



Human Resources

People-oriented and people-driven CMCs

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Human Resources

Your CMC is a *community* as well as a *multimedia* centre. As a result, people – your community’s human resources – should be at the centre of your CMC planning process.

CMCs must be *people-centred* to survive. On a day-to-day basis, it is the commitment and ongoing contributions from your community, e.g. a donated building, a yearly membership fee, or a weekly volunteer slot, that allow community facilities like your CMC to operate on a self-reliant, low-cost AND sustainable basis.

CMCs are different from commercial radio and Internet kiosks, just as they are different from schools or local government offices. As with other community media, you need to think about ways of organising and operating differently from businesses and official institutions.

The need for **alternative ideas** and **innovation**, therefore, is as important, in dealing with the human resources of your CMC, as it is for technical, financial or other resources.

Managing the human resources of your CMC is a slow process – it means building a working relationship with your community on how to use information and communication tools.

Ultimately, putting local people at the centre of the CMC process is probably the most important and long-lasting thing you can do – and it is an ongoing and *organic* process.

The process of building community “ownership” involves:

- Building awareness of the importance of information and communication: What do these words mean? How do they fit into people’s day-to-day lives in your community?
- Facilitating people’s involvement in *both* planning and using local media as tools for the development of the community

Types of human resources

It takes a lot of people to run a community multimedia centre. There are the people on the inside who keep your centre running, keep the radio on-air and keep the computers connected. Then there are all the people on the outside, listeners and information users, community groups and individual members. Of course, one of the things that make community multimedia so interesting is the constant crossover amongst these roles.

Your CMC needs to have

- an official image
- a core team of dedicated people
- enough hands to get the work done
- flexible systems to involve and train people, and to organise and support your whole network.

The best sorts of human resources for your CMC are those that seem naturally and intuitively attracted to the idea. A CMC staff member characterised her station and her involvement as being: *“Less a radio station... more a way of life.”*

Different practices

Coming up with a human resource plan is all about meeting your needs with the resources you’ve got.

- *Some CMCs have no paid staff at all*
- *Some have only one paid staff person who takes on the role of station or centre manager*
- *Other CMCs are fully staffed and have enough funds to pay a team of programmes and technical staff.*

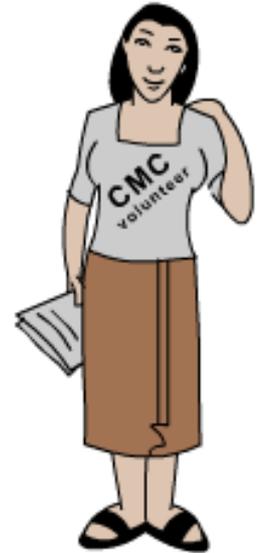


The degree of your community's involvement and the resulting level of activity will expand and contract depending upon the needs, capacity and availability of your community as it responds to trends, cycles and outside forces. Involvement is never constant and your CMC will invariably go through cycles, changes and crises relevant to its human resources.

Key considerations

Your CMC needs to find a human resource solution that is suitable to your own local circumstances. There are a number of key points that we can consider here:

- The importance of **employment** and **paid staff**, certainly the institutionalised type, should not be reinforced. This is not to say that you should not have staff but to keep in mind the need for alternatives.
- For many CMCs community **volunteers** are an important part of how they operate on limited income and excel at meeting local needs at the same time. Emphasise participation and the non-financial benefits of working at your CMC, for example, new skills, practical experience and social capital.
- Because we need to develop alternatives, your CMC should encourage **innovation** and creative solutions – what we sometimes call *thinking outside the box*. In order to do this, you and your CMC must also think outside your own boxes. Be creative and try new ideas!



A *user-friendly and enabling environment* is essential for attracting people and keeping them involved, especially marginalised groups. Your CMC should be an empowering space for anyone within the community to participate, a space open to innovation and creativity: physically and in terms of prevailing attitudes and behaviours.

