

The Development of Community Media in the Caribbean

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In a practical sense, there are only three Caribbean countries – Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago and Haiti – with large enough populations to have enough discrete ‘communities’ with the resources to make community media viable and sustainable institutions. Even in these countries, the creation and development of community media require special help and support. For the central issue faced by community media is the improbability of their survival against the onslaught of external forces. If these institutions cannot attract the resources to sustain themselves, their value and potential will be lost to Caribbean communities and the larger societies they comprise.

Consider the following hypothesis: that community media are uniquely capable of meeting the development, information and entertainment needs of Caribbean countries. This hypothesis suggests that the size, character and homogeneity of Caribbean countries create conditions in which the most appropriate form for their media is a community orientation. A second point is the relevance of community media to the majority concerns and desires of the populations they serve. In the midst of a complex array of forces, which grow more powerful, seductive and all pervasive by the hour, community media still retain the potential to hold their own and to grow and prosper.

Thirdly, community media must be innovative and become the sources of new thinking and fresh insights as old problems and new challenges compete for attention. These institutions must begin to take note of and exploit the new communication and information technologies that simultaneously expand both their opportunities and the threats they face. If not encouraged to grow and assert their influence on the real issues of society, the strengths of community media will remain dormant while their natural constituencies become exposed to and seduced by the new technologies and the easy options they offer.

Fourthly, community media need to provide what are in fact 'essential services' for the communities that they serve. They must fulfil their unique role and provide services and links and information and feedback that are difficult to duplicate and of great value to their communities. By sticking closely to their communities, such media can convert the vested interests of their constituents into a major force. They must carve out a special place in the psyche of their listeners, viewers and readers and become of more than passing interest in their lives. Their messages must be the messages of the communities they serve, their focus primarily local and their impact as immediate as the relevance of their messages. They must become welcome residents of each home, willing partners in development, always receptive and readily accessible channels of communication. Community media enterprises can help to preserve and renew the glue that keeps communities together and become reliable sources of solutions that are shared with their communities to expand the range of choices and improve the quality of community decisions.

Fifthly, they must grow and develop with their communities while remaining at the cutting edge of technological awareness. They can thus act as windows to the world and doors through which knowledge and information enter the communities they serve. Community media have the capacity to play these pivotal roles, bringing tangible benefits to their communities while they explore and exploit the technological options that can increase their effectiveness.

Lastly, community media need to fulfil the key development needs of the communities they serve. Issues such as crime, corruption, poverty and unemployment, violence and interpersonal conflict, consumer information, business development, nutrition, sexual practices, HIV/AIDS, healthy lifestyles, literacy and numeracy confront typical communities on a daily basis. Consideration of such issues by a

significant percentage of residents cannot be avoided and their sensitive and useful treatment by community media can reinforce their importance to the communities they serve. These communities should be their owners and their determinants of policy and content, and practical measures should be put in place to give effect to such ownership and control.

Developing Community Media: Experiences in the Caribbean

The concept of community media is relatively new in the Caribbean and the story of the use and development of its several forms is different for each kind of media. Community radio is the most common form in the region. The support earned by popular radio outstrips that of any other medium of communication. Television is less accessible than radio to the general population and the influence of the print media is constrained by the need for relatively high literacy levels.

Community Video Activities: These are found in three main areas. The first is in Trinidad and Tobago, where Banyan produced the popular Best Village television programmes based upon cultural competitions among rural communities. The second is Saint Lucia's Folk Research Centre which created grassroots television programmes in Creole. And the last is Dominica's Small Projects Assistance Team (SPATS) which concentrated on community-oriented messages and programmes. These activities have continued at a relatively low level without having succeeded in expanding the initial thrust of their early programmes in the 1970s. The medium has failed to create that critical mass of consumer support that could have ensured its growth.

Drama as Media – Popular or Street Theatre: Several attempts to use drama as a means of communication have been very successful and continue to this day. The main activities have been in the Carib-based villages in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; in Dominica (the SPATS group) and in Jamaica through the women's mobilisation group called the Sistren Theatre Collective. However, most of these movements are now inactive, having failed to achieve levels of sustainability.

