



HOW TO GET ON THE AIR

Handbook for Community
Radio in Myanmar



IPDC THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION



Akademie

Table of Contents

CR Handbook Myanmar

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: What is Community Radio?	2
Chapter 2: Setting up a CR station	7
Chapter 3: Financing a CR station	25
Chapter 4: Staffing a CR station	31
Chapter 5: CR and human rights	35
Conclusion and further references	37

Introduction

Community radio is an exciting, valuable addition to Myanmar’s media landscape, bringing news and information to communities that speaks directly to them, with their own voices and in their own languages.

Simply put, **community radio is independent and not-for-profit radio run by a community for that community**. It offers residents useful information on topics relevant to their lives—like health, agriculture, education, environment and social affairs —as well as entertainment.

CR is especially attractive to many ethnic communities, whose concerns are often poorly addressed by other media. That is why the Independent Ethnic Media Alliance (IEMA) has promoted CR initiatives through training workshops, conferences and this handbook with the support of UNESCO and DW Akademie.

CR is new to Myanmar. The Broadcasting Law of 2015 opened up a path to the establishment of a CR sector in Myanmar and the first CR station went on air in Htan Tabin Township in early 2018. Since then, many communities have expressed interest in setting up their own stations. This handbook is meant to help them by presenting some of the initial, practical steps and considerations that should be taken at the beginning of the process.

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Chapter 1

What is community radio?

Myanmar already has a state-run radio (MRTV) and commercial stations (such as Cherry FM and Mandalay FM), but the new community radio sector is an important addition to the media landscape. It helps strengthen freedom of expression and provides new opportunities for communities to express themselves. CR stations have much smaller broadcast area and are community run, therefore they have closer ties to their communities and are able to meet the information needs of local residents in ways bigger media outlets cannot. They give local people the chance to access information which is directly relevant to their lives and, if people want, even take part in making media. CR gives a voice to the voiceless, especially women and minorities.

Benefits of community radio include:

- Boosting community participation
- Improving media pluralism
- Strengthening social and economic development
- Promoting freedom of expression and access to information
- Encouraging tolerance and peaceful coexistence
- Maintaining cultural tradition and ethnic identities

How do you define community radio?

There is no single definition of CR—it comes in various shapes and sizes. But there are some basic characteristics that most CR stations share:

CR aims to benefit its community, not to make money

Community broadcasting has a public-service mandate. Its goal is to improve the lives of community residents by providing relevant information and entertainment, not to make money. Myanmar law even says that CR stations must be non-profit organizations themselves or part of a non-profit group.

The CR station is located in the community it is serving

Since CR is radio for the community, by the community, its studio must be located in that community. That makes it possible for people in the community to participate in the station in various ways (for example, by advising, participating in programs and volunteering).

CR has a strong sense of ethics

CR aims to foster healthy communities, not create division and strife. It is important that all staff and volunteers adhere to clear ethical guidelines to avoid broadcasting hate speech, spreading misinformation, defaming people and possibly getting themselves or the station into legal trouble. They also must not to violate any provisions of the nation's broadcasting and media laws or media codes of conduct.

CR stations are independent and make their own decisions

CR stations are run by the community and are independent. The government, outside interests or powerful individuals (such as politicians and political parties, religious leaders, big corporations, etc.) should not make management decisions or dictate what goes on air. That is up to the CR station's board of directors, station management and the community being served.

CR stations are relevant to their communities and cultures

Community broadcasting is often a source of information that might not be available in private and/or public-service media. For example, information on local road construction or medial clinics

will probably not be covered by national outlets such as MRTV or Cherry FM, but can be very important for residents. So, they're good topics for CR. Stations should stay in close contact with their communities and learn what kind of programs and topics residents want to hear.

CR is inclusive

No one in a CR station's coverage area should be excluded on the basis of ethnicity, religion, language, etc. If multiple languages are spoken in a community, the station should consider broadcasting in the different languages. Religious programming should address all practices in the area.

