

2013

Enhancing Reach and User-  
friendliness of Community Radios  
in Malawi; End of Project Report.

The Executive Director  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Young Advocates for the Advancement of ICT-related Development (YAAICTD) is youth-led and broad-based communication organization based in Lilongwe Malawi. The organization seeks to promote the use of ICTs in order to address the pressing challenges being faced by rural communities. For the past three years, YAAICTD has been working with Mudziwathu and Nkhotakota Radio on a project entitled Community Radio for Accountability and Transparency (CRAT) with support from Hivos. Before CRAT, YAAICTD implemented the Parliament outside Parliament (PoP) project with support also from Hivos with the aim to hold elected representatives accountable to their electorates. The common denominator between the two projects is that they are all issue-based advocacy programs.

Having worked with Community Radios, we noted that Community Radios have a number of challenges including their inability to develop programmes that are relevant to the people they are intended for; and also their inability to take advantage of the wave of social media and ICT usage.

In terms of project implementation, we are satisfied with the level of implementation and impact of the project activities. We are also satisfied with the unintended results associated with the intervention. Despite registering conspicuous success the project financing faced a major risk in the fluctuation of the Kwacha which brought an unprecedented skyrocketing of cost of some essential services associated with the project. The economic squeeze did not also spare the targeted beneficiaries of this project.

In the ensuing sections, a contextual analysis of issues is presented. A way forward on further proposed engagements informed by the Final Review meeting is also provided at the end of the report.

## 2. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

**Goal:** *As a result of improved communication strategies and campaigns, audiences and their Community Radios in Malawi are better informed, equipped and motivated to engage in local and national decision-making processes.*

The theory of change underlying the project was that at the end of the project the disconnect that exists between Community Radios working in the area of civic engagement has decreased significantly as participating Community Radios recognize the need to involve their constituencies in their advocacy

and policy influencing activities. They will think and act more strategically about how they engage with, empower and motivate civic driven change in their constituencies. In the end it is expected that these organisations will be better able to interact with their audiences on issues civic engagement using all the channels available to them including the social media and other online platforms.

**Overall objective:** *A total of three Community Radios in Malawi have the capacity to implement need-based, coherent, appropriate and meaningful information and communication campaigns and strategies with a clear audience and purpose.*

The project is motivated by the realization that major contributing factor to the failure by Community Radios to have a good reach and produce programs that are relevant to their audiences in this information age is due to the lack of understanding of the role of various communication tools in fostering citizen engagement. To be influential these Community Radios need to develop the necessary capacity to implement highly effective communication strategies and campaigns. This capacity cannot be built overnight but with exposure to the right mix of awareness/exposure, skills and tools and practice sustained over a longer period of time this capacity can be built. This was the essence of this project and its activities.

YAAICTD therefore does not claim to have fully built the capacity of Community Radios as the ensuing section will testify but the journey has started.

This project targeted three Community Radios namely; Dzimwe, Mudziwathu and Nkhotakota. However, as a way of fostering interaction among Community Radios Breeze FM from Zambia also participated in some activities to help the radios in Malawi address some of their challenges. Breeze and YAAICTD share a common funding partner in Hivos Foundation. Breeze FM is based in Chipata, Zambia a bordering district with Malawi on the western front where Mudziwathu is. Their involvement did not bring any financial burden on the funding from WACC since Hivos covered their cost of participation.

### **3. ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES**

#### **a. Community Radios Institutional Audits**

##### **i. Methodology**

This information which is part the assessment report was obtained primarily through the use a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews were also conducted with Community Radio's management in order to get a fuller understanding of the issues. The findings, conclusions and recommendations are based on the information collected from Community Radios management during the institutional needs assessment exercise.

##### **ii. Findings:**

- Two of the targeted Community Radios namely; Dzimwe and Nkhotakota were started with funding from UNESCO around 1998 and they have since been handed over to Communities.
- Mudziwathu was established in 2006 by a partnership comprising the American Institute for Research (AIR), Radio Systems In. (RSI), both based in the US, and the Creative Centre for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) of Malawi through seed funding from United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
- The Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) is putting pressure on CRECCOM to hand over Mudziwathu Community Radio to the community but the progress is slow. The lack of progress on the matter is major concern as some members of staff at Mudziwathu feel that the current set up where the finances are held by their mother organization affects them. It was noted that sometimes it takes a month for the money to be released for their use. CRECCOM's head quarters in Zomba well over 400km away from Mchinji where Mudziwathu is.
- Most of the members of staff at the Community Radios are volunteers except for the Station Manager for Mudziwathu who is paid by CRECCOM.

