

**Interview with Aldo Havugimana, Managing Director of Radio Salus in Butare (Rwanda)**

**How did you come across with the idea of having a blind journalist at Radio Salus?**

This student is from the NUR School of Journalism and Communication; he just came to the station like any other student.

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**What kind of feedback Radio Salus has received about having him as an announcer?**

Those who are informed were very much excited by the idea that a blind could work at Salus, and it was seen as the promotion of disabled people.

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**Have you changed the programming of the radio according to your blind reporter?**

No changes made; all we did is to integrate him. He works in live programmes and is coupled with a colleague to help him on telephone, computer and mixer.

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**What overall impact the fact of having a blind reporter at your radio has had and will have in the future?**

This is the first time in Rwanda that a blind works in a radio station. This will definitely be an example that blind people should not be left behind, because they are able to study and work (he is now in second year of journalism and communication at NUR). It will, therefore, strengthen self confidence of disabled people.

The fact that our station can now receive and communicate written messages from blind people, will give voice to the blind who are generally excluded from the media.

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**Has your targeted audience changed or broadened with the fact of having a blind reporter?**

We hope to capture more audience from disabled people, who consider Radio Salus as a means of promotion for disabled people, giving them opportunity to be integrated in work environment.

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**What role Radio Salus plays in Rwanda? How important is it? Which is the main result of this UNESCO/EC-funded project?**

Very hard task! To summarise the impact of the radio station that serves as a major source of information to millions of Rwandans and Burundi.

Firstly, Radio Salus provided highly effective direct radio experience to students. It has contributed a lot to improving the quality of journalism training in Rwanda: our students are being recruited by Rwandan media when they are still in their last year of study. The fact that three of our trainees have won prizes at the continental level demonstrates the high quality of our training and its fruitful output.

Secondly, Radio Salus offers the voice to voiceless. Through its daily and weekly programmes it has given the voice to millions of ordinary citizens in all Rwandan villages and towns. Before radio was seen as the channel of official communications; today we are seen as people's voice that

communicates news, knowledge and opinions. Thanks to this, we gained people's confidence. Every day at Radio Salus we receive hundreds letters: short messages from our listeners all over the country. Most of people passing by Butare town want to come to see the station before going back home. Others come to give news hints to our journalists, to share their new songs or to request re-broadcasting of some programmes they found interesting.

Thirdly, Radio Salus is a channel for social marketing and commercial advertising. It helped NGOs with their social campaigns against HIV and AIDS, malaria, gender-based violence, etc. It also helped small businesses and enterprises advertise their products, thus demystifying the thinking that advertising is meant only for big companies.

And finally, Radio Salus offers quality programmes to Rwandan audience. "Radio Salus plays the role of exemplary radio station in Rwanda", said Rwandan Minister of Information during her visit to us in 2008. The Minister's statement summarises the opinion of Rwandans about Radio Salus programmes, which are mainly based on their concerns. Many of our programmes got prizes in Rwanda, and our sports feature was rated number one in the country in 2007. Briefly Radio Salus could be qualified as a quality radio station, ensuring effective training of future broadcasters and giving the voice to voiceless.