CR depends on volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of CR. Some stations might have a few paid employees, but most are staffed largely by volunteers. They do everything from reporting to announcing to fundraising to almost anything else. Volunteers don't have to be at the station every day. They contribute only as much time as they want or can—maybe only a few hours a week. (See Chapter 4)

The community is the boss

The local community takes part in all aspects of the CR station—it is **their** station. That means a general assembly open to all residents of the community is where final decisions are made. Community members elect a board of directors, which appoints a station manager, who manages the volunteers, etc. The station always answers to the community.

What Community Radio is NOT

CR focuses on development, not politics or taking sides

While national and local news is usually part of CR programming, CR avoids taking the side of any one political party or armed group

and furthering their interests. The focus is on broadcasting information that helps community development, not engaging in partisan politics or worsening racial or religious tensions.

CR is local, not regional or national

Community radio's strength is its local character so that everyone from the area who wants can participate and community issues are discussed on air. Also, technical limitations will prevent a station from covering an entire state or division. Coverage areas will usually be limited to a town, village tract or township.

CR is not divisive

As well as avoiding taking political party positions, CR also seeks to avoid creating division in a community. That means it doesn't feature content that can lead to conflict, religious tensions, ethnic discrimination and the violation of women's and children's rights. That means not excluding a minority ethnic or religious group or only promoting the interests of one NGO or CSO. Remember: CR is inclusive and should represent all the community. The goal is understanding, tolerance, reconciliation and social cohesion.

CR does not sound like the BBC or Cherry FM

CR volunteers are almost never media professionals. Most have no broadcasting experience before volunteering at a CR station. That means a CR station will rarely sound as smoothly produced as the professionals do. But that's fine. The goal is not to be perfect, but it is to provide people access to the kind of information they need and want.

CR rarely provides paid employment

Most of the people who are involved in CR are volunteers; they are not paid for their work. There may be some paid staff, such as station managers, but they are the minority. However, volunteers

do learn skills working at a CR station that could potentially lead to a paying job elsewhere at some point.

Chapter 2

Setting up a CR station

Many people might think establishing a CR station mainly involves getting the proper legal authorization (a license) and the necessary equipment (transmitter, microphones, etc.). But in reality, a lot of planning and preparation must be done before actual broadcasting begins. Before purchasing equipment, it's important to lay the groundwork. The following steps are recommended:

- 1. Exploration/Organization:** A group of community members who believe in the benefits of community radio should be organized.
- 2. Research/Mobilization:** This core group will look into the local social and economic situation as well as interests in CR programming. Potential partners will be considered, word gotten out to the community and local officials, and a technical plan will be developed. Dialogue with existing CR stations will begin.
- 3. Constitution and governance:** a constitution should be written laying out core aims and formalizing how the station will be structured and governed.
- 4. Program plan creation:** A plan for broadcast content relevant to the community should be drawn up.
- 5. Broadcast license application:** If choosing to broadcast, you will need to apply for a license with the National Broadcasting Council and need to be aware of the application procedures and license fees.
- 6. Equipment purchase and installation:** You need to know the technical standards for the equipment set out by the Broadcasting Council before buying it. Then the studio is made ready, the antenna put up and tests are run.

7. Training: A training program should be set up for volunteers on the basics of CR and radio production.

8. Launch! The station goes on air.

Step 1: Exploration/Organization Stage

Find a core group to lead the initiative

It is important to gather a group of people who have the time, enthusiasm and commitment to carry the CR process forward. These will be the people who will introduce the idea to the larger community, begin the organization process, talk to local officials, begin licensing procedures, make initial decisions on equipment and governance, and likely play a role in board management or become some of the first staff members and volunteers at the station.

This group should also understand that the involvement of volunteers should not be restricted by race, language and/or religion. The core group should inform community members about the ways they can take part in the initiative and then assign tasks to those who want to get involved.

It is good to have well-connected community leaders in this group, but it should be open to anyone who has the desire to work on establishing a CR station.

Step 2: Research/Mobilization

Look for potential partners

Most CR initiatives do not have large financial resources, so local, national and international partners which can support the community can be a big help. Some CR initiatives team up with local NGOs or CBOs, who already have strong links to the

community and established networks and procedures. International donors with community media programs can provide funding, expertise and training. Established ethnic media organizations might be interested in working with the CR station, bringing their journalistic experience to the table. What is important is that the station remains independent, not for profit and answerable to the community itself.

