



**fesmedia** **Africa** *series*

**Participation Pays**  
The Sustainability of Community  
Broadcasting in Perspective

*By David Lush and Gabriel Uργοiti*

**2012**

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# 1. Introduction

This publication in the *fesmedia series* is based on the detailed study conducted by David Lush and Gabriel Urgoiti, who in 2011 thoroughly researched the Namibian community broadcasting sector with a view to addressing questions of sustainability. Namibia was one of the first African countries to legislate for community broadcasting. But two decades after the passing of this law, almost all the nine broadcasters operating on community licenses are struggling to survive. Prompted by the funding problems of one these broadcasters, the study was to take a broader view of the sector and identify general trends and sustainability issues common to most of the broadcasters, covering a variety of aspects such as ownership and governance, finance and marketing, content production and audience orientation, policy and legislation, human resources and administration. Furthermore, the literature review and methodology of the research were developed in a way that allows them to be used to assess the sustainability of community broadcasting in other countries.

Namibia is unusual in many ways. Among others it is a large country (approx. 824,300 square kilometres) with a small population (2-2.5 million people) with subsequently a small media consumer base and a small advertising market. Compared to countries with denser populations the question of how many media outlets and especially how many community broadcasters can be sustained is especially pertinent. Despite its relatively small population, around twelve languages and numerous dialects are spoken in Namibia. In the past, communities - from the smallest farm to the largest city - were segregated during more than a century of colonial and apartheid rule, the legacy of which continues to have a profound influence on Namibian society today. Hence listener and viewer communities sharing the same language and cultural norms are smaller still, further complicating efforts to make community broadcasting in Namibia sustainable.

Nonetheless, many issues emerging from this study of Namibian community broadcasters as well as its core questions and findings seem to be relevant to community broadcasters beyond Namibia's borders. The current publication is designed to make the core findings of the larger study easily accessible in the hope that they prove to be useful to community broadcasters and other interested parties inside and outside Namibia.

Fesmedia Africa's interest in the sustainability of the community broadcasting sector can be seen in the context of its efforts to promote diversity, relevance and quality of media content. Community broadcasting could be playing an even greater role in contributing not only to this diversity and to the production of locally relevant programming, but also to the social, economic and democratic development of the communities served.

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\* The complete study can be found at <http://fesmedia.org/statements-and-reports/detail/datum/2011/11/03/participation-and-trust-the-key-new-study-pilots-methodology-for-assessing-sustainability-of-commun/>.

## 2. Principles of Community Broadcasting

Community broadcasting is what other forms of broadcasting are not. Community broadcasters should exist as an alternative to other media. One clear difference between the community and other broadcasters is the participation of their listeners in running the station. This participation may be at different levels, and to varying degrees. But the main aim of the community broadcasting sector is to give a voice to those who were not heard before; to enable them to develop their communities and to hear different information (Lloyd 2000, Tashivo 2009).

Taking into account many different examples and descriptions of community broadcasters, Fairbairn (2009) found that there is agreement on four principles that are the pillars of community broadcasting: Community ownership and control, community participation, community service and a not-for-profit business model. Girard (2007) adds the principle of “independence” to this list.

### Key principles of community broadcasting

*(Girard 2007, Fairbairn 2009)*

- Community ownership and control
- Community participation
- Community service
- Independence
- Not-for-profit business model

### Community ownership and control

Community ownership operates at both practical level and at the level of community perception. Both levels are important; community media are more sustainable when communities actually own the media in question and when there is a strong sense of ownership within the community (Fairbairn, 2009). In some cases the legal owner is the community itself, via an association established for the purpose. In others the legal owner is a non-profit group, a cooperative, an NGO, a municipality, or even a company acting on behalf of the community. Whatever the legal structure, stakeholders from the community have a say in developing the broadcaster’s policies and objectives, and community members have both a sense of ownership

and a real ability to shape the station to suit their wishes and needs (Girard 2007). Where governance structures are representative and processes are democratic, a community service is more likely to be sustainable (Fairbairn 2009).

### **Community participation**

Within community participation lies the formula necessary to create a station that listeners tune in to every day, and which community members identify with and support. Of course a station needs things like equipment, resources and skills in management, administration, radio production and broadcasting, but all this will not be enough if real and ongoing participation by the community is not achieved (Urgoiti 1999). Meaningful participation happens at all levels, and includes activities such as involvement in the station's governance structures, consultation on programme topics and formats, training, the production and distribution of programmes, audience research, and finance. Genuine participation generates a strong sense of community ownership whereby broadcasting is demystified because community members see and understand for themselves how the medium works (Fairbairn 2009).

### **Community service**

Community broadcasting exists to support and contribute to a community's social, economic and cultural development, although each station has its own way of achieving this (Girard 2007). According to Fairbairn (2009), a quality service is one that:

- validates and strengthens communities,
- covers topics that are relevant to the community,
- encourages community discussion and debate,
- facilitates community participation in production and dissemination of content,
- ensures that voices of marginalised, stigmatised, and repressed sectors of communities are heard, and
- provides space for perspectives and views that are not usually voiced through the mainstream media.