Community Newspapers: Many newspapers target particular communities. However, with two notable exceptions, small 'community' newspapers are run by individuals as commercial, profit-making enterprises. The exceptions are the *Eastern Voice* in Trinidad and Tobago that is UNESCO-supported and the

Hinterland News in Guyana that is funded by the Government and UNESCO and devoted to development of Amerindian communities. Amongst other newspapers are *The Twin City Sun*, the *Western Mirror* and the *News* (Jamaica) that are of great value to their communities while being privately owned commercial entities.

Community Radio Activities: The first attempts to create non-traditional forms of radio were in Jamaica during the 1970s and the 1980s. These resulted in the creation of Radio West in Montego Bay in the 1970s by the government, and in the 1980s, Radio Central in Mandeville by the government with USIS support and Radio North East in Ocho Rios by the government with UNESCO support. These stations were located for reasons of geography and were mainly satellites of the government-owned Jamaica Broadcasting Company (JBC). The major activities of their listeners were tourism and farming and the government of the day saw the stations primarily as regional entities serving the populations outside the capital city with programmes relayed from the capital city. Although local programmes were produced by the satellite stations for three or four hours per day, the rest of the broadcast day was taken up regular programming from JBC. Thus, these early community stations had no real character or identity of their own and were mirrors of their urban-centred parent. Local inputs were limited and none of the stations was able to develop a critical mass of devoted listeners and commercial support. Operating revenues were provided by the central government without clear policies to direct their programming and mission. These three early attempts eventually ended and they were then sold to private commercial interests that quickly converted them into national stations.

Twenty-five years after these initial attempts, mainstream commercial media continue to harbour negative feelings about community media and are convinced of their own ability to adequately serve community needs. It is still not generally accepted by established mainstream media that the special character of community media is complementary rather than hostile to their own objectives. They do not accept that their organisation and management, ownership structures and commitment to the profit imperative make mainstream media inappropriate vehicles for sustaining the relatively narrow focus demanded of community media.

To a major degree, the marginalised and deprived 'special' populations within Caribbean countries have never been seen as major consumers and are not the pri-

mary concerns of mainstream media organisations. Experience has shown that mainstream radio stations have been very successful in attracting a mass audience of listeners with call-in programmes, talk shows and periodic outside broadcast links. They have traditionally been motivated by sensation rather than oriented towards the development of all facets of their constituencies. Their focus has been on current political, social and economic issues that have a national rather than a local perspective, leading to a 'tyranny of the centre'.

But a closer examination of these success stories tells us that programmes that encourage free and relatively unrestricted communication of views about the widest possible range of topics of general concern have achieved the greatest listenership. Indeed, several mainstream radio stations in Jamaica owe their continued viability to the success of talk radio. Recently, a radio station very nearly collapsed when it lost, simultaneously, both of its talk shows.

The most significant variation on this theme has been the emergence in the last three years in Trinidad and Tobago of three 'ethnic' stations that cater for the population of Indian origin. This new phenomenon was caused primarily by two factors: first was the change in the government's media policy that sanctioned the granting of more broadcast licences; the second was the failure of traditional radio to cater for the interests of the large Indian population of that country.

Trinidad and Tobago have the second largest population of about 1.25 million after Jamaica with 2,46 million and can be described as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-racial society. Radio stations tended to treat the various communities in a token way with the large Indian population being previously ill-served. The three all-Indian stations cater primarily to the musical tastes of their listeners, a narrow focus that does not fit our definition of community media. Only time will tell what effect these new stations will have on the larger society in Trinidad and Tobago, and whether their emergence will further divide the population or support the integration of its major ethnic groups.

During 1998, UNESCO sponsored the start of Radio Toco, a community radio station that serves a population of approximately 30,000 people in the eastern end of Trinidad. Radio Toco continues to develop successfully along the traditional lines of community stations. It has recently combined its efforts with those of the *Eastern Voice*, a community newspaper begun in 1994 under an

IPDC Rural Information Project, to serve an expanded community under the title: Radio Toco/Eastern Voice Community Media Network.

Small community stations such as Radio em ba Mango, started in 1989 in Dominica, face stiff competition in a highly competitive commercial environment. The same may be said for community newspapers that are forced to behave like mini-commercial entities and face a daily threat of being completely overcome by the larger newspaper houses. This is particularly true of the 10 or so community-type newspapers operating throughout Jamaica and the string of weeklies that are characteristic of the smaller Eastern Caribbean countries.

