

Community Radio: Its Impact and Challenges to its Development

Working Group Report

October 9, 2007



The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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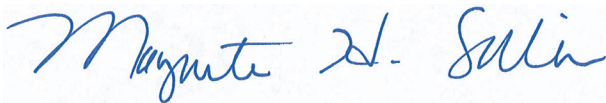
Preface

On October 9, 2007, the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy organized a working group to discuss the social impact of community radio and models for its sustainable development, as well as other key issues affecting community radio development, including an enabling environment and funding strategies.

CIMA is grateful for the valuable contributions of the working group participants. We extend our particular thanks to Joan Mower, public affairs officer at the Sudan Programs Group of the U.S. Department of State, for her skillful moderation of this important topic; to William Siemering, president of Developing Radio Partners, for his informative presentation and for providing a definition of ‘community radio’; and to Anahit Khachatryan for serving as the rapporteur and organizing the discussion into a consensus report.

We would also like to acknowledge Kim Mahling Clark, Kate Coyer, Kreszentia Duer, Carole Frampton, Daoud Kuttub, George Papagiannis, William Ryerson, and Paul-André Wilton for their insightful presentations that facilitated the group’s discussion and structured much of the debate.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.



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Executive Summary

On October 9, 2007, CIMA convened a working group of 27 experts to examine the impact of community radio, as well as the role and challenges of community radio development within the larger context of media development. The working group included community radio developers and activists, representatives from donor and implementing organizations, as well as scholars and policymakers. The goal of the one-day meeting was to form recommendations for policymakers on whether and how to address community radio development within larger assistance initiatives.

The contributions of the participants were as diverse as their backgrounds and affiliations. Representatives of implementing organizations brought firsthand accounts of where and why community radio has been effective, what projects have been successful or unsuccessful and why, and what the main challenges have been. The group discussed creating an enabling environment for community radio development, issues related to the sustainability of community radio stations, and appropriate assistance strategies that donors and implementers should consider.

This report highlights the working group's main points of discussion and recommendations. The group's major findings can be summarized as follows:

- The impact of independent media on society is cross-cutting and encompassing, and thus should be regarded as a unique development sector. Within media development, it is essential to focus on community

radio as a powerful source for empowerment, especially for disenfranchised and marginalized groups in society. Research efforts to quantify, analyze, and draw conclusions regarding the impact of community radio are essential and can serve as a sound basis for assistance advocacy.

- The most important aspects of community radio, which serves a geographic group or a community of interest, include the broad participation by community members—often on a volunteer basis—and the ownership and control of the station by the community through a board of governors that is representative of the community and responsive to the diversity of its needs.
- Where local need and potential is present, but the legal and political environment conducive to community radio development is absent, the international development community should find ways to encourage governments to adopt and enforce legislation and regulations necessary for community radio to operate.
- Long-term commitment and coordinated efforts are necessary for the institutional development of community radio.
- Financial sustainability is a major challenge for community radio stations. Possible solutions to boost struggling community radio efforts include a well-coordinated pooled

funding source, or a microcredit loan system for community radio development that is not subject to donor priorities.

- Donor support is not limitless. Although sustainability of funding recipients should not be the primary objective of donors, funding strategies and development models should encourage sustainability in the long run. Donors should provide equipment and technological support adequate for the local setting, and comprehensive training preparing funding recipients for sustainability even in changing environments.
- Networks of community radio stations can serve as effective and efficient fora for exchange of programming, creation of national news, and information programs. Professional associations can play a vital role in establishing professional codes of ethics, identifying training needs, and establishing training programs. They can also serve as advocates for the sector, soliciting more funds for development. Associations and networks can thus become focal points for donor assistance.
- The media assistance community should be alert to new prospects for community radio development through digitization and the Internet.