### **Independence**

Regardless of who owns them, community media should be independent of government, donors, advertisers and other institutions. This does not mean that they do not have relationships with these institutions, or that they cannot receive funding from them. But this relationship must be transparent and cannot compromise the station's independence. When money is involved,

there is always the potential for independence to be compromised. Therefore, funding relationships need to be governed by clear and transparent agreements that protect the non-partisan nature of service broadcasters provide to their communities. These agreements should operate within the boundaries defined by the law, and the constitution or guiding principles of the station (Girard 2007).

### **Not-for-profit**

A not-for-profit structure is an important way of distinguishing community media from other media forms, and safeguards community media from purely commercial interests. Again, interpretation of this principle varies. In some countries, a non-profit structure is provided for in laws governing community broadcasters. But in countries with no community media legislation, some community media initiatives operate as businesses, but still provide a vibrant community service. This not-for-profit status does not mean a broadcaster cannot generate income from a variety of sources (e.g. advertising, listener's subscriptions, community member's contributions, sponsorship, donor funding etc). It means that the money it makes is reinvested into the station and the community (Mtimde 2000). However, the onus is on broadcasters to show that they are re-investing surplus income, rather than enriching individuals, and some countries have regulations that enforce financial accountability and transparency. Public accountability generates trust, and trust is more likely to attract support from the community and other funders (Fairbairn 2009). Therefore, strong and effective financial planning and management are the foundation of financial sustainability for community media (Ibid).

### 3. *The Sustainability of Community Broadcasting*

For community broadcasters the world over, “sustainability” – the ability to keep something going either continuously or for a period of time – is like the mythical pot of gold that lies at the end of the rainbow. Everyone talks about it but no one can lay their hands on it! Numerous are the articles, guidebooks, seminars and conferences dealing with this critical issue. But only one thing seems to be certain: community broadcasters, in rich countries as well as poor, struggle to sustain themselves.

#### **Framework for sustainability**

Part of the problem is that, until recently, sustainability was mostly thought of in terms of money. Mtimde et al (2000) only talked about “financial sustainability” in their definitive resource guide for African community broadcasters. They did not really link the democratic principles of community broadcasting they wrote about so eloquently with the modalities of generating the income that all stations need in order to operate.

As the body of evidence and experience of community broadcasting has grown, sustainability has been seen to be a much broader and more complex concept, and should be seen in the light of a concerted, ongoing effort to make any community media initiative viable and functional (Tashivo 2009 and Hussain 2008).

Gumucio Dagon (2001) represents the thinking of academics and activists alike when he broke the concept of sustainability into three components:

- **Social sustainability:** This refers to community ownership of the station and participation in the production and airing of programmes at both decision-making and operational levels. Only communities that have “appropriated” a communication process can make it socially sustainable. There is more to this than simply getting community members to use the equipment and to present programmes.
- **Institutional sustainability:** This refers to the ways in which broadcasters function; station policies, democratic processes, management styles, internal relationships and practices, and partnerships with external

agencies. Institutional sustainability is influenced by the external environment, in particular the presence or absence of enabling laws, policies and regulations.

- Financial sustainability: This is about a broadcaster's finances, its income-generating potential, and how money is used and accounted for. This has a lot to do with the social and institutional environment. Communities that are involved in and identify with a broadcaster are more likely to make sure it has enough money to function. Meanwhile, laws and regulations should also facilitate broadcasters' access to funding from local, national and international sources.

Therefore, Gumucio Dagron believes that *social and institutional sustainability are the foundation on which financial sustainability is built*. However, broadcasters still struggle to make this link, and remain understandably pre-occupied with financial sustainability. In its impact assessment of community radio, AMARC (2007) found that "financial and technological sustainability remain a challenge that often distract community radio practitioners from dedicating themselves to ameliorate radio production, increased community participation and the pertinence of programming."

## 4. *Methodology*

The study of the Namibian community broadcasting sector employed a qualitative methodology in order to explore in-depth the complexity of community broadcasting sustainability. Because of the many varied factors that can influence sustainability, a combination of semi-structured questions and focus group discussions was used, as these tools gave the flexibility to pursue various lines of inquiry, depending on the issues raised by those being interviewed. As far as possible, the study sought to involve Namibia's community broadcasters in every stage of the study.

The methodology comprised the following steps:

### **Step 1: 1st consultative workshop with broadcasters**

This workshop served to enable representatives of Namibia's community broadcasters to understand the study, and to have a say in its design. The representatives discussed the main findings of the literature review, and agreed on the study's analytical framework, sample and tools. The workshop also enabled the researchers to gain an initial understanding of the sector and the representatives' views on sustainability.

### **Step 2: Development and testing of tools**

The interview and focus group guidelines were developed around the framework agreed by the station representatives during the consultative workshop. The questions sought to address the sustainability issues identified during both the literature review and the consultative workshop. A separate tool was developed for each group of people that made up the study's sample, although all the tools were based on the same framework (see 'Analysis Framework' below).