In Haiti, following initiatives taken by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and other NGOs, UNESCO provided four small solar powered 20-watt transmitters for the start-up of community radio stations in the remotest regions of the island. Continued political difficulties prolonged negotiations with the government for more than a year and eventually led to the launch in 1996 of these community stations in the rural communities of Tiburon, Belle Anse, Anse a Foleur and Fort Liberte. UNESCO began an intensive period of activities to provide the basic transmission and studio equipment and the start-up training of selected cadres from the chosen communities. This project included provision for a three-year period of support and close monitoring of their operations to ensure that these stations attained levels of sustainable self-sufficiency. However, during this period, President Aristide's term of office came to an end and the change of government led to a shift in its media policies and a change of media priorities.

This unfortunate change away from community radios and towards greater support for mainstream national radio and television forced UNESCO to reduce its support for these young stations at a critical stage of their development. After the Caribbean representative of AMARC completed an operational evaluation in 1997, UNESCO was able to achieve a restoration of government support for the continued development of these community radio stations. In the meantime, the period 1995-1999 saw a rapid proliferation in Haiti of small radio stations which emphasise community concerns over political propaganda.

This period heralded the spread of new community radio stations to several parts of the Caribbean. These were as follows: Radio GED, operated by the students of the Barbados Community College as a teaching laboratory, serving the

campus and its immediate environment; Radio Muye in Suriname; Radio Toco in Trinidad and Tobago; and ROOTS FM in Jamaica. Each of these new stations received their first small transmitters and basic studio equipment from UNESCO.

Other stations now preparing for start-up under UNESCO sponsorship are: Radio Bluefields in a rural Jamaican community that will focus on environmental and development issues, Radio Iwokrama, to serve indigenous communities in the hinterland of Guyana, and Radio Turkeyen to serve the campus of the University of Guyana.

In addition, several independent community and special purpose stations are emerging in other parts of the Caribbean region through church groups and NGOs. These include religious stations in Jamaica through the Tarrant Baptist Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church; Radio Galibi in Suriname, serving the needs of an Amerindian community; the National Youth Council's mobile broadcasts in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Kairi FM in Dominica, and Radio Tambrin in Tobago. There is as yet little information about the nature of these stations, the content of their programmes and the early success or otherwise of their creation.

These initiatives in the use of community media will yield many lessons and experiences. However, there continue to be substantial social and economic obstacles to development of the Caribbean countries themselves. High levels of conflict, violence and crime, particularly in depressed urban communities, sub-standard community services and infrastructure, dilapidated housing and high levels of poverty continue to be features of urban Caribbean life.

With the exception of one instance in Jamaica where a community station, ROOTS FM was started under UNESCO sponsorship in May 1998, Caribbean societies have not come up with any notable examples of media approaches through which the involvement of communities in their own development could be encouraged. Although the situation in which most Caribbean societies find themselves tends to suggest that community media is an idea whose time has come, there is no evidence of any new awareness of the value of this development tool.

The critical issues that impact upon the quality of people's lives need to be addressed close to where people live, within communities and with the collaborative participation of the persons that are most involved. Opportunities for local

ownership and participation in the formulation of the content and objectives of the media can only be assured if their primary mission is directed towards the upliftment and eventual empowerment of the communities they serve.

As the 21st Century approaches, radio continues to gain in popularity and this suggests that the prospects for community radio, as the single most effective medium, as a strong partner-in-development are excellent. In Caribbean countries, a concerted move towards the development of community media seems imperative if these relatively small countries are to have any chance of seizing control of their development options. The challenge lies in being able to convince the national authorities and local stakeholders that the options that community media offer need to be understood and supported rather than treated with suspicion and neglect. Indeed, throughout the Caribbean region, community media are among the few remaining options that have any chance of reducing the increasingly dominant impact of external programming. Unfortunately, most Caribbean countries have no coherent national policies towards community media.

