Sustaining the Voice of the Desert: An Overview of Funding and Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio In Sahara Africa

ADELUSI, Gabriel Ayodeji[1], AKINMADE, Oyinkansola Henrietta[2]

[1,2] Department of media and communication studies, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti

ABSTRACT

Community radio as a platform for marginalized voices, is playing a vital role in Sahara Africa as it is being used in promoting social change in the society. However, funding and sustainability is constituting threat to the long-term viability of the community radio stations in this environment. This article provides an overview of the funding landscape and sustainability challenges facing community radio in Sahara Africa, highlighting innovative solutions and opportunity for growth.

1.0 BACKGROUND

In the face of many challenges confronting the nations in their quest for development which ranges from socio-economic to political and cultural challenges, media and communications were considered as part of measures to put the challenges under control, this is to actively engage the members of the society in the activities geared toward community development. This is, what led to the emergence of community radio, a medium that enhances easy accessibility to information by the members of the community.

Community radio which is a radio owned and controlled by the community through a trust fund foundation is recognized by Africa charter of broadcasting as a third tier broadcasting that serves as a key agent of social-cultural and educational development. Peter[1] describes community radio as an intervention strategy of choice for deepening participation and community ownership. Community radio apart from the fact that it represent the voice of the voiceless and encourages participation of the members of the community in developmental activities, it also enhances rapid development of the community in which it is situated. According to Pavarala[2] community radio produced, controlled and owned by the people, can empower the marginalized and address the "voice poverty". Being governed and managed by the local people, community radio effectively serve for addressing the local concerns in local language and cultural context. And over the years, funding has been the bane of community radio functionality and sustainability in the Sahara Africa.

Sahara Africa which span across several countries in North and West Africa, faces unique challenges that impacted community radio's funding and sustainability. Some of these challenges include, Geographical vastness because Sahara Africa covers a vast area that makes it difficult for community radio stations to reach the remote areas; limited infrastructures such as inadequate road, poor electricity supply and internet connectivity which hinders stations operations and accessibility; political insatiability, economic constraints, funding dependency, limited access to information etc.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This author examined the concept of community radio funding and sustainability. The methodology relied on the in-depth-interview and in-depth-review, analyses and synthesis of secondary sources such as textbooks, news articles, review articles, published academic papers, government documents, statistical databases and historical records. These included file notes and researchers' journal spanning over a decade.

3.0 FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY RADIO

Muswede[3] states that, "the quality of a community radio is often a product of its resources". Though the quality and sustainability of a community radio is largely a function of its financial resources otherwise known as funding but this is not limited to funding.

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[1] Peter DC, The Growing Pair of Community Radio in Africa - Emerging Lessons Toward Sustainability (Global Times 2012).
[2] Pavara V, 'Community Radio "Under Progress", Resuming Paused Revolution' (2015) Economic and Political Weekly 14-17.
[3] Muswede T, *Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio: A Comparative Study of Three Community Radio Stations in Limpopo Province* (ULSpace 2009).

Sustaining the Voice of the Desert: An Overview of Funding and Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio In Sahara Africa

There are other essential factors that determine the sustainability of a community radio other than funding. Therefore, to ensure a quality and sustainable community radio, there are three factors that have to be considered. These are financial sustainability, social sustainability and institutional sustainability.

3.1 Financial Sustainability (Funding landscape)

According to Muswede[4] "financial resources is having far reaching effects on the community radio's independence and the ability to fulfill its functions". No doubt, funding is a life-wire of any organization including community radio. Without funding community radio cannot be sustained. And funding goes a long way to determine the independence of the community radio and the objectivity of its contents. However, most of the things that determine the functionality and smooth running of a community radio are functions of funding. Among these are the regular power supply, payment of staff salaries, procurement of equipment, servicing of equipment, travelling and transportation, training and manpower development and the general running of the station. Therefore, generating adequate funding is a major challenge facing community radios in Sahara Africa.

Methods of Funding a Community Radio

There are so many ways in which community radio can be funded. Many scholars have come up with various suggestions on how to properly fund a community radio in order to ensure sustainability. Gordon[5] suggested seven methods of funding a community radio station. Therefore, the ways in which a community radio can be funded to ensure proper functioning and sustainability shall be discussed in this context.