### **Step 3: Fieldwork and sample**

The community broadcasters attending the consultative workshop agreed on a sample that was representative of the sector in Namibia as a whole. The study's sample was made up of one station broadcasting to a rural community, one station broadcasting to a peri-urban community, one station broadcasting to an urban community, and one station broadcasting to a community of interest.

It was also agreed that, at each station visited, semi-structured interviews with members of the station's management and some members of the board would be conducted. Furthermore, focus group discussions with groups of listeners and volunteers would be carried out. The station managers identified the board members, listeners and volunteers from their respective stations.

In addition, each station in the sample was asked to provide the following materials to allow the researchers to cross check information obtained during the field work:

- Deed of trust/constitution
- Organisational chart
- Annual financial statements
- Monthly budget
- Broadcast licence
- Operating policies: programme schedule, advertising policy, volunteer policy, HR policy, equipment protocols, code of conduct
- Samples of programmes that stations managers considered "good" (one programme) and "not so good" (one programme), as well as a news bulletin if the station broadcast news.

Participants of the first consultative workshop also agreed that the researchers should talk to representatives of organisations and institutions that worked with, and had an influence on the sustainability of community broadcasters, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donor and training institutions, technical service providers, and the broadcasting regulator.

#### Step 4: **Process information**

Following the field work, the information gathered was arranged against the variables in the analysis framework (see below). This made it possible to compare what all the different respondents said in relation to the key principles of community broadcasting within each area of sustainability (social, institutional and financial).

#### Step 5: **2nd consultative workshop with broadcasters**

Once more the representatives of the community broadcasters came together in a workshop, where the findings of the study were discussed. A report of the findings was circulated to participants beforehand. The report included a series of key questions arising from the findings. At the workshop, the participants were asked to address these questions during facilitated discussions and group work. Based on the outcomes of these discussions, the

station representatives developed an action plan for tackling the sustainability issues they felt needed addressing. The aim was for this plan to guide the work of community broadcasters in the months and years ahead as they sought to become more sustainable.

### Analysis framework

The analytical framework used in the gathering and processing of information focussed on the three main areas of sustainability: social, institutional and financial. The study sought to assess broadcasters' performance within each area against the five key principles of community broadcasting: community ownership and control, community participation, community service, independence, and a not-for-profit business model. The following matrix provided the framework for the tools used both to gather and process informed during the study:

<b>Social sustainability</b>	<b>Institutional sustainability</b>	<b>Financial sustainability</b>
Community participation in the station and its programming	The way the station is run (governance, policies, partnerships and training)	Financial resources needed to keep the station on air
<p><b>Community ownership and control:</b> Actual ownership, sense of ownership and representation in governance structures.</p> <p><b>Community participation:</b> Involvement of community members in programming and decisions about programming; making the station and its programming accessible to, and representative of the community.</p> <p><b>Community service:</b> How the station contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of the community.</p> <p><b>Independence:</b> The station's independence from political and economic interests.</p> <p><b>Not-for-profit business model:</b> Surplus income re-invested in the station and/or community; financial accountability to the community; transparent financial systems.</p>		

First the information gathered from each interview and focus group discussion was arranged according to this framework. This allowed for the analysis of information gathered from all “the stations” (community members, station managers, volunteers and board members) and that gathered from the “secondary stakeholders” (regulator, partner NGOs, donors, training institutions and other service providers). The findings from this analysis of “the stations” was compared with the findings from the “secondary stakeholders” analysis to see what issues and trends emerged.

### **Shortcomings**

The study provided a rare opportunity to hear what the broadcasters’ listeners had to say about their stations, particularly in light of the fact that community participation in many community broadcasters is not as strong as it could be. Therefore, it would have been worth putting more time and effort into recruiting a better cross section of listeners for the focus group discussions, rather than relying on the stations to find people to take part in the listeners’ groups. As it turned out, many of the people in the listeners’ focus groups seemed to be well known to station staff, and may not have been representative of listeners as a whole. The fact that none of the broadcasters had existing listener groups they could call upon was, in itself, indicative of the lack of community participation in the stations.

## 5. *Emerging Issues*

What follows is a summary of the main issues and trends that emerged from the comparison of findings from the study's two groups of stakeholders ("the stations" and "secondary stakeholders"). Some of these issues may resonate with those involved with community broadcasting beyond Namibia. In which case, this study and its methodology could be useful for assessing the sustainability of community broadcasters elsewhere.

### 5.1 Understanding the concepts

#### **Understanding of community broadcasting**

Those responsible for the day-to-day running of community broadcasters, as well as the Regulator seem to prioritise community broadcasting's not-for-profit business model, and its role in providing a service to a particular community (geographical or community of interest). This is a narrow understanding of community broadcasting given that these are just two of the five core principles of community broadcasting. On the other hand, secondary stakeholders and, to some extent, listeners and station board members consider community ownership and participation to be the main priorities. Community ownership and participation arguably are the cornerstones of sustainability.