Now let's explore some of the different types of human resources you should be thinking about.

• **Paid staff**

How you staff your CMC is heavily influenced by your local environment and specific circumstances. You need to ask yourself a few questions when it comes to staffing:

- why do we need paid staff and for which specific tasks?
- is there another way to accomplish any of these tasks?
- what roles do paid staff play in relation to other human resources?

Dedicated, paid staff will obviously be of enormous advantage to your CMC. However, paid workers can also complicate the overall human resource strategy because their payment has the potential of undermining or even discouraging other types of involvement, especially unpaid work and volunteerism.

That is why paid staff should never be relied on exclusively to answer your human resource demands. They are never a solution on their own. You need to take a holistic approach and consider all types of human resources.

While it is important to consider and value appropriate skills, it is equally important to consider the right aptitude and a solid understanding of CMC principles, commitment and goals. Though you might hire them because of their skills as broadcasters or technicians, your CMC workers



will nevertheless act as “social workers”. The staff should think of their role **as facilitators** rather than simply as **paid employees**. Though inevitably they end up with plenty to do, staff members should not focus on *doing things*, but rather on facilitating others *to do things*. In other words, volunteer coordination should be part of every staff member’s job.

The major areas of paid staff responsibilities are:

- administration
- technical maintenance
- programming
- coordination

In many cases all these responsibilities are more or less rolled into one post. Perhaps the most strategic task that needs to be incorporated into any position is that of **volunteer coordination**.

• **Casual staff**

Many CMCs provide incentives to their casual workers in the form of tea money, bus fares, or an occasional free meal. Occasionally a token salary or honorarium is paid for a programme or part-time work.

Casual staff are somewhere in-between paid staff and unpaid volunteers. Your ability to pay casual staff may vary from one season to another; it may also depend on your funding and the projects that you undertake.

For example, your CMC might get a small contract from a local NGO to develop online content or a new radio programme. For a few months it might be necessary to have some additional people to fulfil these commitments.

The great advantage for these workers is that they get some compensation for their efforts. This encourages them to dedicate more time to the CMC.

Casual staff often exist in a *grey area* – between the CMC’s need for people to run the daily activities of the centre and the lack of funds available for a full-time, paid staff or team.

Casual staff can be an important part of a CMC’s human resource strategy but CMCs must be careful neither to exploit them, nor to create false expectations. It is also important that neither core staff nor casual workers intentionally or inadvertently limit opportunities for volunteers and the involvement of the community.

Understanding roles, rights and responsibilities

At one CMC, a problem developed between casual staff and the CMC management. Casual staff, being paid per-programme, outnumbered permanent staff at a ratio of 3:1. The casual staff made a major contribution to the day-to-day operations of the CMC but some misunderstanding arose about their role causing considerable resentment and tension, over a period of time. Some casual staff felt they should be granted permanent employment or at least that they should have the opportunity to move “up the ladder.” Others felt that the casual staff occupied too much space and prevented opportunities for volunteer involvement.

It is important to make sure that the roles, rights and responsibilities of all your human resources are clearly understood and accepted.

Wages and remuneration

CMC staff salaries should reflect local realities in terms of their experience.

It is worthwhile researching how much other local workers are paid; ask some questions:

- what are the salaries of local teachers and shopkeepers?
- what are the local costs of living?
- how will paid staff be viewed within the community-at-large?

If you have more than one paid staff member, it is worthwhile for your committee to consider formalising pay scales. It may not be possible to pay everyone the same amount, but you should consider the impact that your salary scale will create at your CMC and among your community.

Keep things simple and remember, money is **NOT** the best way to value a person’s contributions.