A Word about Urban Community Radio Stations

The greatest concentration of people in every Caribbean society can be found in urban communities as the rural to urban drift accelerates. The adoption of free trade policies and the removal of tariff and other barriers to imports continue to wreak havoc on the farming communities of the region. The dumping of cheap agricultural products throughout the region means that in many instances, imported agricultural produce costs less than the local counterpart. This and the already high levels of unemployment caused by the structural adjustment policies of most governments have led to a steady stream of citizens to urban communities in search of jobs that do not exist.

Thus while the initial emphasis of the community radio movement brought radio to rural populations for the first time, the changing demography of these societies and the unplanned explosion in urban populations demand innovative approaches to these new challenges. While not applicable in every urban situation, the concept of a community radio station is flexible enough to adapt to the urban environment if certain important preconditions are met. One example is that of

Radio Apal, a 15-year-old grassroots-oriented initiative supported by AMARC and operating from the poor communities of the capital Fort de France in the French-speaking island of Martinique. In Jamaica, the results are still coming in but the experience gained during the first twelve months of operation of the new community radio station – ROOTS FM – in Kingston, suggest the following minimum conditions:

1. existence of an a-political and a-religious base for the establishment of the station;
 2. establishment of the station's credibility with the communities and the government (the licence-granting authority) through the earned track record of the organisation of the station;
 3. the managerial and organisational capability to develop and implement a carefully prepared action plan;
 4. involvement of community organisations, representatives and members of the target communities from the first preparatory steps;
 5. technical, financial and organisational support from institutions such as UNESCO for provision of a transmitter, basic studio equipment and information relating to the establishment of a community radio station;
 6. existence of a vacuum in a significant number of the areas that an effective community radio station is uniquely capable of filling;
 7. a commitment to the establishment of mechanisms that ensure the meaningful involvement of members of the target communities in all aspects of the radio station and particularly as the only source of the voices heard on the station;
 8. attention to the ability of the station to sustain itself through revenue generation or other dependable sources of funding for its operations. In addition, prior to start-up of operations, the new station must identify sources of revenue that will provide funding until break-even is achieved. As in the case of ROOTS FM, the Radio Broadcasting Licence should allow the station to sustain itself through earned revenues;
 9. establishment of mechanisms for continuous feedback from its target audience.
- These were the conditions that had to be met before ROOTS FM became a reality and are among the minimum requirements for successful start-up and sustainability of urban-based community media and community radio stations.

ROOTS FM

ROOTS FM was established in the heart of the urban communities of Kingston and St. Andrew in Jamaica, to serve a population of approximately 800,000 persons, already served by nine commercial radio stations, two TV stations and a network of foreign cable systems. Its main objective is to work with the depressed inner city communities to alleviate poverty and support their spiritual, social and economic development. The station is operated by the Mustard Seed Communities (MSC), a 20 year old community-development NGO, headed by a Roman Catholic priest, which aims to assist the most vulnerable and unwanted and to give a voice to the voiceless. The rejects of inner city communities are children born with severe physical and mental disabilities and MSC operates three homes for about 150 disabled, abandoned children and young adults and a home for abandoned pregnant teenagers. This NGO places emphasis on self-sufficiency and maintains several businesses that generate surpluses to support its activities. In 1995, it was able to earn more than 60% of its revenue needs which were approximately US\$ 625,000 that year.

This first, urban-based community radio in the English-speaking Caribbean began operations with a 22-watt transmitter and basic studio equipment provided by UNESCO. The grant by the government of a commercial radio broadcasting licence provided the means through which ROOTS FM can earn advertising and sponsorship revenues to support itself. The granting of a commercial radio broadcasting licence took three years of drawn-out negotiations and discussions with government.

It is hoped that the existence of this station will foster collaborative efforts between MSC and other community organisations that are active within the target communities of Kingston and St. Andrew. Such collaboration has already led to a substantial financial grant from a large community development foundation that enabled ROOTS FM to acquire a larger 350-watt transmitter and additional studio equipment. An audience survey is about to be conducted by a marketing research agency and ROOTS FM has been able to secure support and collaboration from PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNFPA. This bodes well for the future since each of these organisations has agreed to use the results of the survey as the basis of a long-term supportive relationship with this urban community radio station.

ROOTS FM broadcasts for 24 hours daily and has 24 staff members, headed by a salaried Station Manager/Programme Director. Twelve staff members receive small stipends and 11 staff members are unpaid, with the proviso that any earned income would be paid out of sponsorships that these presenters are able to attract. In addition, local amateur musicians and disk jockeys run several programmes.