#### **Understanding of sustainability**

Over time, community broadcasters have become pre-occupied with financial sustainability, and seem to have lost sight of key issues such as community ownership and participation, and the independence of their stations. Increasingly community broadcasters act and sound like commercial stations, and seem to be competing with the public and commercial sector for advertising. This may have caused the stations' community members, as well as secondary stakeholders to lose faith in the community broadcasting sector. Diversifying funding (getting a better balance between different types of income and relying less on donor funding and advertising) – a process aided by the involvement of a broader cross-section of community members in the running of stations - may help broadcasters to become more sustainable.

## 5.2 Social sustainability

### **Community ownership and control**

None of the sample stations have democratic processes to involve community members in station governance. None has board members elected by the community, and none has annual general meetings open to community members. Some stations seem to believe that community members are not suited to serving on boards, although some recognise they should do more to involve their communities. This contributes to the lack of community buy-in to many broadcasters, and the mistrust some community members seem to show those running stations. Listeners seem to have more trust in stations that endeavour to be open and transparent, particularly when it comes to finances; and this transparency encourages these communities to support their station financially. In this respect, not all communities seem to expect to have seats on boards, but need to feel they have a say in their station's affairs, and can hold their station to account if necessary.

Identification with the stations seemed to be generally low. However it is this identification and the active buy-in of communities to a station which appear to be important for the survival of community broadcasters. Stations need to remember where they come from and keep in touch with their roots.

### **Community participation and access**

Community participation in programming seems to go hand in hand with community ownership: greater participation in programming can result in greater community ownership of/buy-in to a station, as communities will identify more closely with their stations.

Most broadcasters seem to equate participation with their interaction with their audiences through phone-ins, SMS lines and interviews. However, participation in programming can - and should - involve much more than this. Stations can - and should - involve community members other than volunteers and station staff in the production of programmes. Stations can - and should - consult community members regularly about programme content, format and scheduling.

Currently this level of participation is very limited. Programming is largely produced by those paid to do so (volunteers and staff), or those paying for the privilege of broadcasting (paid-for airtime). This limits the diversity of programming, and restricts community participation, as only a few people

are involved in making programmes. This in turn limits the extent to which communities identify with their stations, because the broad diversity of community interests, needs and views tend not to be reflected in the stations' programming. To increase the number and diversity of people involved in programming, stations could look for volunteers who are not necessarily motivated by money, but rather by a commitment to their community and/or a passion for broadcasting. People are more likely to get involved in programme production, as well as other tasks, if they trust their station, and feel that their investment of time and effort will be rewarded by the recognition and appreciation they receive from their community.

While broadcasters may recognise the need to involve more community members in their programming, either in production or by consulting with listeners regularly, they seem to lack the techniques and/or the motivation for doing this. This has resulted in a vicious cycle, whereby stations are chasing money to produce programmes. And when money is not available, local programming - the type that communities appreciate most - is cut. Increasing the reach of stations will not necessarily boost listenership, as communities may still not identify with the stations' programming. Rather, the first priorities seem to be: a) developing cost-effective ways of involving communities more in programme production and b) involving communities more regularly in discussions about programme content, format and scheduling. This should make programming more representative of the communities as a whole, and thus increase community loyalty and buy-in to their stations.

### **Diverse programming and other community services**

The more communities are involved in programming, the more diverse programming should become. In turn, this should improve broadcasters' service to their communities. By developing their community content, stations can become more distinguishable from commercial and public broadcasters, and should have to compete less directly with these better-resourced broadcasters for audiences and advertising revenue. It is crucial, too, that programmes are broadcast in the language or languages spoken in the respective communities. The more community members actively participate in the development of programmes, the more likely are these programmes to reflect not only issues relevant to the community but also the diversity of languages spoken in that community. The issues addressed in 'community participation' above similarly apply to 'diversity of programme and other community services'. The challenge is for community broadcasters to develop their uniqueness, rather than becoming more like commercial and public broadcasters in the belief that this will generate more money.

Community broadcasters are established with a specific community in mind. There is a symbiotic relationship between the station and its community that may not exist between a commercial broadcaster and its audience. Therefore, broadcasters should be wary of changing the communities they serve in a bid to remain viable; such a change could have the opposite effect by breaking the bond between the station and its community, and leaving people confused as to who the station is serving, as was the case with one of the stations involved in the Namibian study.

### **Independence of community broadcasters**

Most communities are made up of people with diverse views and opinions. At present, stations tend to steer clear of controversial topics for fear of being seen as partisan or biased. However, often these are topics that community members want to discuss. For example, the study found that community broadcasters tend to limit their political coverage to voter education and avoid other political issues, even if these are of interest to members of the community. The study also found that community stations lack the policies and guidelines needed to enable programme makers to cover political issues with confidence and in a balanced way, without compromising the station's independence.

