

INTRODUCTION

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In recent years, there has been a gradual liberalisation of media and a growing phenomenon of community media in African countries. However, many of the existing or emerging community media do not possess the economic, technical and human resources required for sustainability. In its communication strategy and programme for Africa, UNESCO accords priority to encouraging and supporting the creation and sustenance of such media which help to expand the possibilities of more and more people gaining access to the media, participating in the communication process, receiving and imparting news and information and articulating their needs, views and opinions on issues which impact their lives. It is in the perspective of the priority given to community media that UNESCO, in collaboration with the Government of Uganda, organized a regional seminar on promoting community media in Africa in Kampala in June 1999. The principal purpose of the seminar was to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences about approaches to developing community media and to formulate strategies for promoting and enhancing the development of community media in African countries.

In preparation for the seminar, UNESCO commissioned a number of papers and case studies to provide a background for the deliberations. These papers described the development of community media in West, East and Southern Africa. There also described the experiences in South-East Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. In addition, there were five case studies of country-specific experiences in developing community media in Africa. This publication presents the edited texts of those background papers and a synthesis of the proceedings as well as recommendations of the regional seminar.

In Chapter 1, Alfred E. Opubor of the New Africa International Network, Harare, Zimbabwe, reflects on the proposition: “If community media is the answer, what is the question?” He stresses the importance of community media in African countries and notes that community media created in the 20th Century were mainly single-channel media, responding to technical and instrumental orientations, favouring hardware above software, and emphasising technique over process. Their impact has usually been evaluated in terms of the achievement of standardised improvement in sectoral target areas such as agriculture, health, population, literacy and poverty alleviation. Opubor argues that what is needed, instead, is to understand the needs of the community through its communication system, so that community media can be considered as elements of a community communication system. He provides a number of suggestions on issues dealing with community media such as policy and regulation of community media; their ownership and control; technical operations and technology; programme content; and sustainability.

L. Muthoni Wanyeki of ECONIEWS, Nairobi, Kenya, describes the development of community media in East and Southern Africa in Chapter 2. In providing an overview of developments in the region, she notes that two categories of community media exist: (i) media which are independent, corporately owned and managed with a community development orientation, and produced with some level of community participation; and (ii) communication initiatives of development agencies which seek to incorporate community participation in their ownership, management and production. Wanyeki draws particular attention to the need for training in communication skills, journalistic techniques, technical production methods, management practices as well as measures to assure financial sustainability.

Kwame Karikari of the School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, presents an overview of the development of community media in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia in Chapter 3. He contends that, over the last decade, disenchantment with the authoritarian, centralised, state-owned and controlled media in a number of countries in West Africa encouraged experiments with new forms of media to address the communication needs and interests of rural communities. In his view, community media pres-

ent an alternative to the communication agenda set by the dominant, socio-political or even cultural order to contribute to the processes of political liberalisation and democratisation and promote change in the living conditions of poor, marginalised, deprived or oppressed communities. But community media in West Africa face several problems and challenges including funding, running costs, management, human resources, the social environment of the communities, as well as the legal and policy regimes of these countries.

In Chapter 4, Yao Ahade of the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, discusses the development of community media in French-speaking West Africa. He stresses that community media must aim at enabling marginalised rural communities to participate in national development based on knowledge and information. Ahade presents examples of community media in rural areas whose principal purpose is to provide ‘communication of proximity’ reflecting the socio-economic, cultural and linguistic needs and realities of rural communities. He notes that these community media favour dialogue and popular participation, and provide access to development education for the communities and development agents.

Chapters 5 to 7 present the situation of community media in South-East Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. In contrast to the relatively recent development of community media in sub-Saharan Africa, the experiences in these other parts of the world show how differing political, social and cultural environments have shaped the development of community media.

Louie Tabing of the Tambuli Project, Quezon City, Phillipines, describes the development of community media in South-East Asia in Chapter 5. He observes that numerous local newspapers and low-power radio stations exist in South-East Asia and, although many serve small-sized populations and limited geographical communities, they are mainly in the hands of government and elite sectors or families and are western and entertainment oriented in their content. In contrast, community media provide people at the grassroots level with mechanisms for making their voices heard. Tabing describes different forms of community media in the South-East Asian countries including newsletters, blackboard and wall newspapers, audio towers, folk media and radio stations.