Test transmissions were carried out for three months before going live on 25 May 1998 and a survey completed approximately one year before start-up confirmed major support for the station from its target audience. Since its launch, ROOTS FM has been varying its programme content in response to feedback from its audience. There are now five main blocks of time during which the station features a blend of entertaining, educationally uplifting and peace-oriented programming, set against a background of local music. Already its impact and the reception it has received from inner city communities have been considerable.

On 4 November 1998, ROOTS FM broadcast the first edition of a programme called "Peace and Justice" run by the Police Community Relations division. This weekly, hour-long programme is devoted to the improvement of the problem-plagued relations between the police and inner city communities and to a reduction of the conflict and tension that exist in these communities. The feedback from the communities and business organisations has been overwhelmingly in support of the programme.

During the first seven months of operations, ROOTS FM generated revenues of J\$ 832,693 (US\$ 23,000) in gifts, advertising and sponsorship. This included a substantial grant from a community organisation that enabled acquisition of a new transmitter that has significantly improved the range, receptivity and earning potential of the new station. There are many more lessons to be learnt and the performance of this station continues to be carefully monitored to allow periodic reporting of progress.

Radio for Women: Women-speaking-to-Women

Two radio stations, Radio Toco and Radio Muye, were started following a UNESCO General Conference Resolution to set up a special programme for the development of women and the media, as a part of its activities to promote the free flow of information, freedom of expression and freedom of the press,

The Radio Muye discussions began in 1994 with the spokesperson for *Koni Ku Libi*, the Surinamese Saramaccan NGO. This organisation, whose name in English translates as 'live wise to survive' is made up of a group of determined women working for the sustainable development of their villages, in the face of major social and economic barriers, in the remote Surinamese hinterland. The members of this NGO are Maroon descendants of escaped African slaves. They are fiercely proud of their origins and hard-fought freedom and continue to follow the unique cultural traditions inherited from the earliest days of their transplantation from Africa.

Their economy is based on subsistence agriculture (rice, tubers, corn, peanuts etc.), hunting, fishing and gathering. With the construction of roads and airstrips in the interior and equipped with basic education, the men of their villages have migrated to the coastal areas and to the neighbouring state of French Guyana in search of work, leaving the women and children behind. The recent civil war in Suriname also took its toll on the male population so that work such as land clearance that was traditionally done by men is now being done by women. Women perform these tasks in addition to their traditional housekeeping chores and child-care responsibilities. In spite of their significant contribution to their society, women have little say in running their communities and in spending their earnings, and by and large, they continue to be victims of oppressive taboos and customs.

Koni Ku Libi's goal is the education and empowerment of these women by providing them with information and access to opportunities to acquire skills and deepen their awareness and understanding of their situation. This is to enable them to provide their own answers and their own solutions for their deliverance from subservience. A community radio station could be an important instrument for helping these women to achieve these objectives.

Negotiations for the establishment of Radio Muye were long and drawn out with the Basha or Paramount Chief of the region, the government and political leaders. These discussions were difficult due to the Government's reluctance to issue a community radio broadcasting licence. Radio Muye began live transmissions in March 1997 after three years of preparations. Its transmitter covers a radius of 6 miles and reaches about 5,000 persons scattered across about five villages. It broadcasts during the early mornings and early evenings to fit into the working schedules of the women.

The objectives of the station are to: fulfil the need for sharing information on development activities between communities; voice village concerns that would eventually reach the decision-makers in the capital city; encourage and support self-sustaining activities; support and inform village management and self-government; create and reinforce self-confidence and assertiveness of villagers; help to prepare villagers for independence; and increase knowledge through access to information, increased communication and sharing.

Basic training was carried out using down-to-earth methods and included, besides broadcasting techniques, women and development awareness-building and an understanding of their socio-economic and cultural roles within their society. The villagers supplied the buildings and materials. *Koni Ku Libi*, independent of UNESCO, sought and obtained solar panels and additional studio materials. Feedback assessments have shown that Radio Muye has been instrumental in deepening the awareness amongst the villagers and particularly the women who now express and assert themselves much more, have developed a greater degree of self esteem and are thus better able to defend themselves. They also generate income from the production of cassettes for sale. The National Telecommunications Agency of Suriname (TELESUR) installed a larger antenna and the coverage has now spread to a larger number of villages totalling approximately 7,000 people. Feedback indicates that the station is gaining a growing number of listeners and is highly popular.