The development of editorial guidelines and ethical codes should enable broadcasters to cover political issues while protecting their independence, which should help build the trust of their communities in the process. However, if community broadcasters are going to involve community members in programming, these guidelines and ethical codes need the buy-in from community members. Therefore, stations might want to develop their editorial guidelines and codes in consultation with community members, as part of the process of encouraging greater community participation in, and ownership of their stations. Involving community members in the development of these guidelines should also enhance community understanding of the need for broadcasters to remain independent, and an appreciation for community broadcasters' role in facilitating dialogue and debate among community members.

In this respect, community broadcasters' editorial guidelines or ethical codes may be a bit different to those already adopted by the mainstream media. Community broadcasters might consider getting their editorial guidelines and codes endorsed by the regulator in order to give these codes extra weight, and thereby maximise the protection from outside interference these codes can provide stations with.

### **Not-for-profit business model**

There appears to be some confusion about what “not-for-profit” means in terms of community broadcasting. Broadcasters seem to be compromising their programming as they strive to generate income to survive. In this respect, stations tend to focus on selling advertising and air time, rather than exploring other income streams that might actually enhance and diversify programming (for example, programme sponsorship and membership fees and donations from the community). One Namibian station survived almost entirely on donations from its community members. Not surprisingly, community members trusted and identified with the station, not least because it broadcast the type of programming they wanted in a way that no other broadcaster did.

## **5.3 Institutional sustainability**

### **Community ownership and control**

The board members of community broadcasters show a remarkable commitment to their communities simply by being prepared to shoulder the responsibility that comes with serving on a board of this nature. However, many existing boards appear to be holding back their stations by not providing the leadership needed and expected of them. Many boards do not seem to meet on a regular basis. Most boards are not involved in operational issues at all. Communication between the board, staff and volunteers, and the community is generally poor and a source of tension. The trust of listeners, volunteers and secondary stakeholders is undermined in the process.

Board members seem to have a good grasp of the principles of community broadcasting. But they appear unable to apply their understanding effectively, and their lack of training in governance issues may have something to do with this. What seems to be lacking is a clear understanding of the roles that boards and board members should play, and the responsibilities they shoulder as a result. In particular, there seem to be no regulatory requirements of boards to be accountable to the communities they serve. This, together with community representation on boards, might be something broadcasters could discuss with the regulator, in a bid to get consensus on the roles and responsibilities of boards, and how boards should account to both the communities their stations serve, and those who finance the stations. At the same time, the sector could give more attention to training board members in order to assist them in performing their onerous roles more effectively.

## **Community participation and access**

What hurts community broadcasters is that they are investing in developing the skills of young volunteers and getting no return on this investment when the volunteers move on soon afterwards. And yet, community broadcasters are training a significant number of young broadcasters who then go on to work for commercial and public broadcasters. It will be difficult for community broadcasters to prevent young volunteers from using the sector as a steppingstone for getting jobs elsewhere. So perhaps the sector can turn this situation into an opportunity. Community broadcasters could try to convince the regulator that the rest of the broadcast industry should give something back to the community broadcast sector in return for this capacity building, either through in-kind contributions (training, mentoring, exchange programmes, use of transmission equipment) or through subsidies. Subsidies could be channelled to the sector by way of a media development fund (see 'Financial Sustainability' below).

Meanwhile, Namibia's media training institutions appear to be doing little to develop the skills of community broadcasters. Ties between formal training institutions and community broadcasters could be strengthened by community broadcasters providing placements for media students and, in return, training institutions could provide free/subsidised training to the staff and volunteers of community broadcasters.

Stations tend to see technology as a hindrance rather than an opportunity because of people's lack of understanding of the technology. Furthermore, community broadcasters lack in-house technical skills to maintain and repair equipment. As a result, stations remain heavily reliant on expensive external service providers. Therefore, training staff and volunteers in basic technical skills appears to be a priority for stations. Few stations seem to have taken the initiative to do this, even though technical service providers appear willing to provide this training, maybe even free of charge. Seeing that all stations are facing similar problems, alternatively greater collaboration with technical service providers (e.g. collective agreements, or shared expertise) may be a solution. This should help demystify technology and help to make community broadcasters more self-sufficient.

## **Diverse programming and other community services**

Young people appear to have played a significant role in the development of Namibia's community broadcasting sector. However, the youth-orientation of many stations does not reflect the broader communities these stations

serve, and can be a source of conflict. In this case, stations may need to seek a better balance between young and enthusiastic volunteers, and volunteers who are older and who have different interests in order to represent fully the communities that most broadcasters serve, and include these considerations in their programming.

Stations are also struggling to reach all of their communities as their transmitters are not powerful or effective enough. In some cases these stations' reach is restricted by their licensing conditions, i.e. stations are licensed to use a transmitter that is not powerful enough to reach the whole community. This issue would have to be taken up with the regulator. In others cases the lack of reach might be because the stations have installed transmitters that are not powerful enough, or the equipment is old or poorly maintained. This issue would need to be addressed through in-house capacity building in technical issues as suggested earlier.