Background

In the view of community radio developers, community radio stations often “serve as the most trusted agent in town that brings change.”¹ Community radio plays a vital role in building vibrant communities, in mobilizing groups to action by informing and empowering citizens, in giving voice to the marginalized groups of society, and in bringing community needs to the attention of local and even national governments. The scope of the actual and potential impact of community radio is wide-ranging, many agree, as are the challenges associated with community radio development.

Community radio activists who have seen both the benefits and the difficulties of community radio claim that the donor community does not fully recognize the wide-ranging benefits of community radio in development and thus fail to respond to the challenges of this media sector. To address this gap, 27 participants—including community radio developers and activists, representatives from donor and implementing organizations supporting and involved in community radio projects, as well as scholars and policymakers—came together under the auspices of the Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy to explore the role funders, particularly the U.S. government, can play in fostering community radio development.

Prior to the discussion, Developing Radio Partners President William Siemerling offered a working (although non-exhaustive) definition of community radio:

“Community radio that serves a geographic group or community of interest is licensed to a nonprofit organization² to serve the public interest by:

- electing a governing board that reflects the diversity of the community, defines the mission, sets policy, is financially responsible, and appoints the manager;
- creating structures and processes to identify community needs and interests that inform programming decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of the programming;
- ensuring broad participation in programming, giving value to communication among the people to facilitate positive change, not simply relaying information to the citizen;
- ensuring that the service is trustworthy, accurate, and independent of outside influences, be they government, [commercial,³] special interests, or religions.”⁴

The slogan of a community radio station in Mongolia—“Your radio is listening”—speaks volumes about the nature of this medium. Community radio is about the horizontal exchange of information—a participatory interaction between the community and the radio station rather than a vertical, one-way communication method, delivering information from a medium to the public. The most important aspects of community radio, the participants emphasized,

include broad participation by community members—often on a volunteer basis—and the ownership and control of the station by the community through a board of governors that is representative of the community and responsive to the diversity of its needs. Community radio involves community organization, joint thinking and decision-making, all of which, one development expert noted, entail great potential for empowering communities and building a democratic society.

The Social Impact of Community Radio

Presenters:

- *Carole Frampton, Paul-André Wilton, Search for Common Ground*
- *William Ryerson, Population Media Center*
- *William Siemering, Developing Radio Partners*
- *George Papagiannis, Internews Network*

The power of community radio to mobilize groups and bring change to societies is well recognized. This power can, however, also be manipulated and used to spread hate and violence, as was the case in Rwanda in 1994.⁵ Cautioning against the negative potential of community radio, Carole Frampton of Search for Common Ground demonstrated how her organization relied on community radio to prevent the spillover of violence from Rwanda to Burundi by focusing on bringing people together and fostering dialogue and peace. By bringing journalists from each of the two ethnic groups that were in conflict and building on their collaboration, Search for Common Ground helped establish the first independent radio production studio—Studio Ijambo—in Burundi, she said. Eleven independent radio stations followed. According to Frampton, not only did this small and grass-roots effort show that ethnic collaboration and finding solutions based on dialogue was possible, it also helped develop new standards and balanced reporting skills, representing all the voices of the community that other radio stations later emulated. After the initial objective of creating dialogue was successfully achieved, Frampton said, Search for Common Ground’s focus shifted from the core of the conflict to capacity-building through skills training and providing direct

assistance. The stations also helped improve the level of the public’s media literacy, as people could “compare the good stations to others and see what real media should look like,” she said. Listening and discussion clubs and other initiatives to engage the community beyond radio made the impact of the latter even stronger, she added.

Frampton said that community radio developers must have a clear strategy and vision of what they want to achieve. With community radio, “the focus is on dialogue, on finding solutions, on the future rather than who did what to whom. . . , on bringing all the stakeholders together and through the radio trying to calm situations down and move the society toward peace and democracy,” she said. Donors should consider creating, supporting, and strengthening networks such as the Independent Radio Network (IRN) in Sierra Leone, she said, as an effective way to help amplify the impact of this proven and practical tool for social change. Her colleague Paul-André Wilton demonstrated the important role IRN played in the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone by providing a model standard of reporting for its 20 stations and leading the media response.

