television.⁹

NOTES

1. Uzziel Habingabwa, phone interview by the author, May 2020. Pastor Habingabwa served as president of the Church in Burundi when the idea of the radio station was initiated. He is now retired.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Jethron Nsabiyaemye, phone interview by the author, May 2020. Pastor Nsabiyaemye replaced Pastor Habingabwa as president of the Adventist Church in Burundi.
6. Ibid.
7. Personal knowledge of the author as director of the Communication Department of the Burundi Union Mission that owns and runs Radio Agakiza.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

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