The development of community media in the Caribbean is described in Chapter 6 by Colin H. Cholmondeley of Mustard Seed Communities, Kingston, Jamaica. He observes that the common characteristics of developing societies and communities are their vulnerability and the inevitability of their further marginalisation, if such societies do not ensure the emergence of community media organisations as effective partners-in-development. Cholmondeley notes that community media in the Caribbean face similar challenges including the development of human resources; the sustainability of community media enterprises in situations of general resource scarcity; and the need to strengthen the capacity of organisations that operate and manage community media. He calls for a concerted move towards the development of community media, if the relatively small countries of the Caribbean are to have any chance of seizing control of their development options.

In Chapter 7 Vicente Brunetti, a consultant in communication and education in Asunción, Paraguay, discusses the development of community media in Latin America. He observes that a logic of economic profitability characterizes the commercial mass media in the region, a political profitability logic identifies the state mass media or those media which belong to or are associated with political parties, and a logic of socio-cultural profitability defines community media. Brunetti observes that the experiences in communication and community media in Latin America have not been exclusively with rural areas or marginalised communities. Many have been developed within urban areas and not necessarily in marginalised communities. He argues that the legitimisation of community media does not have to do with their geographic location or with the community's marginal character, but with "the development of a collective conscience to define the experience".

Four case studies are presented in Chapter 8. They treat specific developments in Uganda, South Africa, Mali and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as different perspectives on the difficulties in establishing community media and of the important role played by NGOs and the traditional development agencies.

The case of the development of community media in Uganda is discussed by Ruth Ochieng of ISIS, Kampala, Uganda. She notes that political pluralism

in the 1990's encouraged media liberalisation and the rise of the private media accompanied by popular participation in the development process. However, the new players have remained largely in the urban areas, and the government or wealthy conglomerates control most communication outlets. To formulate a national communication policy with a view to redressing the urban/rural imbalance, a study was undertaken in 12 districts in 1998 to identify the sources, adequacy, relevance, accessibility of information as well as the relationship between information providers, community users and government. The recommendations of the study were discussed at a national seminar in November 1998. The seminar made several recommendations for formulating a strategic communication and information policy for Uganda.

Mfundo Majazi of the National Community Radio Forum, Johannesburg, South Africa describes the development of community media in post-apartheid South Africa in the second case study. He notes that community media in South Africa emerged as the voices of the oppressed and played a significant role in informing and mobilising communities, at the grassroots level, against apartheid. While progressive media were banned in South Africa until the early 1990s, a number of organs of civil society played a significant role in preparing for the liberalisation of the airwaves and conceptualising South Africa's future broadcasting environment, including laying the groundwork for the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, which includes a serious commitment to community broadcasting. However, despite the now favourable social and legislative situation, community radio must compete for funding with public and commercial/private broadcasters and sustainability is a major concern.

In the third case study, Jean-Pierre Ilboudo of FAO, Rome, Italy, discusses the methods and lessons learned from a local community radio project in Southern Mali implemented by his Organization. Under the project, four community radio stations were managed by the local communities were established. Ilboudo draws particular attention to the major lessons learnt including the need for (i) an integrated approach and awareness sessions with all the potential participants of the community radio; (ii) management and programme committees; (iii) appropriate premises built by the community; (iv)

training of staff; (v) studies into the community's information needs; and (vi) the technical, listening and impact monitoring and evaluation.

In the fourth case study, Jennifer Sibanda of the Federation of African Media Women (FAMW), Harare, Zimbabwe presents the Development through Radio (DTR) project in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The project was initiated in Zimbabwe in 1988 by FAMW to provide women and marginalised groups with access to radio. By 1999, 60 DTR Clubs had been established in the country and the project had been extended to Angola, Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia. The main objectives of the DTR are to produce two-way radio programmes and create two-way communication between groups and government authorities; to enable women and rural populations to express themselves; and to ensure the participation of rural populations in economic and social development. The key factors in the success of the DTR included the ownership and control of the radio programmes by the community, the use of local language and training of the major players.

In the midst of the globalization of communication and information highways, we need to constantly remind ourselves that the access to highways is by small roads and paths leading from homes, localities and communities. African countries need to build these small roads and paths to ensure that local communities are not completely left out of the national communication and information grid. Our expectations are that the regional seminar and the present publication will contribute to generating and reinforcing the requisite interest, awareness, knowledge and understanding among policy-makers and planners of what community media can do in the national communication and information process.