IRN, which started in 2002 with eight member stations, united 420 reporters from 20 stations by the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone. They produced independent, trustworthy, and timely programming and information by having local voices on air from all over the country—from the most remote areas to large polling stations, said Wilton. Through live interviews and analyses, the reporters provided context to help listeners understand the complexity of the elections,

and through shadow vote counts, helped monitor election results. IRN makes local radio national. Through collaboration and coordination, these 20 membership radio stations conduct national broadcasts through the local radio stations. According to Wilton, success came from the credibility the stations gained through the gradual and strategic evolution of the network's capacity over five years, their commitment to become a credible platform for information by providing both national and local news, and the expert technical and editorial assistance IRN received from Search for Common Ground in partnership with Developing Radio Partners.

The potential of community radio to bring about social change is not a matter of mere observation but, as Population Media Center President William Ryerson demonstrated, an empirically proven fact based on quantifiable and statistically analyzed results. Focusing on women's rights promotion, HIV rates reduction, family planning, reproductive health issues, and prevention of child trafficking, the Center uses community radio to produce behavioral change among large audiences in 15 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, educating through entertainment, including with soap opera characters. The highly significant results of pre- and post-broadcast random-sample surveys, Ryerson noted, indicated positive changes in the behavior of those who listened to the programming. In Ethiopia, for example, those who listened to special programming on HIV were more likely to be tested for

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the virus than non-listeners. This approach builds on the power of media to create high emotional contexts that help make information more memorable, and the Population Media Center relies on community radio as the most appropriate and cost-effective medium to reach its target audiences.

According to the estimates of a project in Tanzania, for example, the cost of getting people to take steps to avoid HIV infection was eight cents per listener.

William Siemering, president of Developing Radio Partners and founding member of National Public Radio's Board of Directors, described the work of community radio developers as "scattering seeds"—alluding to the original meaning of "broadcast"—the results

of which take time to ripen. Like a vaccine capable of reducing preventable diseases, he said, community radio is "a simple, effective solution" to achieve development goals, to prevent "fragile states from becoming failed states," and also to help people celebrate their own culture. The approach recommended by Developing Radio Partners, Siemering observed, is to first build the capacity of individual community radio stations that evolve out of necessity on the grass-roots level, then create an association to develop professional standards and increase the likelihood of sustainability, and finally, help individual stations unite into a network. Showing donors the effect these operative stations are having on their communities will attract more investment for

community radio development, Siemering concluded.

George Papagiannis of Internews Network shared what he called “a story of hope, a story of replacing fear with information” in the establishment of three community radio stations to reach refugee camps in eastern Chad for Sudanese refugees who fled Darfur. With funding from USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a number of private sources, the three stations with a mixed staff of 25 local Chadians and refugees from Darfur target their primary audience—refugees from Darfur—by broadcasting in local, unwritten languages that have never been on air before, as well as in Arabic and French. In constant communication with the audience, the stations have managed to air discussion on sensitive and formerly taboo issues such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. The impact of their flagship program “She Speaks, She Listens,” which aims to empower women—an essential aspect for promoting an open and democratic society, many participants agreed—is further augmented by a drama program dealing with the same subject. Surveys conducted by UNHCR have indicated that the information conveyed to the audience during eight to 10 hours of

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daily broadcasting is being incorporated into people’s lives, Papagiannis said.

Having heard the accounts of the presenters, a long-time community radio activist emphasized the importance of bringing the accomplishments of community radio—especially in post-conflict areas—to the attention of the international development community, as the Rwandan example of spreading ethnic hatred through the airwaves has long haunted the reputation of community radio, forcing media developers to resort to commercial models of radio development instead, as was his experience in Kosovo.