Radio Toco is situated in the North Eastern end of the island of Trinidad. It is coordinated by the Toco Foundation, a community-based NGO in Toco in collaboration with the Citizens Agenda Network, a national NGO. Both NGOs are dedicated to working towards multi-cultural social development, the eradication of poverty, gender equity and environmental protection. The Toco Foundation had previously achieved success in building environmental awareness and a spirit of community advocacy against development activities, particularly those having a negative impact on the delicate coastal habitats and ecosystems in this area of Trinidad. It published a news bulletin called Toco Talk and with UNDP assistance refurbished a building which brought together a number of productive community activities that assist in generating revenues to support their work. They now maintain a day-care centre, a canteen and several cottage industries. The main objective of the Foundation is to guide villagers to an awareness of their rich natural heritage and to help them to

become pro-actively engaged in its exploitation and development to benefit the community in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive manner.

The new community radio station was launched in November 1997 with a small 22-watt transmitter that provided a five-mile radius coverage. The station broadcasts for five hours daily to its listeners in the surrounding villages. The programming is upbeat with interviews with the public health, consumer and environmental advisors, as well as presenting farming news and information, news items and music, all with a Caribbean emphasis. It carries two daily 15-minute gender awareness programmes using information from ILO sources. The programme content is determined by the women of the surrounding villages and feedback channels are maintained through phone calls and letters.

The programming content also reflects the following realities of village life. The ratio of HIV-infected persons in Trinidad and Tobago is now seven females to each male. Thus the HIV programmes specifically target women with information and advice on dealing with the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS in a daily a half-hour programme called 'Me Woman'. Women also exhibit the highest incidence of diabetes and hypertension and head the majority of single-parent households thus creating the need for programmes that deal with these issues.

Seventy percent of the staff of the station are female volunteers with an average age of 25 years who are selected for their strong leadership qualities. The minority male volunteers seem quite willing to allow their female counterparts to provide leadership. After one year of operations, Radio Toco has acquired a larger transmitter. Having secured a private loan, it has increased the height of its antenna and is progressing towards linking the communities on the East Coast of Trinidad through Radio Toco. The station now covers a radius of 30 miles and 30 villages with an approximate population of 100,000 persons.

Notable Results of Community Radio Installations

Community radio has brought increased levels of contact between the beneficiaries of community information and the actual preparation of this information for broadcast. At the grassroots level, there is a new awareness and heightened levels of self-confidence. The higher levels of participation in meaningful group

activities is changing the accustomed process of development in which the man in the street is always a recipient rather than a determinant of information.

Experience has confirmed that community radio succeeds best where it is simply an added tool to enhance already high levels of community development awareness. Every effort to involve the target communities at every stage of development, from conception to design, production, choice of infrastructure and setting programming priorities, has paid dividends in terms of the levels of trust, support and participation by the community.

The choice of technology is important. The practice in the past was to purchase standard electronic equipment offered by commercial suppliers. No consideration was given to the special circumstances within which community radio stations operate or to their need for appropriate equipment. However, these stations now have access to technical advice about equipment from UNESCO as part of its support for the development of community media. During recent years, each new station has begun with the simplest, least expensive, most durable and easily maintained equipment. The initial transmitter in most instances is one with a power output of 22 watts and the capability of using solar panels as an energy source in rural areas. Other studio equipment tends to fit into a similar frame of being durable and inexpensive. There is as yet no standard list of appropriate equipment that new stations can consult in making initial choices. In many instances, after the new stations have established themselves and begun to attract listeners, they have found that the 22-watt transmitter is inadequate for the terrain or the geographical spread required. Several Caribbean community stations have upgraded their transmitters to 350 watts.

Policy Framework for Community Media

It is important that a strategic approach be taken to the formulation of policies that will set the stage for both mainstream and community media. An informed analysis of the circumstances in which the region finds itself would probably lead to confirmation that community media are the most appropriate partners-in-development in all countries of the Caribbean. Such an analysis would probably conclude that a re-assessment of community media as tools of development should be urgently conducted.

