COMMUNITY RADIO / AMATEUR RADIO

Community radio stations are usually set up 'by the community, for the community'. They differ from national or international radio broadcasters because they feature local news and issues and often include local people in the programmes. They are also able to broadcast in the local language. Rural community radio stations often operate on a not-for-profit basis although they may raise money through advertising.

Most community radio stations broadcast on the FM (VHF) waveband and their coverage varies depending upon the equipment being used. Some small stations cover areas of a few square kilometres whilst others broadcast within a radius of hundreds of kilometres and have very large audience numbers. The regulations concerning the licensing of radio broadcasters vary from country to country, and should be understood before undertaking radio initiatives.

Advantages of Community Radio / Amateur Radio

Community radio is often greatly appreciated by its audience because of the localised nature of the programming.

- The community feels involved and can contribute directly to the programme content through letters, phone-ins or by visiting the station.
- Listeners do not require literacy.
- A large audience can be reached.
- For isolated communities without electricity or telephone it may be the only communication medium that they receive.

Faraja Community Radio Station, Shinyanga, Tanzania.

How to use Community Radio / Amateur Radio

- Setting up and running a community radio stations is a significant undertaking and requires careful planning.
- A license must be secured before broadcasting can start.
- Determine the funds required for equipment, premises and all running costs.
- Ensure that the necessary technical and broadcasting know-how will be available.
- Decide on the number of broadcasting hours per day and ensure that interesting programme content is collected to fill time 'on air'. Consider making your own local programmes or sourcing material from other stations. Build up a library of recordings and music, and share with others.
- Consider live programming including interviews, group discussions and phone-ins.
- Encourage feedback and involvement from the listening audience.

Constraints of Community Radio / Amateur Radio

- Some countries restrict the issuing of licences or have long application processes.
- The necessary technical and broadcasting skills may not be available.
- The radio station owners/managers are in control of a powerful communications medium, and must use it responsibly.

Real Life Story

Orkonerei Radio: the voice of livestock keepers.

The village of Tarrat is located in rural Tanzania, 80km south of Arusha on rough mud roads. This is a Maasai pasturalist region with no grid electricity or telephone lines. However, the people living around Orkonerei do not go without their own local radio station. Orkonerei FM (94.4Mhz) has been broadcasting since June 2002 and markets itself as *sauti ya wanchungi*, the voice of livestock keepers.

Judging by the huge number of postcards sent in by listeners, the station is very popular. Listeners often visit the station to ask questions and announce local events. Orkonerei FM uses a solar power system and has a 60 meter mast which allows broadcasting to 5 regions within a 100km radius. The station is on air daily from 12 noon until 10pm, with various programmes including music, educational, and religious programmes. They also have their own local journalists who make news programmes. The station has a small support office in Arusha which finds news and information on the internet and sends it to Orkonerei by e-mail using a high frequency radio, and 'Bushlink' software.

The 60 meter mast at Orkonerei

Getting the station started was not easy, it took 5 years to secure the necessary broadcasting licence. Staff remain uncertain about whether they are entitled to broadcast in the local Massia language, given that Kiswahili is the national language in Tanzania.

Real life story written from an Practical Action visit to Tarrat, May 2003

Further reading

Radio Listening Groups Practical Action Technical Brief
Using Existing Mass Media Practical Action Technical Brief

Practical Action
The Schumacher Centre for Technology and Development
Bourton-on-Dunsmore
Rugby, Warwickshire, CV23 9QZ
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1926 634400
Fax: +44 (0)1926 634401
E-mail: inforserv@practicalaction.org.uk
Website: http://practicalaction.org/practicalanswers/

This document is based on the Micro Media Card Pack: A Tool Kit for Community
Development Workers produced by Practical Action in October 2003. Reproduced
as a Technical Brief in October 2007.

Practical Action is a development charity with a difference. We know the simplest ideas can have the
most profound, life-changing effect on poor people across the world. For over 40 years, we have been
working closely with some of the world's poorest people - using simple technology to fight poverty and
transform their lives for the better. We currently work in 15 countries in Africa, South Asia and Latin
America.

technical brief