

## **Considerations When Starting A Community Radio Station In Central Conferences**

### **WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE?**

In starting a radio station, selecting the audience becomes foundational for deciding programming. Each area deciding on community radio will need to do its own on-the-ground research regarding the status of religion in the area, the culture of information, audience and radio competition as well as determine its own perspectives, interests, resources and expertise. Following are things we've heard through our travels and conversations.

From the Ivory Coast, we heard the desire to program for young people (teens to 30's). They recognized the music, pace, on-air talent and programs would need to reflect the tastes of the young person.

In the Philippines, the United Methodist Church sponsored a program for children and their parents in the midst of programming aimed at an adult audience. Because of the nature of the program, parents and younger people knew to tune in specifically at that particular time.

Liberia's current radio plan notes that Christianity in Liberia has become a forerunner during the last generation in both nation-building and national healing. Therefore, the church's role as assumed a pro-active pioneering spirit in the development and growth of health, economic, educational, communication and agricultural sectors of Liberia in order to enhance the teaching of Christian love and virtues. Prior to this generation, Christian religion in Liberia existed outside the sphere of mainstream of national development and reconstruction. It was a separate and distinct institution only restricted to the teaching of the word of God. The audience they currently plan to reach, then, are United Methodists and non-United Methodists with a mix of music, both secular and Christian, in English and local languages, and news programming focusing on Christian education and instruction, health and basic hygiene information, community development initiatives, and local/regional news.

In at least one Ugandan Christian radio station, the target audience is non-churched people and, more specifically, people on the church peripherals with whom the church's members have access to and relate to on an ongoing basis. This audience has access to radio but never goes to church nor appreciates the Christian faith. In addition, families can be specifically targeted. To do that, the nature of programming would rotate around a typical working family in rural Africa, where the man goes out to look for work and the wife stays at home, does the house chores and raises the children. In the evening, the wife relaxes waiting for her husband. The husband returns just as the sun sets and is given a meal or a hot drink, sits in a verandah watching the goats and cows come home.

While this is a typical rural setting, the urban setting changes a few things, such as the wife also works, leaving the children with a minder. They both come home in the

evening, and the man sits to watch TV or listen to his radio while his wife rushes to make dinner. Family targeting is more complex in planning but once it is done successfully, the station is assured of a sizeable audience.

#### WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF RADIO?

Communications breaks boundaries created by race, religion, age groups, denominations, and unites people from different cultural and intellectual backgrounds and brings Christians and non-Christians into a common good environment. Community radios can use local languages, which helps illiterate people to easily communicate, and also covers people that are far apart and where there is a lack of transportation.

In addition, unlike television, the radio program brings the family together. In Africa, radio is by communal listening where all the family gathers to listen to radio. This provides the family a time to be together, either listening or discussing what they have heard on radio. Radio has replaced the instructional fireplace. In terms of impact, family unity is enhanced. By extension, if all families listening put every thing in practice, then there will be a bigger impact in terms of malaria reduction. One statistic identifies every hour, 6 people die from malaria in Africa. These deaths are preventable.

There is a need for effective community participation in all areas of life – civic, educational, spiritual, and physical. As one United Methodist bishop said, the issues related to HIV/AIDS require adapting to our real cultural situation. For example, cultural taboos restrict putting males and females together or fathers and children or even the pastor and lay people, to discuss sexual related issues. In such a case, people would be reluctant to express themselves and as consequence there are increases in the rate of contamination. Communications then plays its major role in this process and puts people together in the way the culture demands.

Radio can also be a major player in saving lives during catastrophic or emergency situations and to help spread the plea for food in an event of hunger. During the floods in Mozambique in 2000, adequate means of communications or radio would have been used to pass on the message for affected people, warning them to leave places that were vulnerable to floods and hence would have saved many lives, goods, animal stocks and crops. Instead what was experienced was chaos because of absence of adequate communications ministry.

Community radio can also have a great impact in rural settlements once it is responsible for production and dissemination of programs that benefit that particular group living in the coverage area. Various sectors of production absorb this information, especially agriculturalists, vendors, animal stock holders and business people.

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY RADIO?

Here's what several people we've talked to have said:

- Listening is easier than reading

- Many programs will be in local languages and as such, there will be no need to interpret.
- Timing of radio programs (information) can easily be adapted.
- Radio programs can easily be delivered compared to publication of newspaper and magazines.
- Information transformation is easier than print.
- Persuasive and remainder messages can easily be organized and compared to print messages.
- Many preachers and choirs can easily and physically participate and minister to the public.
- In many countries, the culture of reading is poor yet the culture of listening is very good.

### HOW CAN THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY RADIO BE MEASURED?

It's important to set targets to determine success rate. Targets for radio are not easily identifiable but the following can work:

- a) the number of calls from the audience
- b) the number of letters
- c) contributions from community groups listening
- d) a reduction in malaria and other disease incidences
- e) routine checks in the rural areas to see if people actually listen
- f) if the radio ever feature in the newspapers
- g) if politicians begin to see it as a force to reckon with... in terms of it being recognized for its contribution to society.

### CASE

Here's how Isaiah Mbuga of Uganda responded to the questions in terms of starting a radio station (he has already started four radio stations):

If you were to start a radio station:

1) What's the audience?

RESPONSE: Family audience. In terms of a community radio, set up in a rural detached community. Program something for everyone. However, in an area having many radio stations, I would target the youths, from 12-29, or from 29-39. If I am in it for money, I could even go for the opinion leaders, ages 40-65. These are the CEOs and they determine the values of society.

2) How would you measure the influence of the information?

RESPONSE: By seeing the reduction or increase of the things am promoting. For example, if am promoting products, then if they are bought, we are successful. If the reverse happens, then I have failed, and I have to look for other ways of getting into the market.

3) How would you assess the size of the actual listening audience?

RESPONSE:

- a. Through surveys and random sampling.
- b. Through monitors that we send to the ground through fans clubs that we run.

4) How do you make sure you're getting to the intended audience?

RESPONSE:

If they respond to my calls and the things I say to them. It's hard because you do not see them face-to-face. You have to rely on the feedback that you receive and also on the letters and phone calls, or on the traffic you get at the radio its self, if it is located near the people.

### **WHAT WE HEARD FROM UNITED METHODISTS IN UGANDA AS REASONS FOR ESTABLISHING A RADIO STATION IN UGANDA**

- A radio will consolidate for people knowledge about United Methodist Spiritualism- converting people from Islam to Christianity.
- Young generation will have a good handle of who God is, know their rights, eliminate poverty and reach their full potential.
- Radio would uplift community programs and uplifts standards in rural communities.
- Ignorance is a disease and knowledge is power. People will make informed decisions and this would bring development.
- The church would help people know what opportunities are available for quality life through radio communication.
- Radio ministry would be a source of income for church people. People would be employed and generate income for the church as well.
- Radio will help win more souls for Christ. It would mobilize people to join the church.
- Radio will be a conduit of information of knowing what the church is doing in their community and nation.
- Radio would help combat HIV/AIDS. This would help remove some taboos within certain communities about sexual issues.
- Radio would help market church programs, schools programs or hospital programs.
- Communication is the lifeblood of development and radio would play a pivotal role. Radio would embrace the holistic ministry of the church by giving people life in its fullness.