A few things about volunteers

- *Volunteers are not a substitute for paid staff*
- *Volunteers should not be seen or exploited as free or unpaid workers*
- *They should not be counted on for long term, or even regular involvement*
- *A CMC needs to be **flexible** in order to accommodate volunteers*
- *Volunteers may contribute perhaps only an hour or two a week/month*
- *Volunteers are often irregular and/or seasonal*
- *Volunteers need to be **supported**, rewarded and valued; their contributions need to be recognised*

• **Volunteers**

If volunteers are part of your overall strategy, your staff should focus on

- identifying the skills and interests of potential volunteers
- facilitating their training and work contributions
- maintaining systems

The benefits of volunteerism can be significant for your CMC. It all depends on the human resources that already exist and, more importantly, on those that can be built up in your community.

Are there people with free time in your community; both young and old? For many people in the community, your CMC may represent a unique opportunity to do something. Often people, especially youth, are frustrated with the sheer lack of opportunities to do worthwhile things.

Volunteerism is a special consideration for any type of community undertaking. Your CMC's success can be measured by the degree of community involvement in your centre. *Volunteerism is about building relationships with people and therefore with the community* rather than having people to work for free.

Volunteers can feed into all areas of CMC operations – from answering phones to running programmes, from technical maintenance to fundraising. But it can also be a major challenge in resource-poor communities where free time, especially amongst women and girls, is a luxury that many cannot afford. For many people, volunteerism is a new and sometimes difficult concept.

The strength of volunteers is in their commitment and numbers. CMCs are run on the power, not of large service by a small number of people, but on small service by a large number of people.



You may think that working with volunteers is risky compared to running media with a staff force. In fact, the two simply cannot be compared. Community media are on a fundamentally different path than other types of media. One essential characteristic that sets CMCs apart is the focus on people's participation, both as a productive input as well as a constructive output.

CMCs that can afford paid staff make little or limited use of volunteers due to issues of trust and management. Other CMCs rely almost exclusively on volunteers to run their operations. Many find themselves somewhere in-between.

Running a CMC with volunteers requires **investment**: to train people, to supervise them, to be patient while they learn and make mistakes; even to watch them walk away. However, volunteers can create a resource multiplier-effect along the lines of 'train-the-trainer': invest in five volunteers, training and supporting their interests, and see a return of perhaps three dedicated workers as well as a stronger link with your local community.

Working with volunteers requires **flexibility** and systems that are designed to accommodate volunteers. You need to be volunteer-centric to capitalise on the great potential of volunteerism. Planning for volunteers' involvement needs to be flexible: sometimes they will be there intensively, but at other times volunteers won't be there at all. You have to be ready for it. You need to adapt your human resource plan according to the abilities and availability of your volunteers and the needs of your CMC.



Avoid allowing false hopes to build amongst volunteers or casual staff that their involvement will at some point lead to a job.

The CMC in Koutiala, Mali, has no fewer than four categories of volunteers: external collaborators, resource persons, volunteers and interns.

An “external collaborator” has a paid job elsewhere and helps the CMC on a regular basis and at fixed times. Some have been doing this for over 10 years. A “resource person” is a local expert who can be called upon to identify, explain or comment on particular information, for example by taking part in a radio programme on health, agriculture etc. A “volunteer” is a young person or student who helps out with certain tasks according to their availability. An “intern” comes from a local, national or international training or educational institution in order to acquire practical experience.

In Koutiala, the “external collaborators” are the most committed and involved, while the “volunteers” are the least involved or subjected to constraints.



Tips on rewarding volunteers

- *Contracts or agreements for volunteers that outline rights and responsibilities*
- *Official volunteer positions and/or categories such as radio producers, show hosts, technical operators, telecentre supervisors, computer trainers, etc.*
- *Acknowledge your volunteers in public: on the radio, at the centre, in publications*
- *Provide rewards and incentives such as discounts at the telecentre and at supportive local businesses or institutions*
- *Identity cards for volunteers*
- *Other types of compensation: tea, transport, meals.*

Recognise and encourage all staff and volunteers

Recognition of CMC workers should not be based on money. Unfortunately, the amount of money paid is often seen as an indication of how the CMC (and therefore the community) values the contribution of staff. **It is essential for CMCs to motivate and encourage staff and volunteers in alternative, non-financial ways.** Read more in the section on Volunteers.

