



SUMMARY OF APRIL 3'S DEBATE

In yesterday's debate, the following issues were put into focus:

The importance of management and planning for effective and ongoing income generation in a radio was one of the elements in many contributions during the past 24 hours. Alymana Bathily from Senegal stresses the fact that a skewed vision which actually does not advance participation of the people of the community will put financial sustainability at risk.

Jimmi Okello maintains that rushing to talk about financial sustainability as the main or primary issue when sustainability comes up, is a mistake. Yet finance/money is needed for making the many aspects of a station work. "Once the community radios have their business/feasibility plans in place, they will find that some activities do not require money directly and others do. So the ones that require funds and are budgeted, ways and means to generate these funds would be undertaken."

Loli Martinez, Media Specialist Community Radio with IREX underlines that "the radio needs to have a good manager", then it is possible to find sustainability in different systems, which depend a lot upon the different national frameworks and experiences.

John Goslino maintains the need for a strong management to manage the funds well once generated: how much of it should be re-invested in community-based programming and participation activities consistent with its mandate. I think the source of the money is not necessarily a problem by itself, much more important is the kind of governance and management in place to deliver on the goals of the station.

Also requiring sound management, Craig Twitt stresses that diversity of income sources is the key, and over-reliance on any one source (with the exception of direct community support) should be avoided. Over reliance on donor-funds leads to programming that isn't necessarily responsive to community needs; over-reliance on commercial advertising (whether small local businesses or large national businesses) incentivises populist on-air programming, irrespective of its social/community impact and over-reliance on public/government funding may lead to an erosion of political scrutiny functions provided by the station.

On the management side also the challenge of maintaining capacity while working with volunteers and having an important turn-over is highlighted by Gladson Makowa, Malawi, who says that: from experience, many community radios find it difficult to fund-raise because many so called funders or donors think community radios are for almost nothing (cheap). But there are people who work very hard as volunteers but without or with little compensation of some kind for their hours spent. Therefore, it is indeed not good to say the community only should contribute or fund. In most cases, these communities fail to reach the optimum if the community radio is in remote area.



The importance of ownership and social sustainability BEFORE talking funding is brought forward again by Kofi from the Ghana Community Radio Network and AMARC Africa stresses that “The baggage of the operatives if any is carried over to add or subtract ‘value’ from the image of the station.” And “If anybody in the community challenges or questions transparency in the operation of the station, ownership and for that matter, sustainability is surely an unsuccessful abortion.” So again: Governance and community ownership decides whether financial sustainability is possible!

Suman from Nepal and AMARC stresses it : “I feel that it is fundamentally wrong to begin discussing sustainability from the point of finances. That's the easiest to handle -- just live within your means [...]. Remember, setting up a community radio can be very cheap or very expensive – depending upon what a community can afford. People will support, if they see it as a priority.”

Goslino challenges this: “I think we need to think beyond the concept of “just live within your means” which suggests a survival mode. Survival is not the same as health and sustainability, most radios that are in survival mode are probably providing very little value / scope to a very small (maybe diminishing) audience, and will be increasingly irrelevant unless they are the only radio (or media) serving a region, and there can't be many cases like that anywhere in the world today.”

Harriet Okoko from Radio Wa in Uganda agrees with Suman: “to meet the sustainability level ; cost containment is very important. Through experience I know that when income increases many have the tendency of increasing 'needs”

The role of community radio facilitators like NGOs and donors is still discussed:

Kanchan from Hyderabad, India, maintains that “if the parent NGO nurtures community radio as one among its various empowering social change initiatives, with a clear mandate of giving voice to marginalised groups, and sticks to the core CR principles of democratisation, then, seeking funding for the CR station should take place in the same manner as it happens for all its other interventions. “

Audience research and documentation of impact is another issue touched on by many: Ricky Moses Ojok, Northern Uganda writes: "Most community and local radios do not have well defined target audiences, coupled with lack of practical skills to carry audience research to know how many people listen to their radios and strategizing how to market ideas to generate/increase income still remain a big road block that makes radios with no clear avenue to financial sustainability".

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