Support from the Station Own Community: Every community radio has a purpose for setting it up, in order to accomplish this goal, the owner and community members have the responsibility of supporting their community radio station in form of donations, membership fees, fund raising activities and in kind support such as gifts to the station etc.

Patronage from Larger Organizations: Sometimes, there may be a larger organization in the community where a community radio is situated which may be ready to support the radio station in number of ways. The radio station may share premise with the larger organization in which the larger organization may have to support the radio station in form of utilities such as electricity supply, security and other supporting staff.

Commercial Advertising and Sponsorship: In a situation where the community radio is operating in a society whose legislation permit them to take commercials, such a community radio will take the advantage to generate revenue and this will be of help in financing the radio station. But in many of the cases, the community radio are not permitted to take commercials. In a situation like this, the community radio will have to look elsewhere for their revenue generation. This may be inform of sponsorship and any other sources.

Service Contracts: In service contract, the community radio stations sell broadcast services in a way that is not commercial advertising. These are the broadcast services that are being paid for that are not commercials. Among this category of service is the public service announcements.

Competitive Grants: There are situations in the developed countries where large organizations finance community radio in form of grants. Before such grants can be given, the radio station must have followed the guidelines set for accessing such grants. However, this is not common in the developing nations.

Support by NGO: There are some nongovernmental organizations that sometimes support community radio with fund and other incentives. Therefore, community radio can always approach any NGO that can accommodate their programs for funding but many of such NGOs sometimes wants to influence the content of radio stations they are financing to favor their ideology which can be inimical to the purpose for setting up a community radio

Support by Government Agencies: Receiving support from government agency by community radio station is largely depend on the owner community decision because some communities would not want any interference by the government which is one of the reasons for setting up community radio but some may decide to access government fund

3.1.1 Analysis of Funding Gaps and Limitations

The following are some of the funding gaps and limitations to community radio funding and sustainability in the Sahara Africa:

Insufficient funding: community radio stations in Sahara Africa are facing significant funding shortfalls which are hindering the ability community radio stations to sustain their operations.

Lack of Government Support: the inadequate funding and subsidies from the government and refusal to grant tax exemptions are exacerbating financial struggles among the community radio stations in Sahara Africa.

High Operational Costs: the cost of maintaining equipment, covering transmission cost couple with the payment of staff salary are factors that strain limited budgets of community radio stations.

No Clear Funding models: lack of an established models and best practices for funding community radio are hindering long-term planning

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[4] Muswede (n 3)

[5] Gordon J, *Community Radio, Funding and Ethics: The UK and Australian Models* (Oxford Long 2009) 59-79.

Sustaining the Voice of the Desert: An Overview of Funding and Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio In Sahara Africa

Dependency on External Funding: the over-reliance of community radio on donor funding which are unpredictable and short-term, this is creating uncertainty and vulnerability. These and more are the gaps and limitations to community radio funding in Sahara Africa.

3.2 Institutional Sustainability

Institutional sustainability of community radio is the ability of a community radio station to maintain its operations, mission, and impact over time. Whenever a community radio station or any other media establishment is set up, the issue of sustainability has always been the center of concern. Apart from funding, the institutional sustainability is a vital area that determines the functionality and sustainability of a community radio. Therefore, the institutional structure put in place in form of quality management, staff with special skills, clear vision and mission, capacity building and training, financial management, policy and regulatory compliance, evaluation and monitoring, quality programs, a clearly defined roles among other things will go a long way to determine the sustainability of such a community radio. Many community radio have closed down due to poor institutional arrangement put in place by the founders at inception. However, a community radio set up with properly defined structure and clear rules of engagement stands a better chance to last long, viable and enjoy a sustained service to the community. If at any particular time, a change of staff occurs, the operations of the station will still go on smoothly due to the sustainable institutional structure put in place by the founders. Therefore, institutional sustainability is an important area that determines the functionality or otherwise of a community radio station.

3.3 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability of community radio is the ability of the radio station to maintain positive social relationships, promote social cohesion and contribute to the well-being of its community. The level of social activities of a community radio station and its public relations will determine the number of its audience. Social activities of a community radio station will not only attract more listeners but will expand their reach. Therefore, before a community radio can be sustained, it has to device many ways by which it can attract the members of the community in terms of frequency range, community engagement, social impact initiatives, inclusive programming, collaboration and partnership, cultural sensitivity and diversity, social responsibility initiative and the programs of interest that are capable of catching the attention of the audience and secure the loyalty of the community members. The entertaining and educating programs a community radio dishes out will also determine its acceptability and popularity among the people of that locality. And this will contribute to sustainability of the community radio station in no small measure.

