

## First ever homegrown Hausa-language channel now on air

On 28 June 2014 the first ever indigenously produced 24-hour channel catering to Hausa-speaking people launched in northern Nigeria.

Available free-to-air on the Nilesat platform, AREWA 24 ('arewa' is Hausa for 'north'), is a lifestyle and entertainment channel offering a variety of programming, with a significant contingent of original, Hausa-language productions across genres.

The channel came into being with the backing of American funds, the result of a grant awarded to San Francisco-based non-governmental organisation, Equal Access International, which exists to stimulate positive social change by delivering and facilitating access to media and technology in underserved regions of the world. "The goal was simple," says the channel's president Jacob Arback. "Create a television platform and voice in Hausa through which northern Nigerians

could tell their own stories in their own voices and celebrate their own music, film and local culture and build an original production capability for the long term."

AREWA 24 is family-focused and has placed particular emphasis on youth culture, expressed through chat, magazine, music and sports programmes, as well as soap operas and music shows.

Although set up with US backing, the channel's content is produced for and about northern Nigerians, as well as Hausa speakers in the surrounding countries. While the channel is only a few months old, it already produces 10 original shows. These include, among others: the daily morning show *Gari Ya Waye* (Daybreak); the primetime drama series *Dadin Kowa*, produced entirely in-house and launched on 24 January; the sport show *Jaruman Wasanni*; *Kundin Kannywood*, which focuses on the northern Nigerian film industry,



**MOTHER TONGUE:** AREWA24's daily breakfast show *Gari Ya Waye*

nicknamed 'Kannywood', (setting it apart from the predominantly English and Yoruba-language Nollywood, based in and around Lagos); and a culture show called *Waiwaye*.

The advent of AREWA24 is good news, not only for television viewers in the region but also for the creative and technical professionals employed by the channel.

"In order to staff the channel we have hired professionals from the Hausa film industry, from the local television industry, as well as bright, talented university mass communication graduates," Arback explains. "What we ultimately found was that there were plenty of young, creative and wholly dedicated talent already in the market and just looking for the opportunity to

use their skills. We now have 56 northern Nigerian executive producers, editors, on-air talent, finance professionals, field producers, translators, writers, directors, camera operators, sound technicians and others, who are building a highly competitive television channel."

Despite the problems of setting up a new channel and the added infrastructural and security challenges presented by operating in Nigeria's troubled north, AREWA24's initial success has exceeded expectations. The channel's success is proof of the hunger that exists across the continent for homegrown content, in indigenous languages and that is drawn from and speaks to local cultures. – **Warren Holden**