Based on lessons learned, the participants stressed the need to inform donors of the best ways to use community radio’s potential. One representative of an international organization said that donors should abandon their approach of “looking for a quick fix” and regarding community radio simply as a means of getting devel-

opment messages across through short-term projects. They should develop a long-term vision for investing in community radio as an institution and “be prepared to stay in for the long haul,” since real change, she continued, should come from within the community, with community radio playing a “microcosmic” role by helping the community acquire a sense of ownership and empowering people to see their impact on society. The impact of community radio

is most evident in areas having practically no other access to information, and donors should, therefore, realize the significance of investing in it as a means of making information available without necessarily having a realistic vision of achieving sustainability over a short time, a representative of one donor organization added. Donors should also avoid imposing models for individual stations to adopt, since the best models are those that develop naturally and out of necessity, a participant observed.

According to a representative of Internews Network, after the devastating earthquake in northern Pakistan in 2006, it soon became apparent there were not many stations reaching that area to report on the aftermath of the earthquake and to disseminate vital information. As a response to the emergency situation, larger radio stations created an association—something they had not been able to do before—and as an association, acquired emergency licenses that enabled smaller stations to reach the remote areas affected by the earthquake. The association and the community radio stations have remained active since the association was formed.

Community radio is generally the best tool for getting information to illiterate and poor communities, as it requires neither reading skills nor money to buy newspapers, a radio developer said. Since in many countries most media are concentrated in capital cities and heavily populated areas, and even

national media fail to reach remote areas, community radio provides the opportunity of “reaching powerless communities and giving them a voice,” he added. Even in areas where national media broadcast, the impact of a community radio broadcasting in a local language or languages is incomparable, an implementer observed.

The participants also considered contexts where community radio development is infeasible or inadequate. A government’s lack of understanding of the importance of reaching out to and communicating with marginalized or rural sectors of the population can hinder community radio development, a number of participants observed. One implementer suggested engaging appointed and elected officials as part of community radio projects to create a strong link between governments and local media.

Another implementer cautioned that the guidelines outlined for donors will prove irrelevant in regions where governments and the legal and regulatory environment hinder community radio development. In the Middle East and North Africa region, he said, discussions on the impact of community radio will matter only after there is legal reform allowing for the licensing and establishment of independent community radio stations. In terms of inadequacy of community radio development, one implementer strongly cautioned against supporting initiatives where there is clear evidence that the majority does not protect the rights of the minority within the community and will take advantage of community radio to further reinforce the disparity, be it on ethnic, political, or social basis.

Challenges to Sustainability and Funding Perspectives of Community Radio

Presenter:

- *Kim Mahling Clark, Creative Associates International, Inc.*

In 2001-07, Creative Associates International carried out a community radio strengthening project in Haiti, where—according to Kim Mahling Clark, senior associate with the company’s Communities in Transition Division—community radio developed its own identity after UNESCO’s initial setup of six stations in 1991. When Creative Associates’ project started, 40 stations were already operating. In assessing the capacity of the stations, Creative Associates looked at criteria such as their organizational development, equipment maintenance, financial management, and programming content. Just months after the capacity-building project ended, however, approximately a quarter of the stations started experiencing serious problems hindering their ability to broadcast, leading to the closure of eight stations. Major factors that led to the station closures included lack of financial sustainability and inability to maintain equipment, along with other factors beyond the control of radio station personnel, such as intermittent electricity. A number of stations were not able to meet monthly operational costs—which ranged from \$200 to \$1,000—as most funds were used to pay full-time staff.

Sustainability, many agreed, seems the biggest challenge for community radio.

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Some stations manage to generate revenue through paid announcements, such as thank you messages, birthday wishes and funeral announcements; through funding from side businesses, such as a restaurant; or through a barter system, allotting priority air time to an advertisement for a local company that has provided goods or services to the station. Active participation by volunteers, however, is the key to success for many community radio stations. As a representative of an organization that provided initial operational funding to a community radio station in northeastern Congo put it, “part-time radio volunteers who are full-time community members” can successfully maintain a station’s sustainability after donor funding ends. “If people invest their time and resources in something without any pay, it is an indication of commitment and sustainability,” a participant added. Volunteerism, nevertheless, is not universal, and there are cultures and places where it is impossible to rely on volunteers, another participant cautioned.

