

AWR-102.9 Light FM, Uganda

KOOJO LAMBERT

Koojo Lambert

Overview

A part of the Adventist World Radio network, AWR-102.9 Light FM, The Voice of Hope, is owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Rwenzori Field of the Uganda Union Mission.¹ It is located in the Kasese Better Living Center Complex situated between Kilembe and Rwenzori Roads in Kasese Municipality. Kasese Municipality is within the Great East African Rift Valley, and therefore has a low altitude. For this reason, the communication mast is stationed at Kaburisoke, a hill in the Kamwenge District, about 100 kilometers away.

Like all Adventist World Radio stations in the world, AWR-102.9 Light FM was established to proclaim the everlasting gospel to all the world in harmony with scriptural commands through various types of radio and internet broadcasting.² It is the resolve of AWR-102.9 Light FM to maintain an excellent mass media center that provides information to build and strengthen the spiritual, physical, and socio-economic wellbeing of families and individuals communities across the Rwenzori Region and beyond.³

Founding

The vision for a radio station was born in 2004 by two lay people, John Tsongo Capital and Muranga Machi. While seated under a tree at Kasese Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, Kamaiba, Kasese Municipality, one day the idea of the field starting a radio station entered their conversation as they noted other denominations around and in the country were doing likewise. At that time, Daniel Matte, who was the field president, was in school at Solusi University in Zimbabwe, and Erisa Masamba, who was the stewardship and church development director, was acting president of the field.⁴ Masamba welcomed the idea and actually called an orientation meeting of five dedicated and passionate lay people, including Capital and Machi. Other members included Kalingutsa Clovis and Mr. Kimulya Adorable. Bwambale Erisa Masamba chaired the brainstorming meeting⁵ In his narration, John Capital, who was a phone repairman, presented the draft of a proposal for Prime Radio, which had been given to Machi Muranga and Kalingutsa Clovis who were experts in concept writing. There and then, they proposed the name of Rwenzori Adventist Radio (RAR). However, the chair advised that before discussions went very far the frontline pastors needed to be involved in the discussions, and eventually the field executive committee would be involved.⁶ Thereafter, the discussions followed the established channels until the

executive committee under action NO-SWUF/264/2004 implemented the idea.⁷

History

The field committee, chaired by Daniel Matte, the field president, by then having supported the radio station proposal as a field project, appointed a committee to spearhead its implementation.⁸ The committee included the field officers, the communication director, a few frontline pastors, and the four lay radio pioneers. The committee also selected Dan Muhindo, Muhindo Harriet, and Yosia Baluku to research a feasibility study to guide the progress of the project.

On June 26, 2012, the feasibility study committee presented a three-year business plan for the project.⁹ A full project proposal with an estimated budget of UGX 379,920,000 was completed by October 2012. It was during this time that the name was changed from Rwenzori Adventist Radio (RAR) to Light FM–The Voice of Hope.¹⁰ Elder Misaki Maate Wanzalabana was the field communication secretary at the time. Following approval from the Uganda Union Mission, the Rwenzori Field executive committee embarked on the project in 2013.¹¹

Before the Rwenzori Field became deeply engaged in the implementation process, they consulted Nathaniel Walemba, East-Central Africa Division executive secretary, for advice and guidance. Through him, the division donated a 1000-kilowatt transmitter, which the author personally witnessed and participated in loading for transportation to the Rwenzori Field, Kasese, Uganda.

In 2014, the Rwenzori Field, under action number RF/ADCOM/215/75/2014, requested that the Uganda Union sanction the official operations of an FM radio station (Light FM Radio– The Voice of Hope).¹² With the Uganda Union Mission’s sanction of Light FM, the Rwenzori Field’s request to purchasing modern transmitting equipment was forwarded to the Adventist World Radio office at the General Conference through the ECD communication department.

Adventist World Radio, under AWR/ADCOM – Action 16-145, approved the request with the condition that the Rwenzori Field brand, market, and promote its radio station as an affiliate of Adventist World Radio, appropriately exhibiting the AWR official logo on all signage, billboards, stationery, and material in print or electronically.

On October 12, 2016, the Rwenzori Field, through the Uganda Union, signed a memorandum of understanding between the Rwenzori Field Light FM–Kasese and AWR, at ECD headquarters in Nairobi. Nathaniel Walemba signed on behalf of the Rwenzori Field while Daniel Matte signed on behalf of Uganda Union Mission and Jerome Habimana, the ECD treasurer, on behalf of the East-Central Africa Division.¹³

In the same year 2016, AWR, through the ECD, donated a generator, STL, a 3-kilowatt FM transmitter, and four pairs of antennas with their connectors. This equipment expanded transmission range and solved the power challenges, hence improving the radio station’s stability. The radio station’s stability and wide coverage have

resulted in listenership growth from 20,000 people in 2016 to around 18 million people in 2021. It draws an audience from all over the region and outside Uganda to parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).¹⁴

AWR-102.9 Light FM, The Voice of Hope Radio was officially launched on March 21, 2015, by Dowell Chow, AWR world president, in the presence of the three ECD officers, Blasius Ruguri, Nathaniel Walemba, and Jerome Habimana, and Steven Bina, communication director of the ECD. Their Uganda Union counterparts were also in attendance. Many people were involved in the preparation for the historic day. Under the direction of Walemba at ECD, the logo was prepared by Joshua Safari and Justus Ngandwa, both of the ECD Media Center, Nairobi, in consultation with the Rwenzori Field and Uganda Union.¹⁵ Recognizing Light FM's affiliation AWR, the Rwenzori Field administration voted to adopt the current name as AWR-102.9 Light FM with the tag line "The Voice of Hope."¹⁶ The process of implementation took eleven years, from 2004 to 2015 when the radio station finally began airing.¹⁷

Programming

All programs and music on AWR-102.9 Light FM, are broadcasted in harmony with the beliefs and principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Rwenzori Field and AWR-102.9 Light FM allow its programs to be used and distributed by AWR through other media outlets, such as internet archiving and podcasting, at no cost to AWR. All materials used in production of programs comply with appropriate international and national laws regarding copyright, royalties, and any other intellectual property right issues.