Many contributors, big and small, come to the CMC in response to a need: a need to use their time and energy to make a difference to others. It is essential for you to identify and institutionalise your CMC’s needs to match with people’s need for participation and involvement.

Planning

You won’t find any easy answers to the challenges of operating a CMC. Advertising and paid staff is not the answer, nor is it safe to say your CMC will run itself once the equipment arrives.

Plan your human resource needs before you plan the use of your staff budget and equipment.

People need to drive the vehicles of their own development, not just be along for the ride. In other words, people need to be involved every step of the way. A key theme for all CMCs is **participation**. This is true across all areas of operation, but most importantly for how you think about and manage your human resources.

- Give special consideration to **youth** and **women** to maximise impact.
- Youth have a mutually advantageous relationship to CMCs: they bring with them sharp learning abilities, open minds and free time; they take away a variety of new skills, increased social capital and wider perspectives.
- Being at the centre of community development, women must be involved at all levels of your CMC and their needs must be a priority.

Try to make sure that human resource considerations are part of your constitution. It helps to put people squarely in the driver’s seat and have **guidelines** or **policies** that reflect your goals and priorities.



Staff guidelines developed for Kothmale Community Radio and Internet

Excerpts :

- *The Internet and other new communication technologies should not be presented as a technological gimmick or marvel – they should be presented as something that is useful in people’s day-to-day lives.*
- *The first precondition for success is active community participation – for this, the computers and other facilities should be placed and operated in a user-friendly manner.*
- *The staff should not be over-cautious about computer breakdowns – users should be given a free hand.*

• **Members**

It is worth beginning our exploration of human resources with the basic building block of your CMC: your community members.

Whether officially, through a cooperative or other form of organisation, or simply through their involvement as volunteers, listeners and users, your goal should be to make ‘members of the community’ also ‘members of the CMC’.

Ideally a broad community membership will form the basis of your CMC’s local ownership, a key ingredient for the success and sustainability of any CMC.

• **Community participation**

By now it should be obvious that your CMC’s greatest resource is your community itself. Of course, ‘the community’ includes your listeners and users, but also all the individuals, organisations and groups that work on ICTs and local media – among others extension workers, teachers, health workers, community leaders and local government officials, among others.

You should consider inviting individuals and groups that are specialised in a particular area to partner and innovate: Internet cafes, for example, can share their experience in running a sustainable operation and may provide technical assistance. NGOs and various development programmes may have parallel objectives to your own. You may share mutual interests with other community outfits, such as user groups or microcredit networks. See what sort of linkages you can make. You might consider inviting representatives of other groups to sit on one of your committees or form an advisory group.

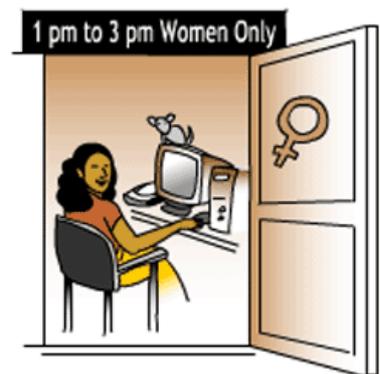
• **Core groups**

At the centre of your CMC are the people who make it all possible – people who instinctively and intuitively understand your mission and means. Often, a core group of committed people will emerge.

Tips on involving women and girls

Consider and plan separate recruitment for girls and women

- be sure to have women represented on committees and staff, not as token members, but as full participants
- Involve women and girls in planning all aspects of the CMC from programming to the physical layout of facilities
- be sure to have women’s programmes as well as sections for women-oriented digital resources
- Have “women-only” times at the CMC for both media programming and computer usage
- Make sure women are involved as recruiters, trainers and supervisors... basically in all of your CMC’s areas of operations



In fact, these rules go for ensuring the participation of any group, be it youth or people with disabilities.