The dearth of genuine opportunities for citizen participation together with what can be described as a generally low level ‘quality of life and state of wellness’ in many communities impact negatively on the daily lives of people. The combined effect of these factors is the growing vacuum of time, attention and allegiance that has been and will continue to be filled wholly or partially by foreign, imported media content as an easy escape from the harsh reality of daily life. One sign of the growing alienation of citizens is the increasing numbers of persons who have withdrawn from participation in the political process. The reality of life in these forgotten communities is that elected representatives have ceased to represent people and there are few opportunities for self-expression.

Unfortunately, investigations have revealed only a single concrete attempt to formulate a policy and regulations that would establish the part that community media would be permitted and encouraged to play in community and national development. In 1996, the Government of Jamaica issued a draft Sound Broadcasting Licence under the Broadcasting and Radio Re-Diffusion Act. This Community Radio Licence specifically prohibited any material “that seeks to promote the sale or use of any product offered by or associated with a sponsor” and also specifically prohibited “broadcast of any advertisements or advertising matter”. In the absence of sources of guaranteed funding for community radio stations, these prohibitions in the draft licence made the survival of a community station almost impossible. The critical need to provide the new station with the means by which it could sustain itself prevailed during the negotiations with the Government of Jamaica and eventually resulted in the grant of an unrestricted commercial licence to ROOTS FM in July 1997. Also in 1997, the Jamaican government published a new TV and Cable Policy document that harmonised the provision of cable television services. The new policy included a requirement for each cable operator to dedicate a single channel to be used for ‘community programming’, although there have been no proposals about how this might be achieved.

Training Programmes for Developing Community Media

The establishment of a training course and the design of classroom and on-the-job training programmes for community media workers must begin with an awareness

of the crucial differences between community and mainstream media. The *raison d'être* for community media enterprises lies in placing the power of the media at the disposal of the communities they serve. Thus community media workers must be sensitive to the mission of the entity, facilitate and encourage the fullest possible participation by listeners, come primarily from among their target populations, and be knowledgeable about all aspects of their target populations and keep up-to-date about current developments. They must also be willing to play multiple roles to attract the resources needed for sustainability of the enterprise, to acquire special skills that are different from those required by workers in mainstream media institutions, including those for the appropriate delivery of appropriate messages, and to submerge their egos and become sensitive servants of their listeners. They must commit themselves to the highest levels of integrity and professionalism.

These are the priorities that must inform the selection and training of community media workers and provide the basis for their continued employment in community media. The primary objective must be the creation and development of a cohesive team of professionals in a responsive and effective community media enterprise. Additionally, to be truly effective, these enterprises need to earn the trust and a sense of ownership on the part of their target communities. Ongoing training needs to respond to the purpose of the enterprise and to react to the dynamic realities of their chosen environment.

Currently, training for the majority of community media workers is part of the standard daily routine. On-the-job training is emphasised and frequent staff meetings and seminars are used to reinforce and augment staff development. The experience at ROOTS FM has confirmed that rigorous adherence to a schedule of carefully planned weekly meetings of all staff members is a *sine qua non* of success.

UNESCO has been a prime source of support for the training of community media workers. One example is its recent sponsorship of the 1998 Summer Programme for Community Radio Practitioners. This programme was conducted by the Caribbean Institute of Mass Communication (CARIMAC) on the University of the West Indies campus and brought together workers in community radio stations from across the region. The training lasted for six weeks and catered for 10 producers/presenters from six countries. The schedule was rigorous and the training placed heavy emphasis on practical exercises that students were encouraged to

duplicate when they returned to their community stations. The occasion was used to encourage collaboration and the exchange of information among participants and to begin discussions on the creation of a Website for Caribbean community radio stations. Participants felt that future training exercises should take place at the actual locations of community radio stations, on a rotating basis, to encourage the cross fertilisation of techniques, sharing of ideas and networking among the various community radio stations in the Caribbean region.