4.1 INNOVATIVE SOLUTION

A case study of Afe Babalola University Radio station, Ado Ekiti, Adekunle Ajasin University radio station, Akungba Akoko and Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology, Ikere Ekiti. Shows the pattern of community radio stations funding in the area.

Summary of interview responses from Afe Babalola University Radio station

The interview session with the staff of the radio station to explore the in-depth information on their radio funding and sustainability revealed that the funding is crucial to the proper functioning and sustainability of the radio station. Stating that the radio station majorly relied on grants, sponsorship and partnership with relevant bodies for their funding. They also believed that the organizational structure and the business model put in place are capable of sustaining the radio for a long time.

Summary of interview responses from Adekunle Ajasin University radio station

The interview with the staff of the radio station revealed that they developed strategies target at improving funding of the radio station for sustainability. Even though, they currently relied on the grants and support from the station own community, patronage from their larger organization which is the university community and sponsorship for their funding. Hoping that those strategies would bring results in the long run.

Summary of interview responses from Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology

The interview with the staff of this radio station on the funding and sustainability of their radio station also revealed their current funding pattern and their plan for sustainability. Support from their larger organization in term of funding, provision of support staff, security and electricity. They also receive grant from NGOs and relevant government agencies. They however believed that the structure and strategies put in place are capable of sustaining the radio station.

Discussion of Findings

The management of these radio stations understand the funding challenges facing community radio stations which made them develop effective strategies that would ensure long-term sustainability of these important media outlets. Apart from the fact that these radio stations enjoy patronage from their larger organizations i.e. the facilities support such as electricity supply, security, supporting staff etc. from the university communities within which they are situated. These radio stations also develop other innovative ways of funding their stations which align with most of the funding methods earlier discussed, such as sustainable business models; grant; community led funding initiatives; partnership with government agencies, NGOs and local businesses etc.

Sustaining the Voice of the Desert: An Overview of Funding and Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio In Sahara Africa

In order to address these funding gaps and limitation challenges, there is need for community radio stations and stakeholders to come up with innovations, such as diversifying revenue streams (e.g., crowd funding, membership models etc.); developing sustainable business models; building partnership with government agencies, NGOs and local businesses etc. with this, the reliable funding system and sustainability of radio stations in Sahara Africa is assured.

5.1 CONCLUSION

It is worthy of note that funding and sustainability are the major challenges confronting community radio stations across Sahara Africa, to ensure sustainability of the community radio stations in this area, funding is crucial. This is expected to be the first factor to be considered before setting up a community radio. Eventhuogh, funding is important, there are other factors which are equally important to setting up a community radio which are institutional structure and the social arrangements put in place. These three important factors are critical to funding and sustaining a community radio station. It is therefore important for the stakeholders in community radio to understand these challenges and come up with sustainable strategies to fund community radio stations in the Sahara Africa.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

Having critically assessed the requirement for funding and sustaining a community radio station, it is instructive to recommend the following ways of funding and sustaining community radio for the existing and potential founders of a community radio and for academic researchers, that before a community radio can be established, funding is a very critical area to look into and the various sources of funding as discussed in this paper. However, for a community radio to be sustained, aside from funding, other factors such as institutional structure and social arrangements are very important. Future researchers are also expected to dig more into new ways to improve community radio funding and suggest strategies for sustainability.

REFERENCES

1) Peter DC, *The Growing Pair of Community Radio in Africa - Emerging Lessons Toward Sustainability* (Global Times 2012).
2) Pavara V, 'Community Radio "Under Progress", Resuming Paused Revolution' (2015) *Economic and Political Weekly* 14-17.
3) Muswede T**,** *Sustainability Challenges Facing Community Radio: A Comparative Study of Three Community Radio Stations in Limpopo Province* (ULSpace 2009).
4) Gordon J, *Community Radio, Funding and Ethics: The UK and Australian Models* (Oxford Long 2009) 59-79.