With community radio development, some participants observed, ensuring the financial sustainability of stations should not be the primary objective. “When I start worrying about sustainability and stop worrying about my listeners, that’s when my stations get into trouble,” an implementer with vast experience in community radio development commented. According to others, however, all aspects of sustainability—social, institutional and financial—should be incorporated into the overall strategy of community

radio development. “Thinking about your listeners, by providing them with engaging programs, is the best way to ensure both social and financial sustainability,” one community radio developer said.

The least donors and implementers can do to contribute to the sustainability of radio stations, the group agreed, is to design projects that can run with low operational costs, equip them with technologies that are appropriate for the environment of that particular community, train them to manage and maintain the equipment they receive, and help them acquire the necessary journalistic skills to produce quality programming. Funders should also be open to investing in approaches, including technical and engineering solutions, which are unconventional from donors’ perspective, but fully feasible for the local setting. “The most important thing we can train people in is how to recognize changes and to adapt to changes as they develop,” said a veteran radio developer.

Media environments change. Therefore, by training stations to identify their potential listeners, partners and funders, assistance organizations can help them develop their own business models that are more likely to prove sustainable than those imposed from outside, added another implementer based on her experience with a community radio project in Mali.

The issue of sustainability is not limited to the financial standing of a station. Alluding to a number of community radio stations

in northern Uganda that sold airtime to humanitarian organizations, an implementer noted that only one of those stations managed to maintain editorial control and present the information while also preserving the identity of the station, as opposed to the other stations, which simply aired the material as provided to them. A number of participants pointed out that donor funding can often have an adverse effect on the sustainability of community radio stations, as

Funders should be open to investing in approaches, including technical and engineering solutions, which are unconventional from donors’ perspective, but fully feasible for the local setting.

many choose to focus on areas that bring donor funding at the expense of meeting local community needs. Out of five Serbian-language stations supported in eastern Croatia, the only station that kept its community nature and managed to survive was the one that resisted donor funding and maintained its sustainability through a number of auxiliary activities,

including airing concerts sponsored by a local bar, for example, one community radio activist noted.

To avoid complete dependence on donor funding, a long-time radio developer advocated models that motivate sustainability by requiring matching funds from the onset of a project. He suggested creating a trust fund for community radio to help funding beneficiaries resist pressures put forward by donors’ specific agendas. A representative of one international organization noted that public sources of funding not subject to changing political tides are ideal for providing core operating funds for community radio. The Support Fund

for Radio Expression, set up in France in 1982, for example, had provided \$27 million to community radio development by 2004 by drawing a levy on advertising on broadcast media. The Media Diversity and Development Agency in South Africa is another publicly funded institution that provides grants to community radio stations. A significant issue to consider here is the publicity and accessibility of funding sources, since in Hungary, for example, despite the country's favorable system of funding and subsidizing community radio, many stations are unaware of existing opportunities, another participant observed.

Given the inconsistency and short-term, project-driven nature of donor assistance in many cases, a number of participants questioned whether community radio development should be dependent on donor support at all. Yet expecting the stations to support themselves entirely from the local economy is also both unfair and unfeasible, according to one participant. "The U.S. public radio wouldn't exist without federal support," and it is premature to expect community radio stations in developing countries to become sustainable on their own, a prominent community radio

developer argued. Different funding possibilities most feasible for local circumstances should therefore be explored.

Considering the funding perspectives for community radio, the group agreed that a pooled funding resource is necessary to support community radio development. One development expert nevertheless cautioned that large amounts of funding suddenly made available can distort the field, and suggested identifying niches to find appropriate models of funding to support the networking of local constituencies as a more effective solution. Another proposed approach is to introduce a micro-credit loan system for community radio, such as the Media Development Loan Fund, which would provide low-interest funding packaged with management and financial training. Another implementer noted that there will always be stations that do not fit into the specific definition of community radio adopted by a global funding source. Irrespective of the format of any global funding source, funding strategies should be flexible and comprehensive enough not to exclude such stations. Donor coordination in this regard is crucial, she added.