By developing the skills of station staff and volunteers, particularly those of older members of the community who are less likely to leave once they are trained, broadcasters can offer other services to community members and secondary stakeholders besides just access to airtime. For example, stations could produce programmes and adverts on behalf of other people. They could record local musicians, or hire out their expertise (e.g. presenters, DJs). Therefore, skills development will not only enhance the diversity of programmes and services provided by the stations, but could also bring a return by generating much-needed income. Community broadcasters are likely to become more professional in the process.

Therefore, community broadcasters could become more self-sustainable by developing their in-house capacity. In order to do this, stations could be more proactive in identifying their training needs, and finding people to meet these needs, rather than waiting for training to come to them, as seems to be the case at the moment.

Meanwhile, by introducing local content quotas, the regulator can encourage broadcasters to produce more local programming, and thus develop their capacity. This type of "positive regulation" is standard practice in many African countries and the rest of the world.

### **Independence of broadcasters**

While most broadcasters covered by the study have founding constitutions, few of these spelt out how the stations should safeguard their independence. As a result, those charged with running the stations have little guidance as to how to maintain their independence when faced with often testing commercial and political pressures. The avoidance of political coverage mentioned earlier is a case in point.

Meanwhile, the boards responsible for drafting and safeguarding the stations' constitutions are often seen by community members as promoting particular interests, despite many board members being dedicated members of the community concerned. This perception is not helped by the fact that many station managers also serve on their boards. For their part, board members tend to have little understanding of their governance role, and acknowledge they could do more to make their boards more representative of the community as a whole, and thus less open to accusations of bias and self-interest. Few board members had received training related to their role.

The weakness of boards leaves individual stations open to political and commercial influence. Meanwhile, the lack of its own representative body means Namibia's community broadcasting sector is in no position to shape the policies and laws that affected its members and their communities. The lack of solidarity and collaboration between stations leaves them isolated and more exposed to external pressures. As unity is strength, community broadcasters may want to consider forming a representative body or network.

### **Not-for-profit business model**

A not-for-profit business model is not about producing a cheap, second-rate service. Rather it is about using the available resources to produce the best, most professional service possible for a particular community, no matter how poor that particularly community is. The biggest test of this professionalism and service is to ask your community members to contribute financially to the upkeep of the station. If the service provided is professional and one community members can identify with, even poor communities – research has shown – will make financial or in-kind contributions.

None but one of the stations covered by the Namibian study received such contributions from their communities. As a result, airtime is the main resource community broadcasters have to trade with. Quite understandably, community members feel that they are entitled to access this airtime for free

if it is for non-commercial purposes, as the community is supposed to “own” the station. Furthermore, airtime is a public resource that the broadcaster has been entrusted with in order to provide their community with a service (rather than make a profit, as is the case with commercial broadcasters, which is why community broadcasters should pay less for their licence fees). Besides which, people are used to making announcements and broadcasting non-commercial programmes for free, as this has been the practice of many stations until now. Therefore, the move by many broadcasters to start charging for airtime, even for non-commercial content, is being met with some resistance. In some cases, this approach is driving away community members and secondary stakeholders who are essential to broadcasters’ local programming.

In principle, there is nothing wrong in charging people for airtime, as long as those paying receive a reliable and professional service in return. Few broadcasters appear able to provide this level of service at the moment, which makes people reluctant to pay for airtime. Furthermore, few stations seem to have clear guidelines explaining what they do and do not charge for, and the charging for airtime is often left to the discretion of individuals. This can result in confusion and mistrust. Hence, community broadcasters may want to develop clear guidelines about services offered and tariffs charged to bring greater transparency to these processes and regain the trust of the community.

## **5.4 Financial sustainability**

### **Community ownership and control**

Financial sustainability appears to be closely linked with the trust communities have in their broadcasters. Transparency and accountability builds such trust, particularly when it comes to money. Most of the stations involved in the study could not produce recent financial statements, only half of them conduct regular audits. None of these stations present their financial statements to annual general meetings that are open to community members. Donors cannot trust most community broadcasters to account for funds. Therefore, it is not surprising that so few stations can convince community members to contribute more to the financial sustainability of their stations. Where community broadcasters are accountable and financially transparent to those they serve, community members are willing to substantially contribute to the financial sustainability of their stations.

### **Community participation and access**

Community broadcasters believe that a lack of financial and human resources prevents them from involving their communities more in the station, and from providing their communities with a better service, including local content. Secondary stakeholders turn this around, and argue that the lack of community participation in stations, and the poor service provided to communities, e.g. the lack of relevant and professional local content, are the reasons stations do not have adequate financial and human resources.

Audience research should enable broadcasters to understand their communities and their needs better, particularly if such research is combined with efforts to increase community participation in the station. At the same time, understanding the profile of their audiences will help stations to market their services and negotiate with advertisers and other stakeholders interested in buying airtime. Few stations consult regularly with their communities, and therefore have little information to offer advertisers and sponsors. The sector could do more to demystify the concept of “market research,” and provide broadcasters with the basic techniques to consult with and get feedback from their communities. At the same time, stations could show more consistency, creativity and initiative when it comes to marketing.