The most important thing is to get people involved!



Whether they are made up of staff, volunteers or both, core groups provide a degree of continuity, allowing for turnover among short-term contributors and flexibility around seasonal demands.

Your core group might take on the practical responsibilities that are nominally covered by your committee; for instance charting a course for fundraising. In low budget operations, volunteer members of a core group might even take on the role of paid staff. In all likelihood, your core group will help your CMC to be flexible and manage day-to-day operations.

It depends of course on your own particular situation, but one factor that CMCs have in common is that they attract people. Be ready for them and, in positive ways, be sure to take advantage of their energy and skills.

What makes up a CMC core group?

The individuals that are part of it and the way they relate to one another as a group will be a distinctive reflection of your local community and CMC:

- your core group may include founders of the centre or representatives of your parent organisation or members of its governing board
- it will almost certainly include your staff
- it may involve local community leaders, teachers, extension or development workers
- the core group could also involve advisors or contributors from outside the community who are committed in some way to community media
- For many CMCs there will also be people who, for one reason or another, get hooked on CMC — volunteers who can't seem to get enough of operating the studio, doing interviews or creating new programmes on the computer.

Building skills and capacity

One of the most important things your CMC will do is to build the capacity of your community to respond to local needs, for example, generating income, improved education, good governance or health.

You will also need to think about building the skills and the capacity of your own staff and volunteers to effectively plan and run a CMC.

This is true for people working on radio and TV broadcasting as on new ICTs. Your training should cover a wide range of skills that have been jointly identified and discussed. You might do training on interviewing or editing, or on how to generate and format content for the Internet.

• Careers and skills

While formal training is important, it is also essential for you to foster a culture of mentoring and peer training. Cooperation and peer encouragement often result in an organic growth of skills, interest and capacity amongst not just one or two members, but amongst many, perhaps spreading out to touch the whole of your CMC network.

Becoming part of the CMC may contribute in many ways to an individual's *marketability*; however, you should be careful not to encourage people to consider the CMC as a career move in itself. It is also a bit dangerous to promote the idea that computer or other types of training will result in employment.



Young volunteers at Baraka Telecentre, Senegal

Photo courtesy: Laurent Elder



CMC staff is often young, with limited education language skills and knowledge of the world. However, these young people bring an endless stream of energy and creativity to whatever they do.

Training: a valuable investment

Staff and volunteers that start working without basic ICT skills must be trained to handle various duties that include CD Rom usage, software maintenance and management skills of the CMC.

On the job training is ideal but has to be properly structured and focused and requires additional tools in the form of manuals, tutorials, online advice, discussion groups, etc.

Problems of high turnover

Retaining staff and volunteers is no doubt a challenge as there is usually a high turnover due to the following factors:

- brain drain as people move on to higher aspirations, further studies, and the city
- trained staff get poached by organisations that provide better offers
- energetic young people get older, get married, take on new responsibilities that increase their financial needs and limit their spare time
- Young managers/coordinators cannot always cope with the high level of responsibility in handling money, people and administration
- it can be difficult to harmonise the roles and responsibilities of paid versus unpaid staff
- poor interpersonal relations, unreliability, no progress despite training
- disparities in wage levels within and among CMCs, e.g. project salaries, state salary levels, salaries paid out of local revenue.

Suggested solutions include

- ongoing and decentralized retraining
- consolidated and expanded pool of activists, volunteers and committee members
- involve activists and local committee members in management and other training
- thoughtful, treatment of activists, and the introduction of incentives for their dedication, e.g. recognition, free training or Internet access, t-shirts, tea.
- comparative salaries and wages

It is critical to ensure a good and welcoming work environment for the community and the workers so that people can feel proud to be working at your CMC.

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One of the great advantages of CMCs over computer and media institutes is that CMCs not only help develop skills, but also put them to use. You need to promote your CMC as a place in which people can apply their skills, be innovative and creative on behalf of the whole community.

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