- Dzimwe and Nkhotakota are struggling to survive and the dwindling support from its traditional program sponsors has worsened matters.
- There is a dearth of Civic engagement programs on Community Radios due to the rising cost associated with travel to the rural communities. In 2013, it was YAAICTD that was supporting Mudziwathu and Nkhotakota Community Radio through the Community Radio for Accountability and Transparency (CRAT) while Dzimwe had none.
- Due to the proliferation of independent radio stations in Malawi, Community Radios are being used as spring boards by budding radio personalities. This has exerted a lot of pressure on Community Radios as they have to deal with losing key members of staff all the time.
- Mudziwathu Community Radio enjoys so much support from the community it serves but they have not done enough to capitalize on this wave of support. Apart from receiving adverts from surrounding business firms they have not done enough to capture a larger clientele. Part of the reason for this state of affairs is linked to point number 3 above.
- All the community radios had made efforts to use social media but such efforts were not sustained.
- The legal framework is now conducive for Community Radios to do more than just airing development programs and this is an opportunity for them to use the available space to come up with innovative initiatives that can give them a wider reach. Previously even advertising was not allowed.
- Much as people are willing to pay for adverts at Mudziwathu the other two Community Radios have not done well in that regard.
- ICT uptake by the Community Radios has been slow due to the associated costs.

## **b. Ideas Factory**

The Ideas Factory did two things: First of all it will be the first opportunity for the three radios to meet each other, the Mentors and the project team. It is also an opportunity to get a clear understanding of the purpose of the project. The meeting will also challenge them to think critically about how they can improve their entities through the right mix of skills and tools and strategies. Ultimately, the aim is to motivate Community Radios to incorporate new tools and thinking into their internal organizational culture.

This meeting was held at onset of the project in Lilongwe, Malawi. The meeting also discussed effectively and refined the project's objectives, activities, methodologies and overall implementation. All the targeted radios were in attendance and were represented by two representatives.

Generally, the participants were comfortable with the format of the project which was devised in such a way to encourage learning and sharing of knowledge.

Some changes, however, were suggested and they were taken on board. Among the proposed changes to the project plan was that since it is a six months project the mid-review meetings should be a reflective sessions between a Community Radio, part of their audience and the mentors. This change was implemented and it is reported elsewhere in the report.

During the Ideas Factory it was quite clear that two of the targeted Community Radios apart from sharing a common partner in YAAICTD have interacted at programming level. Exchange visits have been conducted before with the aim of learning from each other. For example, Nkhotakota Community Radio and Mudziwathu ran a "Greetings Show" where the community pays for the program by contributing towards the cost of travel and airing through a small fee of MWK 100.00 for featuring on the show per min. some even write letters. In some cases the funds generated are enough for them to produce specific program targeting an area. It was therefore felt that using this model the community radios should not wait for donors to fund

their programs but be proactive in coming up with innovative ideas of funding for the production of the programs.

Nkhotakota Community Radio also shared how they are using the Freedom Fone platform as emergency reporting service including reporting crime. They have therefore developed linkages with the police who handle all reports relating to crimes. However, this facility is only open for one –hour in a day. The Freedom Fone call can be borne by the service provider (toll free call) or the caller/listener. The latter is usually problematic and that is why Nkhotakota Community Radio opted for the toll free one.

### **c. Master Class**

The Master Class was aimed at building awareness and capacity of the targeted beneficiaries in areas of needs. The three participating Community Radios were fully represented at this event as planned. Just like the Ideas Factory, the Master Class was also held in Lilongwe due to its centrality. The major needs that were identified for the Master Class were:

- i. News writing and editing
- ii. Micro blogging
- iii. Use of social media
- iv. Hands-on training on Freedom Fone

Needs (i), (ii), (iii) were tackled fully by the identified resource persons from First Web Foundation while activity (iv) was developed by Freedom Fone by YAAICTD staff. YAAICTD is currently coordinating the adoption of Freedom Fone by community radios in Malawi as one way of helping the community radios to come up with better ways of generating feedback at minimal cost. So far Mudziwathu and Nkhotakota have set up the Freedom Fone facility.