Involve, inform and begin mobilizing the community

Is a CR station something your community wants or understands? CR is new to Myanmar, and most people have never heard of it. It is important to clearly tell community members what it is and what its goals are as well as how they can get involved and advocate for the station themselves. This can be done by talking about the CR initiative at village meetings or during local events where people gather. Getting people's feedback on the idea is crucial. If you want, you can organize a fun event to bring the community together and talk about the CR idea there. CR must have the community's support or it will not be successful.

Learn about the community

It is also a good idea to do a needs assessment to find out the make-up of the community, the groups (religious, ethnic, linguistic) in the coverage area, the most pressing local issues, etc. Finding out what kind of programming interests them is also vital. This "community mapping" will give you an overall picture of your community. It makes sure no groups are left out of your planning and helps you better design your station and its programming to meet local needs and interests. Finding out more about the community is also a good way to let residents know about CR and to generate excitement.

The larger community is what the station is meant to serve and will be the source of volunteers and programming content. So the

more community members know about and support the station, the better.

Gain the trust and support of local officials

CR is legal in Myanmar, according to the Broadcasting Law, but most people are still unfamiliar with it, including some government officials. Talk with them early in the process about your CR plan, explaining it is a platform for community development, not to further the interests of a political party, armed group or business concern. Officials who understand the benefits can be helpful with the license application and other setup procedures. In fact, their support is essential throughout the set-up process. Once the station is operating, local government officials will also be important sources of information about community issues.

Consider how people will hear the station?

Before any equipment is purchased, check the existing regulations on technical standards and consider what kind of technical setup is right for your community. How big is the area you want to cover? Do you have a stable electricity supply? Do you have the ability and willingness to invest in equipment and apply for a broadcast license? And, if equipment breaks down, do you know where to get spare parts and get it repaired?

Broadcast: Getting an FM frequency

- *Pros:* Your programming can be picked up by radios and phones within your coverage area. More people likely hear your programming and can listen to it in different locations.
- *Cons:* You need a broadcast license from the government and the necessary equipment (see technical section of this handbook), making startup costs higher. More technical training is involved. Equipment must be maintained and repaired if it breaks down.

Loudspeakers: Playing programming through speakers at a central location.

- *Pros:* No broadcast license is required and startup costs are lower. Less technical training is required.
- *Cons:* Your programming reaches only those people within hearing range of the loudspeakers. Some residents living near the speakers might resent being being “forced” to listen to your programming!

Consider the local terrain

Is the community in a flat area, hilly, very mountainous? Terrain plays a role in the choice of equipment and setup. If choosing the FM broadcast option, be aware that FM radio signals must travel in a direct line from the source (antenna) to the receiver (radio, phone). It’s called line-of-sight propagation. Large obstructions between the antenna and the receiver such as hills or tall buildings can block the signal. An antenna placed higher up will allow the signal to reach further. The strength of the transmitter also plays a role in signal reach.

For FM broadcast stations, flat terrain provides fewer challenges. If the landscape is hilly or mountainous, the antenna should be placed at the top of an elevation. Another option is to have a “radio repeater” high up on a hill which could extend the range of the signal to another valley. But that would involve more costs.

The Wi-Fi and loudspeaker options are not as affected by the terrain.

What is technically feasible?

Radio needs electricity to run, so a CR initiative must think about how it will provide power. Is the community on the electric grid? If so, is it reliable? If not, are there generators that can be used if

the electricity goes off? Some stations use solar and water power to charge batteries, which then power the equipment.

Step 3: Constitution and governance

Form an association

CR stations are best organized through forming an association. It should have a formal structure, statutes and be in the form a registered, nonprofit entity (necessary to obtain a CR license).

Develop mission and vision statements

These statements help determine the goals and direction of a CR station. A mission statement is one or two sentences which define the purpose of the CR station – why does it exist? A vision statement declares what the station wants to achieve over time – what is the station working toward?

For example, the Khayae FM CR core group came up with the following:

Mission: Khayae FM’s mission is to be a voice of the Htan Tabin community, featuring information on livelihood, social, economic, religious, educational, health, cultural, and other important issues, and providing a broadcast space for creative expression and community involvement in making radio.