AWR-102.9 Light FM runs six major programs with some segments a day. *Zukuka Nafee* (Wake Up With Us) and *Yamabiika* (It Has Crowd) are programs that call and alert the listeners to prepare themselves for the day. *Salaam Kwa Kazi* (Have Peace as You do Your Work) hosts specialists who teach listeners how to do a particular job. It also addresses all aspects of life in relation to development and knowledge of how to handle different aspects of livelihood engagement. Other programs provide Sabbath inspiration, sundown worship, *Abana be Light* (Children of Light), and sports updates among others.

Founding Employees

AWR-102.9 Light FM, The Voice of Hope Radio was launched on March 21, 2015, by Dowell Chow, AWR world president. It started with twelve staff members who included Nzaghale Charles (station manager), Nyabosi Phebrine (program director and the first radio presenter), Bwambale Robert (chaplain), Muhindo Mark (marketer), Bwambale Baker (presenter and technician), Mbambu Faith (accountant), and Muhindo Jovia (receptionist). News anchors included Bwambale Geoffrey Venderesa, Bwambale Laziele, Biira Racheal, Jingo Zawadi, and Denis M. The staff was overseen by the field communication director, Wanzalabana Misaki Maate,

and the field president, Mutwanga Ezekiel, who chaired the board of directors.

Current Management

As of 2021, the current field communication director is Koojo Lambert. Kanyonyi Barak Geoffrey is the station manager. Bagheni Saulo serves as the station accountant, and Bwambale Robert as chaplain. Other staff members include Nyabosi Phebrine, radio personality; Bwambale Baker, program director; Bwambale Geoffrey Venderesa, producer; Baluku Owen Alton, editor; Masika Jetrace, receptionist; and Kihuhuni Joblet, Baluku Fredson, Ajuna Pleasure, and Kasasya Generous, radio personalities.

Impact in the Community

AWR-102.9 Light FM is the only Christian radio station in the Rwenzori Region, which covers Kasese, Kabarole, Kamwenge, Bushenyi, Mbarara, Rubirizi, Kagadi, Kabale, Rukungiri, Mitoma, Buhwejju, Kyenjojo, Mityana, Kanungu, Sheema, Ishongororo, Kisoro, Rukungiri, Bundibugyo, Ntoroko, Kibale, Hoima, Kagadi, Mubende, Mityana-Kampala, Eastern DRC. The radio station's reach extends beyond this range through online radio and media platforms. The station currently operates at 1000 watts or one kilowatt. AWR-102.9 Light FM is accredited and licensed by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC).

With programs featuring spirituality, family life, socio-economic development, peace, interpersonal relationships, and inspiring Christian music, AWR-102.9 Light FM has positively impacted church members and increased the number of baptisms in its listening area. There is a clear difference between before and after the radio station began broadcasting. Socio-economic development in the Rwenzori Field and beyond is visible. Programs are produced in the commonly used languages of Lhukonzo, Luganda, Runyankole, Rutoro, Rukiga, Runyoro, Swahili, English, Lhubwise, and Kinande, the latter two for listeners in the DRC. The radio station plays a significant role in evangelism and transforming people's lifestyles. In 2020, the Rwenzori Field conducted a virtual camp meeting in which over 5000 families participated while in their homes since Covid-19 prevented people from congregating. As a result of those meetings, 940 people were baptized. AWR-102.9 Light FM has also assisted evangelism efforts by the Amazing Facts team in the Rwenzori Region. Through radio preaching and other means, many souls have been won for Christ. In Kyalhumba, an area dominated by the Catholic Church, more than 116 converts have been baptized.

Since it began broadcasting in 2015, AWR-10.9 Light FM programming has consistently contributed to the baptism of new members: year 2015 (116 baptisms), year 2016 (135 baptisms), year 2017 (897 baptisms), year 2018 (661 baptisms), year 2019 (45 baptisms), year 2020 (470 baptisms), and the first half of 2021 (72 baptisms).

AWR-102.9 Light FM offers a cost effective, time efficient, and measurable marketing medium with maximum flexibility and creativity. It broadcasts advertising from businesses that conform to Adventist Church beliefs, and

people who advertise through it are flourishing in business while enjoying wide coverage at an affordable cost and effective means. AWR-102.9 Light FM listener clubs have been formed. Each of these clubs is involved in a variety of social and economic development services for the different communities in which they are located. In Kanyampara and Bughalitsa villages ten houses have been constructed so for vulnerable, elderly people. In other places, savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) have offered small scale loans at affordable rates for the well-being of society. Eighty-seven couples have benefited from weddings funded by clubs, land has been purchased for six church members, and school fees have been paid for orphaned children from thirty-five families. Forty-six families have benefited from their homes being repaired. Other services have included reconciling family members, mediated land disputes, catering services, free medical camps, sending people to job training, and donations to over fifty-two churches, mosques, schools, and conferences.

Frequency is the key to promoting and conveying messages. All messages are conveyed through multiple internet channels, such as website, Facebook, and Twitter.

Challenges

AWR-102.9 Light FM listeners frequently face mistreatment by community religious leaders. Some people have been disfellowshipped from non-Adventist churches when it was discovered they listen to the station. For this reason, many people listen privately at night, from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., when they will be undisturbed.

SOURCES

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NOTES

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