### **Diverse programming and other community services**

Communities are not the only ones demanding a professional service. Increasingly advertisers and sponsors want this, too. By cutting back on local programming to save money, community broadcasters are reducing the very things that community members, advertisers and sponsors consider essential to a community broadcaster and risk alienating their audience further. Rather, community broadcasters should be looking for creative and cost effective ways of making their local content more appealing and relevant, and their service to community members and other stakeholders more professional and reliable as a means to enhance their financial sustainability.

### **Independence of broadcasters**

Many African countries recognize the special role community broadcasting may play in the development of the country and in opening up the airwaves to communities. Based on this recognition some countries directly subsidise community broadcasters. Governments can also be lobbied to provide assistance through a media development fund, which may aim to promote media diversity in terms of both media outlets and content. While South Africa boasts the Media Diversity Development Fund, Namibia is in the process of

establishing the Universal Service Fund (USF), which can also be of potential benefit to community broadcasters as the fund seeks to promote information flow to the types of marginalised communities that many community broadcasters serve. However, few of the community broadcasters involved in the study were aware of the USF, let alone how they might benefit from it. Such funds are usually financed by tax revenues and/or statutory contributions by broadcasting and telecommunications license holders. Broadcasters need to lobby decision makers to ensure such funds take into account the role of community broadcasters, and also to make sure these funds operate independently of political and commercial influence.

Meanwhile, community broadcasters are uniquely placed to tap into local government funding. However, as was pointed out during the study, community broadcasters need to “distinguish between promoting local government and promoting local governance.” Community broadcasters’ focus needs to be on promoting local governance: facilitating the involvement of community members in debate and decisions about the services provided by local government.

Donor funding and outside assistance is often important for getting community broadcasters off the ground. However, many stations have grown dependent on donor funding, and this has undermined the broadcasters’ sustainability in the long run. Rather, donor funds could be better invested in enabling broadcasters to build the kind of community involvement that is likely to sustain the station once the donor funds run out.

A strong community broadcasting network could support the efforts of the sector to access all kinds of external funding, while at the same time helping to shield the sector from political or economic pressures.

### **Not-for-profit business model**

Some community broadcasters assume that decision makers and the public at large understand what community broadcasting is, and how it is different to commercial and public broadcasting. This appears not to be the case, and community broadcasters could do much more to promote the concept of community broadcasting within Namibia. To do this, the sector itself needs to be clear what community broadcasting is. In Namibia, not-for-profit is, at the time of going to press, the only core principle used to define community broadcasting.

At the same time, people's understanding of "not-for-profit" varies greatly in Namibia. Some broadcasters see it as a by-word for poor or substandard broadcasting. However, to be attractive to their communities, as well as to advertisers, sponsors and donors, community broadcasters now have to be increasingly professional and well run. Other broadcasters believe the not-for-profit status means they are not allowed to generate a surplus of income. This is not the case either. What is important is that any surplus generated by the station is ploughed back into the station and the community, rather than going into the pockets of owners, as is the case with commercial broadcasters. Besides being registered as not-for-profit entities, community broadcasters ought to practise what they preach by having sound financial systems in place that are transparent and accountable, e.g. proper financial records should be open to public scrutiny.

## 6. *The Way forward*

At the second consultative workshop, station representatives discussed a number of strategic questions arising from the study's findings. Through these discussions, the Namibian broadcasters drew up and adopted an action plan that sought to enhance the sustainability of their stations, and the sector as a whole. The study's strategic questions may well be relevant to community broadcasting beyond Namibia, and are summarised below. Addressing these questions effectively and comprehensively – as the Namibian broadcasters sought to do with their action plan - should help to build trust among community members and outside stakeholders alike. Addressing these questions should also

- lead to greater transparency,
- enhance the professionalism of community broadcasting,
- encourage the community's buy-in to, and identification with their stations.

It is thus likely that this will lead to more community and external support for community broadcasters and to ultimately promote sustainability of the sector.

### Summary of Action Plan of Namibian community broadcasters

- Re-establish the network representing the sector
- Build consensus around the key concepts of community broadcasting – including that of participation - among communities, broadcasters and other stakeholders
- Develop a common understanding about the principles of, and approaches to governance of stations

- Assess and address the training needs of community broadcasters
- Strengthen the sector's approach to advertising and marketing
- Build stronger partnerships with other sections of civil society
- Explore creative ways of diversifying income
- Engage with the newly formed Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN).

## **Common understanding of community broadcasting**

- Should community broadcasters build consensus around key concepts and find clear and shared definitions of *community broadcasting*, as well as *participation*, *governance* and *not-for profit* in the context of community broadcasting? If “yes”; how?

## **Community participation**

- How can community broadcasters involve their communities more
  - in the governance of stations,
  - in discussions and decisions about programme content, format and scheduling?
- How can community broadcasters involve a greater diversity of community members in programme production?
- How can broadcasters attract and nurture a more diverse cadre of volunteers in order to reflect the diversity of their communities, without losing the enthusiasm and drive that young volunteers bring to a station?
- What can community broadcasters do to build their understanding of their community and their community’s needs? How can these efforts encourage greater community participation in community stations?
- How can board members become more involved in the governance of stations, how can their roles and responsibilities be defined more clearly, and how can stations strike a better balance in the representation of men and women on their boards?

