

EMPOWERMENT RADIO

Voices building a community

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Foreword

Community Radio: Much more than voices on air!

A wave of community radio stations, which could be called ‘community radios for development and empowerment’, have emerged during the past 15-20 years, especially in Africa and in Asia. These radio stations are as different as the communities to which they belong. What these communities have in common is the desire to use their radio as a platform for community debate and dialogue. They wish to bring out — through a multitude of voices — their experience and local knowledge to effect social change, and to move towards the development vision and dreams of their community. These radios also serve the communities to which they belong by bringing an increasing wealth of information into a locally understood and meaningful context.

Throughout my adult life, working with community radio and communication for development, I have seen that giving people a voice, and an opportunity to speak for themselves, is what – better than anything else – leads to the empowerment required to trigger an avalanche of positive personal and community change. The power and potential of this type of community radio has also been discovered by development partners aspiring to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Increasing numbers of individuals, organisations and institutions have seen the powerful impact generated by community radio stations, identifying it as the potential ‘missing link’ between development support being provided and true development actually taking place.

Why write this book?

That community radio can, in fact, be an effective platform is certain. However, community radio is not a quick fix and there is no single blueprint that can be implemented swiftly, with little money and without the need for support and backstopping. Creating lasting social change takes time.

Furthermore many development and empowerment-focused community radios are created and take root in communities with little experience of democracy and democratic practices. Often the local authorities' lack of experience of open debate, information-sharing, requests for accountability and criticism, pose significant challenges to community radios and the people around them.

Most importantly, no real impact nor sustainability of 'community radios for development and empowerment' can be achieved without a deep-rooted sense of community ownership. In particular where the initiative of an empowerment-focused community radio is also driven and supported externally, i.e. from outside the community, an important inversion process is indispensable. This ensures true community ownership and the engagement, confidence, power and drive that can be derived from it.

It is for these reasons that I feel that this book is needed and important — and this feeling has been echoed by colleagues, community radios and their networks from many countries and realities around the world. The book's main intention is to help all participants interested in supporting community radios for empowerment to get it right. It's desire is to facilitate learning from the experience of others, to enable inspiration by example. Fundamentally, it also seeks to allow supporters of community radio for development to avoid the many pitfalls which can occur along the path of establishment, while ensuring to tap — or at least consider — the full potential of community radio.

The book is built on multiple experiences and realities, and to be certain of the validity of my examples, I use the scenarios I know best. As you read the book you will therefore become more familiar with some realities than others. The concrete examples have been included to inspire, to extract lessons and to illustrate concepts and general principles in the context of community radio for development and empowerment.

It is, however, important to realise that there is no, there cannot be, and there should not be one model to follow, because every community radio is different, because every community is different: the history is different, the people are different, their culture and language are different, their day-to-day lives are different, and their challenges are different.

Still, a number of common areas need attention and reflection: all radios need to map the community, all need to organise, to have a sound and effective management, to mobilise and organise community volunteer broadcasters, and to deal with the technical issues. Furthermore, all need to identify the important issues and priority themes in the community and develop skills to turn these into effective radio programmes, and all need to address sustainability issues and develop partnerships with the relevant stakeholders around it.

Who is this book written for?

This book is written for everyone interested in ways of turning community radio into a tool for development and empowerment. However, many of the book's elements on community mobilisation and ownership, on management and organisation, and on sustainability and partnerships could be used beyond the specific focus on community radio. The book's target audiences include:

- ★ Facilitators in and around the community using the book as a guide when starting up a community radio station, or as a diagnostic tool in an existing station;
- ★ Organisations wanting to support community radio: The book can help identify the kind of community radio to support, give clear ideas on how to design the process to ensure community ownership, what it will take, what to consider and how it may be possible to address these areas step by step along the way;
- ★ Planners at national level, seeing how community radio can support the empowerment of communities and spur democratic cultures;
- ★ Legislators, in search of a community radio concept which is adequate to ensure community ownership and empowerment;
- ★ International organisations and donors, in their definition of policies and priorities, and practically as a tool in the scanning of proposals and applications.
- ★ University students, providing a framework for understanding how community radio can become a tool for change and empowerment. While the book is not based in theory nor in an academic tradition, it provides a complementary source of understanding important hands-on issues around community communication;
- ★ Consultants and other professionals interested in effective development in general and Communication for Development specifically;
- ★ Anyone in search of (one of) the missing link(s) between development 'investments' and development results.

Acknowledgements

This book reflects the learning I have experienced since 1980, when I began to focus on community radio. I have learned immensely from all of you with whom I have interacted in the latter part of my studies, as well as in the international community radio movement and circles. I have benefited from exchanges and collaboration within my professional networks, and I have learnt from all who have been my colleagues in my many different work environments.

This book would not have read as well without Melissa Manning's keen and capable proofing and editing, and it would not have matched Lulu's layout requirements without Brian Lister's kind collegial support. Without my husband and EMPOWERHOUSE partner, Peter Haag's tireless support, and encouragement, this book would still have been a dream.

Beyond acknowledgement, I have dedicated this book in solidarity to all of the women and girls, men and boys, who — with a passion for change and love for their community — work hard to create and maintain the meeting place represented by their community radio. You have shared with me your stories about your culture, your pride, your longing and your dreams, as well as your struggles and hardships — and how you think life can be better. I hope this book will help you and your communities to build strong and sustainable community radios, which you can use to build your tomorrow.

Further use of the book within **EMPOWERHOUSE**

This book will be used as a basis for online webinars, training, and other events, which will be produced in conjunction with my company EMPOWERHOUSE. EMPOWERHOUSE aims to be a facilitator for all target groups mentioned above striving to secure strong and sustainable empowerment radios through training and coaching, networking and other support. For more information, please refer to www.empowerhouse.dk (under preparation).

For any queries, comments or suggestions please contact me at mail@empowerhouse.dk.