

# *Community Radio Case Studies*

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*Remarks by*

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Radio is a century old technology that reaches all corners of the world. Although the emergence of the Internet in the late 1960's and the web in the 1990's have had a major impact on communications and lifestyles this past decade, it is still a means of communications that requires a level of infrastructure that is not available to many disadvantaged groups especially in the rural areas of the developing world. As delivery systems for information, radio and print are still the leaders in mass communications. This is especially true in the developing countries where radio can be highly effective in reaching and addressing people about their local concerns in their local dialects. Radio is the great equaliser.

The Commonwealth of Learning has promoted and employed, in a number of Commonwealth based activities, low-powered FM community radio as a viable means of delivering education at a distance. A suitcase radio system can reach populations effectively and at a fraction of the cost. Inhibiting factors such as electrical bills and replacement parts, necessary for large installations, can be limited if a low-powered FM solution is considered. Solar electricity can be factored into this scenario with low power requirements of a suitcase FM station. It must, however, be stressed that community radio does not just happen once the station has been implemented. Training in management and business skills is needed in order to sustain staff, organise programming, and replace or purchase equipment. Good planning and training will lessen the risk of failure. The case studies will allow the reader to consider some of the issues that may be a relevant to their own country situations.

The case studies presented by Boulahya, Walker and Naidoo, focus not only on the effective setup and delivery of community radio in the field, as demonstrated by the RANET Niger and the Apac, Uganda models, but also on Naidoo's description of the, "highly competitive, often volatile commercial

environment", of community radio which is forced into, "vying with the commercial and public broadcaster for listenership". The authors share the urgency of the promotion of community radio as an essential element, "in the battle against AIDS and ignorance about the pandemic". It is the goal of these case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of community radio, "as an open system that invites rural populations to participate, it offers tremendous returns to those who are willing to invest their energy and imagination", to quote Boulahya. Walker draws our attention to the crucial issues of cost-effectiveness and the sustainability of such projects. COL and UNESCO-BREDA have commissioned these case studies as examples of issues and good practice in community-based radio in Africa. The case studies challenge us to consider community radio as an effective means of reaching the targets of a world free of HIV/AIDS and of each child having access to educational opportunities if only, as Boulahya declares, 'we dare to dream'.

## Case studies

1) Climate, Communications, and Innovative Technologies: Potential Impacts and Sustainability of New Radio and Internet Linkages in Rural African Communities, by:

Mohammed Boulahya, Director and Founder, African Center for Meteorological Applications for Development, Niamey, Niger.

Macol Stewart Cerda, Investing in Women in Development Fellow, Institute of International Education, funding provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Marion Pratt, Senior Research Associate, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Social Science Advisor, USAID.

Kelly Sponberg, Coordinator, Climate Information Project, U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Global Programs

2) Portable FM Radio Stations: Broadcasting with the Sun, by David Walker, Education Specialist (Educational Technology/Media), Commonwealth of Learning.

3) Effective Community Radio in Education, by Gordon Naidoo, Director, OLSET, South Africa (Open Learning Systems Education Trust).