## **Internal policies and systems**

- How can community broadcasters develop editorial guidelines/a code of ethics in a way that involves community members and protects the independence and integrity of stations?
- How can community broadcasters strengthen their financial systems, and become more financially accountable and transparent to their communities?

## **Capacity development**

- How can community broadcasters identify their training needs, and what do they need to do to ensure that these needs are met?
- How can they develop the skills and techniques to involve their communities more in programming decisions, programme production and station governance?
- What creative and cost-effective measures can community broadcasters take to make their local programming more appealing and the services

they provide more professional?

- How should the community broadcast sector go about building the skills of board members?
- Does the sector want to strengthen its ties with formal training institutions? If so, and how should community broadcasters go about this?
- How can community broadcasters build their in-house capacity to maintain and repair equipment?

## **Funding**

- What should clear guidelines for (professional!) services offered and tariffs charged look like to increase funding from community members and revenue from advertisers?
- How can broadcasters explore creative ways of diversifying their sources of funding?
- How can the sector strengthen its approach to advertising and marketing?
- Do community broadcasters want to encourage the establishment of a media development fund? How can community broadcasters try to tap into such a fund and/or local authority funding?
  - What arguments can community broadcasters put forward to convince decision makers that the sector should receive such funding, bearing in mind the objectives of the fund?
  - What can community broadcasters do to lobby for local authority funding?
  - How can community broadcasters ensure that their independence will not be compromised in the process?
- Should the community broadcast sector try to capitalise on its role of training young broadcasters for the rest of the industry? If so, how (e.g. in-kind services and subsidies from commercial and public broadcasters)?

## **Working together as a sector and with other stakeholders**

- How can community broadcasters build greater collaboration and solidarity amongst themselves?
- How can a representative body or network assist in safeguarding the stations' independence from political and commercial pressures, thus maintaining their integrity and their communities' trust?
- What can community broadcasters contribute to such a network, and what do they expect in return?
- How can strong partnerships with other sections of civil society be built, and with what aim?

## **Engagement with the regulator**

- How should the sector go about engaging the regulator, and what role can secondary stakeholders play in supporting this process?
- What issues does the sector want to highlight in discussions with the regulator, and how can the sector speak with one voice on these issues? How should the sector go about preparing for negotiations with the regulator?
- Should broadcasters seek agreement with the regulator on the roles and responsibilities of boards, and the issue of community representation and accountability? If so, should the sector try to develop its own position on these issues before discussing them with the regulator?
- How can the regulator use positive regulation such as local content quotas, as well as training and financial incentives etc. to develop the capacity and, thus, the long-term sustainability of community broadcasters?

## 7. *Participation pays*

As is the case elsewhere in Africa, Namibia's community broadcasters have come a long way in the two decades since broadcasting was liberalised. The sector has made incredible strides under very difficult circumstances, and deserves praise for achieving so much. However, most community broadcasters have become dependent upon those outside their communities for their survival. There are plenty of reasons for this, and no one is to blame. The challenge is to change this around, and to ensure that community broadcasters are sustained by the communities they serve.

Gaining the trust of these communities by ensuring their participation in the programming and governance of stations appears to be the key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector. It would appear from the findings of this study that greater community participation should result in stations providing their communities with a more diverse and accessible service. This in turn, should encourage greater community buy-in to their community broadcasters. Transparency and accountability in decision making as well as the financial affairs of community stations also appears to be important for encouraging this all-important buy-in from communities.

All this should enable community broadcasters to provide their communities with a service that the community needs and values enough for community members to contribute – either from their own pockets, or in-kind - towards the financial sustainability of their stations, no matter how poor that community is.

However, more often than not, community broadcasters end up doing the opposite, and produce a second-rate service on the premise that community broadcasting is poor and second-rate. Or, even worse, they do so in the belief that their communities are poor and therefore do not expect or deserve anything more than second best.

By focussing on all that which makes community broadcasting special, instead of imitating commercial and state broadcasters, community broadcasters may unlock the door that leads to sustainability. Community ownership, including the community's sense of ownership needs to be encouraged through broad

participation and various modes of community engagement. This includes the identification of the community's needs and interests e.g. through research going out into the communities, interviews, surveys, focus group discussions, and annual general assemblies in addition to the already quite common phone-ins, e-mail communications and text messages. What makes a community broadcaster worth sustaining is the fact that it addresses the specific needs of that specific community in a way that no other broadcaster does. Involving a diverse cross-section of community members in the production of programmes, and in the decisions taken by a station as much as possible is probably the only way of achieving this.

In all their endeavours, community broadcasters should bear in mind the overall finding of this study, which is that social and institutional sustainability bring about financial sustainability. It is not the other way round.

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