Conclusion

Community media, in both urban and rural settings, can serve groups of people who are physically isolated from the mainstream or who live under similar economic circumstances. Beneficiaries of community media usually have many social and cultural links and perceive themselves as distinct in some respect from the larger society or region within which they exist. Experience in the region has been that the availability of responsive media in such communities can reduce alienation and facilitate their integration into the larger society or region. Such media certainly reduce the 'tyranny of the centre' and help to improve the self-esteem of individuals by providing easily accessible opportunities for them to express themselves and to participate in the process of their own development.

In general, it may not be wise to allow market forces to be the prime determinant of the creation and sustainability of community media. The imperative of the sustainability of community media is one of the most critical challenges that Caribbean societies face on the threshold of the new millennium. Community media institutions should earn their way in society and provide their owners, the community, with an adequate return on invested human and material resources. In this case, an adequate return must include the qualitative benefits that the community derives from community media. Caribbean community media must live and prosper in a maelstrom of rich and powerful international media forces. The population is in fact served by 17 daily and about 50 weekly newspapers, 21 AM radio stations and 65 FM radio stations, more than 40 television stations (19 of which are in Guyana alone), nearly 60 satellite and cable operators and more than 30 Internet service providers.

These open windows to the world already bring a mind-boggling volume of mostly alien material to the people who live in the countries and communities – all small and vulnerable – that together make up the Caribbean region. The option of restricting general access to external sources of media content is not a viable one and is increasingly difficult and prohibitively expensive to apply. Instead, it is recommended that governments and stakeholders in all Caribbean countries immediately begin the identification and adoption of measures that can be described as ‘intelligent and informed self interest’ in the provision of support for the development of community media. Such measures could include the provision of adequate resources to create and sustain community media as partners-in-development. Disincentives could be applied to investments in other forms of media and attractive incentives applied to expenditures that support community media. Such ‘self interested’ practices should be maintained until most national needs for sustainable community media have been satisfied, in circumstances where national needs have been quantified through a carefully organised strategic planning process.

Caribbean countries are so small and vulnerable as to render them almost powerless in the face of the concerted assault by global media empires. However, the limited size of Caribbean countries and the limited size of the Caribbean region could be converted to a significant strength if understood and wisely employed. Community media can thus become an effective weapon against the ‘tyranny of the centre’ in a global sense.

Community media are relatively young and face an uncertain future in the Caribbean region because their potential value as partners-in-development of the societies and communities is as yet unknown and only just beginning to be understood. Until their value as partners-in-development can be demonstrated by the success of the current examples described in this chapter, they are unlikely to attract the resources that are essential for their survival and growth.

The development of a vision of what Caribbean communities and their larger societies can become, if community media were allowed to reach their true potential, may be helped by consideration of the following hypothetical questions:

1. what if the establishment and maintenance of community media became national priorities in Caribbean countries?

2. what if Caribbean community media enterprises were part of a well organised and managed electronic network with their own Web Page and Internet links?
3. what if developments, decisions and successful initiatives in any community in the Caribbean region could be instantly available to community media enterprises in all other communities in the region, for appropriate distillation, dissemination and discussion?
4. what if the various stakeholders in each community served by a community media enterprise could be provided with the details of ongoing developments in other communities for discussion, analysis and the selective application of successful techniques of development? And what if this process could be organised without interference and at minimal cost?
5. what if the residents of any community in any Caribbean country could access relevant information about any other community through its resident media enterprise and do so at minimal cost?

The unique configuration and relatively small size of Caribbean countries and the communities that comprise them suggest that many of these communities and several of the countries could be perfect hosts for community media. Most of these communities exhibit high levels of unemployment, of illiteracy, of interpersonal conflict; they show serious levels of criminal activity, low levels of saving and of home ownership, substandard housing, decaying, substandard community infrastructure; they also display unhealthy lifestyles, uninformed nutritional practices, high risk sexual conduct, high levels of teenage pregnancy, growing numbers of abandoned street children and many other worrisome indicators of a decline in the quality of life and well-being of these communities.

This suggests that the region is conducting business as usual while sitting on a powder keg that is resting on the smouldering embers of neglect, voicelessness, illiteracy and hunger. An explosion is inevitable if the situation is not addressed with sensitivity and urgency. The widespread application of the concept of community media in the Caribbean Region offers an affordable and attainable approach to these challenges and the time for concerted action is now.