**N.B:** Freedom Fone addresses communities' requirements for a simple, affordable technology to communicate with one another. Individuals can contribute questions, content and feedback by leaving voice messages via the IVR interface. More information here:

<http://www.netsquared.org/projects/freedom-fone> ;  
<http://www.freedomfone.org/>

#### **d. Review Meetings**

The review were split into two the mid-term and final review meeting. Due to the proposed changes from the Ideas Factory the mid-term review meeting was turned into **Internal Flashbacks**. The Internal Flashbacks provided the participating community radios with dedicated time and activities to reflect on their communication experiences and contribute towards learning and planning for the future. The mentors encouraged this process and assist with the setting up of internal flashback activities. Also linked to this were on-demand learning activities. The flashback moments were in the form of lunch meetings and brainstorming sessions on a particular issue. We do believe that these interventions will ensure that lessons learned and skills gained during the project are shared with the broader organization and are not 'held' in the people who attended the various project events.

The Final Review Meeting was aimed at providing an opportunity for the project team and the participating community radios to reflect on the entire learning process and identify challenges and opportunities for the future.

The Community Radios expressed satisfaction with the project activities but requested for more support in the area of ICT adoption so that the community radios are able to use the online media to reach out to their audiences other than those that are within their radius. Furthermore, the Community Radios requested for support to officially launch their websites so that a lot more people can know about their online presence.

#### **e. Mentoring**

##### **1. Community Radios Mentoring**

Each participating organization had access to the services of a mentor both face-to-face and online who provided support to reinforce their learning process. The mentors among other things identified specific learning needs and made suggestions on the needed interventions. Luckily, the mentors have offered to continue helping the participating radios remotely through the



Internet. We believe that as a way of sustaining our efforts there is need to continue the learning process. We will also be exploring other ways of ensuring that Mentorship activities are sustained by helping the Community Radios identify local people to help them with some of the pressing tasks.

## **2. Technology Planning:**

The objective of this effort was to create greater technology awareness within the organizations and help them to identify new opportunities through the use and implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The developed plans propose measures and options that are to be taken by each organization to use technology as a strategic tool to achieve organizational mission and programs. In order to achieve this, the Mentors worked with each institution to better understand which technologies they feel can help them to achieve their missions.

During the technology planning process a few things had to be considered and these included existing skills, infrastructure and bottlenecks.

A technology-savvy was identified among the staff. This is a requirement in the Technology Planning process so that the identified person can act as a champion. Save for Mudziwathu and Nkhotakota who have dedicated staff for Information Technology issues, Dzimwe's technical person appears to have a lot of responsibility on his plate since apart from being a presenter and producer he is also a technician.

In terms of skills Nkhotakota IT Manager appeared to be well conversant and well exposed to ICT matters. However, he left Nkhotakota Community Radio to join Farm Radio International Malawi as an IT Officer. This is a huge setback for the radio station since he played a crucial role in setting up the IT systems at the organization and his expertise is difficult if not impossible to come by in a Community Radio where the majority of the members of staff are volunteers.

Breeze FM from Chipata, Zambia is providing back-up support to Mudziwathu from time-to-time.

All in all this process was an eye opener for the Community Radios members of staff as they had time to reflect on how social media and other ICT

platforms including websites can help them to reach out to audiences other than those reached with the airwaves.

It must be pointed out that the major challenges facing the technology intake are sustainability issues. Currently, Nkhotakota and Dzimwe face similar challenges as they are struggling to survive and their preoccupation is to meet their immediate needs and not make some substantial investment.

In a nutshell the Technology Planning process sought and achieved the following:

- a. Draw a road map to facilitate technology usage within the Community Radios.
- b. Identify technology champions within the Community Radio to coordinate the technology portfolios in the Community Radios.
- c. Facilitate the implementation of the Technology plans.

It is expected that from time-to-time we will work with the Community Radio to review progress on the implementation of the plans and also review the validity of the plans given the fast pace of technology advancements.