Ensuring an Enabling Environment for Community Radio Development

Presenters:

- **Daoud Kuttab,**
AmmanNet and Princeton University
- **Kreszentia Duer,**
World Bank Institute
- **Kate Coyer,**
Center for Global Communications Studies at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Issues of sustainability and other challenges for the functionality of community radio become relevant only when the legal and political environments allow community radio to exist. In some countries, however, the attempt to establish a station is a challenge either because there is no supportive legislation allowing it to operate freely, or the existing laws are not properly implemented. Daoud Kuttab, a Ferris professor of journalism at Princeton University, presented his experiences in establishing community radio in an unfavorable legal and political environment. Identifying the need for local and interactive news in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where media have often practiced self-censorship or been restricted in their coverage, particularly of local or national news, Kuttab in 2002 took the creative approach of launching AmmanNet—an Internet-based radio channel, thus avoiding a prohibition that existed at the time against

AmmanNet demonstrates how the Internet and the use of open-source software have enhanced possibilities for community radio development.

establishing an independent radio station in Jordan. Four years later, the Jordanian government started providing licenses to private FM stations for \$40,000 for entertainment-oriented stations and \$60,000 for those seeking to broadcast news and cover politics. AmmanNet went on air to carry out a community radio mission with a commercial model, Kuttab said. According to him, the station’s programming has had a significant impact both on policymakers and traditional media practices. After a program airing the quotidian concerns of taxi drivers, for example, revealed the latter lacked insurance, the government introduced laws to remedy the situation. The station was also a pioneer in providing live broadcast of Jordan’s parliamentary sessions. Airing live voices and news content focused on local developments, the station introduced a new practice of radio reporting that was adopted by other media, Kuttab concluded.

The AmmanNet example shows that there is an unrecognized potential for community radio in the MENA region to examine an array of essential issues that have not until now received due attention. “In a country such as Egypt with almost 100 percent radio and television penetration, why aren’t media used for development purposes?” a radio activist rhetorically inquired.

AmmanNet demonstrates how the Internet and the use of open-source software have

enhanced possibilities for community radio development. The interaction of community radio and the Internet has great potential and should be further explored, an implementer noted. Even for existing radio stations, the Internet can help them provide local news and “keep in touch with community members scattered for political or economic reasons,” said the implementer. Another participant pointed out that cell phones with radio functions that are widespread in most developing countries should also be considered for transmitting community radio programming.

Even in places with no legally licensed community radio stations, “people are going to use whatever means available to them”—be it through private and commercial licensing, public service broadcasting, or pirate radio—to carry out a community radio mission when there is such a need, said an academic with research interests in alternative media. According to her, this puts pressure on governments and policymakers to open up space for the sector, as happened in Hungary, for example, after pirate stations emerged in the post-Soviet era. Currently, community radio accounts for 25 percent of radio broadcasting in the country. The discussion that followed focused on the legal and regulatory environments enabling community radio development.

Kreszentia Duer, co-author of the newly published book *Broadcasting, Voice, and Accountability: A Public Interest Approach to Policy, Law, and Regulation*, which examines existing good practice in the field of community broadcasting, outlined the essential legal and regulatory elements enabling community radio development. In addition to the general constitutional framework supportive of free, independent,

and pluralistic media, Duer emphasized that the national legal system regulating the media sector should guarantee a subcategory of community broadcasting supported by adequate regulations and arrangements. The best approach, she continued, is to reserve 10 to 15 percent of FM frequencies for community radio, as is the case in France, Australia, and Germany. Given the proliferation of commercial stations that occurs as economies open up, there should be incentives for community broadcasters to carry out and maintain their mission of community development, Duer said.

