



C A M E C O P R A C T I C E S E R I E S

CAMECO facilitates 11-day online debate on:

Participatory Income Generation of Community Radios

The theme of this first pilot online debate is: Income Generation – a central aspect of Community Radio sustainability.

The debate will be opened on LinkedIn, with regular twitter feeds, at 12 noon CET on Monday, March 31, 2014, and closed on Thursday, April 10, 12 noon CET.

Participants in the online debate are Community Radio Directors, community broadcasters, including volunteers and boards, as well as community radio facilitators, funders, and civil society activists, academics and development practitioners.

Registration is open for three simultaneous language forums – [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#). Moderators will regularly provide summaries and share central issues amongst language groups.

Moderation is by Birgitte Jallof, with support from the CAMECO team. Regular summaries and lead questions will be presented.

At the end of the debate, a tool kit of methods and techniques to ensure financial sustainability will have been put to the fore, and CAMECO will summarise and share knowledge generated in ways appropriate and easily accessed. Form and shape will naturally depend on the process.

Let us make all community radio stations financially sustainable!

While this is a bold statement, we actually believe it is possible to come close to realisation of this dream, held high by all community radio managers, broadcasters and their boards, along with their surrounding communities and partners. Widely recognized as being in a position to close the gap between development challenges and development investments, sustainable community radio is important not only to each community in question, but far beyond that!¹

¹ The general thinking in this introduction is building on Birgitte Jallof's book: EMPOWERMENT RADIO – Voices building a community. EMPOWERHOUSE 2012

Making a community radio sustainable is a challenge everywhere in the world! By now, it is generally acknowledged that sustainability is made up by **external factors**, such as an enabling environment (legislation etc.), and **internal factors** within the station itself including: social sustainability, organisational sustainability and financial sustainability. While these three internal factors are mutually interdependent and reinforcing, and it is difficult to isolate one for discussion, and while ownership and participation have been proven to be the most important aspects of sustainability, this online debate will focus on financial sustainability.

Working with community radio partners in Latin America, Africa and Asia, CAMECO collected data about community participation. The three surveys on "Community Participation at Local and Community Radio Stations" are available online at the [CAMECO website](#). Based on this documentation, CAMECO has decided to initiate a debate series addressing the core issues and challenges of income generation, with 'participation' as the special entry point. The objective of this debate is for community radio practitioners and facilitators to share experiences – very concrete and practical – and in this way build new locally adapted, globally informed strategies for change in the financial area.

While discussing issues around a community station cannot begin without knowing its vision and the way it plans to fulfil its mission and its values – the soul of the community radio, so to speak – the burning issue mentioned by all radios is how to get the financing mix right and how to match financial needs with appropriate and effective income generating activities. We therefore take this as our starting point for a first, pilot debate.

This online debate is intended to support such a development by collecting experiences: positive and negative, from the debate's participants, and summarising these, while systematically and regularly spurring on the debate from Monday March 31 to April 10, 2014.

Invitations have been extended to all continents, with very different traditions and experiences – yet with similar challenges. Bringing them together in this debate, we trust that a wealth of innovative and useful information will emerge. The debate will therefore take place in three parallel fora in English, French and Spanish, where our facilitators will ensure regular cross-fertilisation through sharing.

Community Radio: Participation at the centre of community ownership and change

Community radio stations are as varied 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 spread — through a multitude of voices — their experience and local knowledge, to bring justice, accountability and rights, generating social change and a move towards the development vision and dreams of their community.

Community radio gives people a voice, and an opportunity to speak for themselves, leading 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.

While well established in many countries with regional and national community radio networks, facilitating organisations providing support and capacity building as well as funding partnerships,

community radio still faces many different challenges, depending upon the national setting in which they operate, and their community organisation and orientation. Maintaining a strong community engagement, having an effective management, meeting ongoing capacity building needs due to a high turnover of volunteer community broadcasters, ensuring programme quality and appropriateness, mastering rapid technical innovations, are but some of the challenges met by most stations in all parts of the world. Getting ever demanding expenses covered by an appropriate financial mix, learning how this is done in your realities, sharing achievements and failures in this first online forum, will help us to be much better able to meet the challenges.

Is your community radio self-sustainable or sustainable? An important distinction!

Financial sustainability is still considered the major stumbling block by most community radio stations. And when looking for answers, we find that they are closely linked to the organisational capacity (and sustainability) of a station, as well as social sustainability aspects, such as community ownership and participation. In the work to get the financial sustainability right, it will in the process be good for the station's overall well-being!

Realistic budgets and reliable operations will be crucial. Not least, full transparency and capable financial management, based on the principles of accountability, will contribute to efficient use of resources. Building and strengthening capacities on good financial governance, financial planning, etc. of a sufficiently broad group of community members and radio station staff, is of paramount importance for the longer-term financial sustainability of the radio station.

When talking about financial sustainability, it is important to distinguish between 'self-sustainability' and 'sustainability'. In most parts of the world, it is difficult to imagine a community radio station being totally self-sustainable, in the sense of the radio station generating all necessary resources through member contributions or through its own activities.

CAMECO has been working with local and community radio partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania for many years. A common concern of our partners is the active involvement of their "listeners" in the radios' operations. But in which areas and how can they do so? What facilitates community participation – and which are the difficulties faced? To gather respective data, CAMECO conducted three regional [surveys on participation](#) at local and community radio stations in the Southern continents. The studies examined the involvement of the radio stations' communities in programming, management, ownership, and funding in order to gain a deeper understanding of concrete practices and challenges of community and local radios. An initial survey was conducted in English in Asia and anglophone Africa. It was followed by a French survey in francophone Africa and the Caribbean, and a Spanish survey in Latin America.

The findings of these surveys are not considered representative, but provide a basis for further in-depth research. In that process, CAMECO has decided to initiate an online debate series addressing the core issues of community participation. The first pilot debate focuses on the challenges of (financial) sustainability and income generation. Experiences shared and the knowledge generated during this debate will be published in an appropriate and easily accessible way – depending on the process.

CAMECO (Catholic Media Council) is a consultancy specialising in media and communications in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific. The overall aim of CAMECO's services and resources is to empower community-oriented media and communication initiatives and contribute to the capacity building of partners.

For understanding sustainability in a broader sense, a useful definition of financial sustainability is:

...the ability of an organisation to secure and manage sufficient resources to enable it to its mission effectively and consistently over time without excessive dependence on any single funding source [...] Sustainable organisations have, at minimum, a clear mission and strategic direction; the skills to attract resources from a variety of local, national and international sources and the know-how to manage them efficiently [...].

Lisa Cannon: Life beyond Aid, 1999.

The online debate will question and discuss this through experiences shared. It will discuss the role of national community radio associations in their function as fundraising support and capacity builders – also in the financial area. Furthermore, we will debate the importance of regular, simple barefoot assessment of impact for radios to be able to document that people actually listen and follow the station's advice, which is important for potential partners and advertisers to know. Moreover, it will be important to discuss experiences with affordable audience research. And a lot more!

Effective income generation to facilitate lasting social change

That community radio can be an effective platform is certain. However, community radio is not a quick fix, and there is no single blueprint for swift implementation, with little money and without requiring support and backstopping: creating lasting social change takes time. But when sharing experiences, mapping the dos and the don'ts, we can help each other move towards the aim of this debate: More financially sustainable community radio stations!

So: sign up and get ready for March 31, 12, noon CET! We look forward to meeting you in cyber space!

Birgitte Jallov, Debate facilitator, March, 2014