Websites and social media were identified as viable technology tools that the Community Radios could use to reach out to their target audiences. Support with web authoring and micro-blogging was done. In order to avoid problems with web authoring each website is linked to a blog for ease of updating. The following are the links to the three Community Radios websites:

- a. Mudziwathu: [www.mudziwathuradio.com](http://www.mudziwathuradio.com)
- b. Nkhotakota: [www.nkhotakotaradio.com](http://www.nkhotakotaradio.com)
- c. Dzimwe: [www.dzimweradio.com](http://www.dzimweradio.com)

#### **f. Practice Campaigns**

The *Practice Campaign* were intended to demonstrate the ability / extent to which the participating Community Radios have internalized the skills and learning, and applied these in the development and implementation of their communication activities. Furthermore it was also an opportunity for the

Radios to experiment with their newly acquired skills and insights in a guided manner (with assistance of the mentor and possibly On-Demand Learning activities).

Nkhotakota Community Radio identified the following issues as requiring immediate attention:

- a. Training of correspondents from hard to reach areas of Nkhotakota district.

Through the small grant Nkhotakota Community Radio was able to train a total of 20 correspondents on the basics of journalism. The training materials were developed with the project mentors from First Web Foundation.

Since the community radio is unable to cover stories from across the district the role of correspondents is to fill the gap. Nkhotakota district is along the lakeshore and is also famous for the illegal cultivation of marijuana; the growing of sugar cane and fishing. Recently, the issue of customary land grabbing by chiefs in favour of commercial sugar cane growing has raised great concern. As one way of responding to the plight of the people these correspondents together with the community radio would act as advocates for the people so that their issues are addressed by the authorities.

- b. Conducting snap shot survey to better understand the needs of their audience vis-à-vis their Civic Engagement programs.

The community radio together with the Civil Society groups in the district conducted a snap shot survey with the aim to understand the needs of their audience vis-à-vis their civic engagement programs. The survey was conducted in Chikako Village. The respondents generally felt that the Community Radio ignored taking up issues that were affecting their lives in favour of musical and entertainment programs. In their understanding the Community Radio is supposed to be their mouth piece and because the content on radio they feel let down.

A total of 11 priority issues ranging from fraud and corruption, negligence by duty bearers and land issues were raised during the meeting. It was

however noted that these issues were not new but the Community Radio was dragging its feet because they enjoy a good relationship with the District Commissioner's office owing to the closeness of their offices.

On the issue of more musical programs that civic engagement and educational ones, the community radio indicated that previously CSOs working in the district were approached to sponsor specific programs but of late most of them do not have funds for such activities.

As a way forward it was agreed that the community radio as a mouth piece of the people needs the right protection and the Civil Society Network for the district should take an active role in shielding the Community Radio from the threats. The district CSO Network is coordinated by the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) who are partnering with us on two projects namely, the Community Radio for Accountability (CRAT) and the Malawi Elections Tracker (MET) project.

We have experienced first-hand how you can be targeted if your initiative does not sit well with power-that-be and Nkhotakota Community Radio's situation can be very tricky because most of the issues that their civic engagement programs focus on have a bearing on the district commissioner's office and Member of Parliaments (MPs). Naturally MPs from the ruling party can be so hostile. Unless the communities therefore are proactive to provide the necessary support to the Community Radio, the radio alone cannot do it.

c. Airing of Issue-based Boma Lathu (Our District) radio program.

The program followed on the six (6) priority issues that were identified during the survey and these are:

- i. Illegal acquisition of land and citizenship by foreign nationals.
- ii. Interference in the procurement of materials under the Constituency and Local Development Funds by District Council staff as well as politicians.
- iii. Poor town planning.
- iv. Non-completion of construction projects.

- v. Abuse of office by Chiefs and District Council staff in the distribution of targeted Farm Input Subsidy Program (FISP).
- vi. Customary land grabbing (for commercial sugar cane growing by Illovo Group of companies).

It was quite evident that people felt so strongly about the issues raised and wanted to see the issues being addressed.

At Mudziwathu Community Radio Station they identified the following as issues requiring immediate attention:

- a. Capacity Development Training for Radio Listening Clubs.

Mudziwathu has a total of 53 Radio Listening Clubs spread across Mchinji District and these clubs play a crucial role in mobilizing people at the grassroots on issues relating to Mudziwathu programming. The clubs are spread across the entire district of Mchinji. Due to financial limitations only 43 clubs were reached through the sub-grants.