Community radio stations thus should not be subject to the same licensing fees required for commercial broadcasters, and there should be sanctions—suspension of a community radio license, for example—for stations that become purely commercial. Transparency and independence of procedures regulating community broadcasting, as well as transparency and clarity of licensing regimes and eligibility criteria, which—as Duer stressed—should be determined in consultation with civil society groups, are absolutely crucial.

The Importance of Public Consultation

Kreszentia Duer noted a positive example of the public consultative mechanism was recently implemented in Nigeria. In 2006, Nigeria’s minister of information set up a committee that is partly governmental and partly nongovernmental in nature. The committee’s objective is to establish guidelines governing the licensing regime of community radio stations.

Duer also pointed out that there should be no restrictions on content as long as programming aims at the social development of the community, nor should there be limitations on proposed sources of revenue. The licensing regime, she said, should instead encourage multiple sources of funding, including subsidization by stations themselves, leading to their sustainability in the long run. According to Duer, transmitting power should not be limited on the basis of a general regulatory guideline; the footprint of broadcasting should rather be context-specific and defined by the needs or interests of the particular community the station is targeting. Even though the number of countries coming close to having an ideally enabling environment for community radio is very small and constrained to a few Western states, the regulatory regimes in an emerging number of developing countries, such as Mali, Ghana, and Liberia, that are “leapfrogging over old practices” is encouraging, she concluded.

Putting the above mentioned guidelines in country-specific contexts, Kate Coyer from the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, highlighted aspects of regulatory policies in India and the United Kingdom—two countries where community radio has been recently recognized as a sector for regulation. In India, implementation of the state policy for community radio adopted in 2006 and the government’s promise to license 4,000 new stations by 2008 is yet to be witnessed. Only nonprofit entities that have been reg-

The intent of good laws can be subverted by uneven and inconsistent enforcement or cumbersome and overly bureaucratic regulation and reporting requirements.

istered for at least three years and have a community-based management board are eligible for licensing. In terms of content, licensed stations are required to produce half of their programming locally and in local languages. Entertainment is not forbidden per se, but not encouraged, whereas news reporting is banned, as is the case with commercial radio. According to Coyer, funding will be one of the biggest challenges, since with no central source of funding, the system allows five minutes of advertising and sponsorship of programs only by the government. Lack of clarity and transparency of application and licensing processes is also one of the disadvantages of the new policy.

In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, the 2004 Community Radio Order foresees a transparent online application process that favors stations based on the social gain they propose to accomplish. In fact, applicants can specify the area they want to reach with an option of either FM frequencies with a four–six kilometer range or AM frequencies for wider reach. The Community Radio Fund has a £500,000 (\$1 million) annual budget, with a board responsible for allocation of funding that is separate from the one making licensing decisions. The regulations also specify that more than half of the funding cannot come from a single source, including advertising and program sponsorship, thus fostering diversity of funding sources.

Concluding the discussion on legal and regulatory regimes enabling community radio development, the participants agreed

that even with the most favorable laws, implementation is crucial. “The intent of good laws can be subverted by uneven and inconsistent enforcement or cumbersome and overly bureaucratic regulation and reporting requirements,” one participant summarized. A veteran community radio activist with experience both in the United States and abroad cautioned against time-consuming and complicated regulations, including accounting and auditing requirements, which shifts the focus away from the work of a community station to compliance. Implementation of regulations, he continued, should be simplified so that “a station trying to get a portion of public funding does not forget the duty to serve the community.”

Recommendations

Prior to agreeing on specific recommendations for community radio development, the participants reinforced the need to regard media as a distinct sector for development rather than as an auxiliary of larger development projects, as is often the case. “Up to now there have been no serious efforts to create an enabling environment,” lamented a representative of an implementing organization, urging initiatives that support the development of infrastructure necessary for independent and sustainable media to emerge. He highlighted the significance of having quantifiable evidence of media’s impact—community radio in this case—to advocate assistance to media as an end and not only as a means for development.