- b. Setting up of the Freedom Fone Facility to enhance interaction with their audience.

As it has been indicated elsewhere Freedom Fone is a facility that can lessen the burden of Community Radios going out to seek content for their programs. In turn the Community Radios would save money and time. Apart from receiving support on this from Nkhotakota Community Radio, Mudziwathu was also assisted by Breeze FM from Zambia whose two technicians traveled to Mchinji to work on the system set up. As we speak the facility is up and running and in the spirit of sharing knowledge Mudziwathu has also helped Center for Girls Interaction (CEGI) in setting up a hot line for reporting cases of sexual abuse on girls.

- c. Development of a Fundraising & Sustainability Strategy

Although Mudziwathu seems to be the most viable among the three community radios targeted under this project they have placed Sustainability issues at the core of their agenda since CRECCOM, their mother body will be severing ties with them. The sub-grant was therefore used to conduct Board

Meetings aimed at reviving their Board which had been dormant for a long time. Currently, Mudziwathu remains a project under another organization and this lack of identity has proven costly in terms of fundraising. A case in point is a proposed partnership with Hivos Foundation that we had facilitated earlier in the year. So far Hivos is willing to take them on board as a partner but issues to do with their identity and governing structure have to be sorted out first. A meeting between the Board, Management and Hivos was held in Lilongwe.

It is also pleasing that World Universities and Schools of Canada (WUSC) accepted their requested for a volunteer on Fundraising. This support bodes well with their set goals.

#### **4. SUSTAINABILITY OF ACTIVITIES AND WAY FORWARD**

The Learning process initiated by this project has not been concluded with the phasing out of the initial funding from WACC. It must be noted that this project aimed to create within the participating organizations an internal culture of learning, a mindset geared towards strategic communication for civic driven change within the community. And although this process cannot be completed in the short term, major steps forward have been made with the raft of activities under this project.

Last but not least, it is important to state that this project was not intended to be isolated from general public. The Websites and the Practice Campaigns all aim at introducing a wider audience to the essentials of communication for civic driven change and for these audiences to have an opportunity to interact and share knowledge with the participating community radios. On their own, Community Radios cannot achieve much and this calls for the need to support Community Radios as vehicles for civic engagement. In moving forward YAAICTD is committing itself to work with the Community Radios further so that the lessons under this project do not go to waste. We have set aside a budget of Euros 4, 000 from our annual budget starting September 2013 to consolidate the work that has been done. Specifically, the next activities will help the Community Radios implement their Technology Plans systematically.

It is also our hope that WACC and other players would continue to help us reach out to more Community Radios in Malawi.

## 5. FUNDS UTILIZATION

<b>Approved Budget Lines</b>	<b>Total Cost in Euros</b>	<b>Total Spent In Euros</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Mentors Fees (2)	1903.93	1903.93	
Monthly Communication Costs (Internet & Telephone)	419.02	401.00	
Institutions Audit/Assessments	315.79	325.25	
Ideas Factory	698.38	705.00	

Master Class	698.38	702.00	
Mid-Term Review	698.38	690.00	
End of Project Review	698.38	694.00	
Sub-grants for Community Radios	2518.96	2518.96	
Travel Costs for Institutional Audits	63.16	62.55	
Travel re-imburements for participants to Ideas Factory, Master Class, Mid-Term Review, End of Project Review	558.69	610.84	
Individual on-demand Mentoring	315.79	299.47	
Fees for Resource Persons ( 3 for 6 days )	419.02	412.52	
Lunches during the Factory, Master Class, & Review Workshops	558.69	570.00	
Refreshments	209.50	302.00	
Auditing	793.30	852.80	
Monthly Monitoring & Evaluation	631.58	624.00	



<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>11500.00</b>	<b>12130.25</b>	
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There is an overage of Euros 630.25 which should be considered as YAAICTD contribution towards the project. During the implementation period we had experienced a lot of fluctuations in the cost of fuel which had a trigger on effect on the cost of the project. The currency was also not static and to avoid currency losses the money was converted into Malawi at the onset of the project. As we write the Euro fetches approximately Mwk 441.00 down a high Mwk 504.22 in February, 2013.

The financial statements were audited by Mak Grant and Company whose report is attached. We have also attached the Management Letter for you to see the major findings during the Audit.