“Community radio is an extremely important part of the whole media sector,” one participant said. As a result of the daylong discussion, the group reiterated the need for focusing on community radio development as an essential part of media development and also agreed on a number of general and specific recommendations addressed to policymakers, funders, and implementers, as well as all those concerned with community radio development.

Influencing Unfavorable Environments

- Community radio is essential for empowering disenfranchised sectors of a population and bringing about democratic and social change. Where local need and potential is present, but the legal and political environment conducive to community radio development is absent, the interna-

tional development community should find ways to encourage governments to adopt and enforce legislation and regulations necessary for opening up space to community radio. One option is for the United States to earmark funds for media development and direct aid-recipient governments to allocate resources for the development of the community broadcasting sector.

Funding

- Donor funding is crucial for community radio development. Donors should invest in the development of community radio as an institution and not as a quick means of getting information across to a community as part of a larger project. This approach requires long-term commitment and coordinated efforts on behalf of donors.
- There should be a pooled resource fund or a microcredit loan system for community radio development that is not subject to the political or other priorities of a given donor. Funding allocation strategies should be carefully designed not to distort the sector and not to exclude groups that may not necessarily fit into the legal definition of community radio but carry out such a mission.
- Donor support is not limitless. Although sustainability of funding recipients should not be the primary objective of donors, funding strategies and models should encourage financial sustainability in the long run.

Sustainability, Capacity Building and Adequacy of Assistance

- Community radio stations should be able to continue functioning after assistance projects end. Therefore:
 - Assistance organizations should design projects in a way to ensure that governance of a community radio station is not parachuted in from outside and that the community acquires a sense of ownership. All projects should respond to existing needs and encourage input from the community to ensure a participatory, two-way exchange of information.
 - Assistance and implementing organizations should be careful not to overbuild community radio stations. They should provide equipment and technological support appropriate for the local environment and compatible with the skills of the operating personnel, who are often volunteers. Models and tools that help maximize limited resources should be developed and made accessible to local stations.
 - Training should not be ad hoc. Implementing organizations should incorporate training of management, financial, technical, equipment maintenance, and journalistic skills into their projects. Most importantly, they should prepare project beneficiaries to face and adapt to change.
 - Donors and implementers should be more open to local solutions that emerge on the ground.
- Community radio developers should

invest in the development of professional associations as they can play a vital role in establishing professional codes of ethics, identifying training needs and establishing training programs, as well as providing information resources on financial, auditing, grant writing, and grant reporting requirements. Developers should also foster the creation of networks of community radio stations as effective and efficient fora for exchange of programming and creation of national news and information programs. Networks should be a one-stop shop for donors to support.

- Professional associations can play a vital role. They can also serve as advocates for the sector, soliciting more funds for the sector's development.
- Donors should invest in the development of a globally accessible clearinghouse for exchange of information, ideas, contacts, and programming.

Measuring Impact

- The impact of community radio is measurable. Donors should allocate substantial resources necessary for rigorous quantitative and qualitative research as part of every media assistance initiative, including community radio projects, to measure their effects.

Tying Community Radio to the Digital World

- Donors and implementers should explore how new technologies and the Internet can contribute to community radio development, focusing on issues ranging from program exchanges using the Internet to conversion to digital frequencies.

Endnotes

¹ William Siemering, “What is Community Radio?”, October 2007, 1 (background paper, Working Group Meeting on Community Radio Development, Center for International Media Assistance, National Endowment for Democracy, October 9, 2007).

² One working group participant noted, however, that, where there is no provision for community radio in the law, some community stations are not licensed to non-governmental organizations, but rather universities or individuals, while still serving as community stations.

³ This word was added to the definition of community radio at the suggestion of a working group participant.

⁴ Siemering, “What is Community Radio?”, 3-4.

⁵ This is a reference to radio broadcasts in Rwanda, in particular by Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines, which incited violence by ethnic Hutus against Tutsis during the 1994 genocide. According to many experts on the genocide, such broadcasts played a major role in perpetrating the killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Appendix

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