Vision: Through the contribution of Khayae FM community radio, Htan Tabin residents will deepen their general knowledge and enjoy a higher standard of living, resulting in fewer worries or concerns for them.

Decide on governance structures

How will the CR station be managed? Who will be in charge of what? These are essential questions that should be answered at

this stage. Most CR stations are governed along the following lines, although the particulars depend on the circumstances in each community:

- **The General Assembly**

The General Assembly is made up of the entire community in the CR station coverage area. Since the community owns the station, it is the highest authority. It usually meets at least once a year and elects the Board of Directors (see below) and makes other important decisions, such as deciding on statutes, approving the general budget, changing station rules, etc.

- **The Board of Directors**

This is the group of people charged with setting the direction of the station and supervising overall station management and operations as well as helping with fundraising. The board is elected at the General Assembly. The board ensures that the station is fulfilling its mission and appoints the station manager(s). It usually meets every three months. These are volunteer positions.

- **Station Manager(s)**

The station manager oversees the running of the entire station and its day-to-day operations. They are usually there when the station is on the air and their duties include scheduling, approving topics, editing content, managing volunteers and finances, etc. This can be done on a volunteer basis but because of the amount of work involved, it is often a paid position. The station manager is hired by the board of directors.

- **Other possible positions**

Depending on the resources of a station, additional staff positions are possible, including a **program manager**, a **technical manager** a **marketing/fundraising manager** and a **finance/administration**

manager (see Chapter 4). But since funding is often limited, often the station manager or very motivated volunteers take on these duties.

Adopt a constitution

A CR constitution is the official document that lays out the principles, policies and governance structures of the station. It is drafted by the CR core group and should be approved by the General Assembly. It might include the following:

- The overall mission and vision
- Overall aims and objectives
- The broadcast/coverage area
- Broadcast language(s)
- General Assembly rules
- CR membership model (if desired)
- Board policies and procedures (term of office, size, etc.)
- Management structure
- Financial rules and regulations
- How to amend a constitution
- Dissolution of the community radio station

Step 4: Program Plan Development

Before the station goes on air, it has to have content to broadcast! And before a license if provided, applicants have to submit a planned program schedule.

The station must decide how many hours a day or week it will broadcast. This usually depends on the number of volunteers and staff and their capacity. **Most CR stations do not broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** Many are on air a few hours a day or even a week. As the station becomes established, more volunteers

come on board and revenue begins coming in, the broadcast day length can always be lengthened.

Through community input at meetings or events, or from a “community mapping” survey, you will hopefully have an idea what kind of programming people are interested in. Given CR aims, planning content that is relevant for local residents is essential, such as discussions of community issues, local news events and community announcements. It is good to make a list of topics you want to cover and slot them into a program schedule on a certain day. For instance, listeners would know that the station is always talking about a health topic at 8 am on Tuesdays.

The following is an excerpt from Khayae FM’s first program schedule in early 2018. They started with five thematic topics per day:

Tuesdays: religion, education, agriculture, culture, development, DIY

Wednesdays: religion, teenagers, cooking, personal finance, women’s issues, health

Thursdays: religion, culture, animal husbandry, beauty, development, DIY

Individual items must be planned and produced in advance. (For example, an interview with a farmer about safe pesticide use for the agriculture topic.) It is good idea to plan items several weeks in advance to make sure reporters can gather the information or conduct the interviews needed. The station manager should set up a regular schedule of weekly editorial meetings with volunteers for new ideas and to assign topics to reporters.

Formats should be kept simple at the outset. Interviews, recordings of meetings or speeches, vox-pops (short responses

from community members to a question which are edited together) and studio discussions are good starting formats. Short, educational dramas are also quite popular. As volunteers become more skilled, more complicated formats can be introduced.

The program schedule should be revisited regularly based on experience and input from listeners. Listeners' interests may change. The station should find out what current interests are, and change its programming accordingly. The community may have recommendations for new topics or may not show interest in one already on the air.

CR should be educational and informative, but also entertaining. Aim for a mix of music and information, more serious and lighter topics, during the broadcasts. Remember: the station should not primarily become a music station with a little talk between songs. The priority should be community development through providing information to residents.

Step 5: Broadcast License Application

If the station will broadcast over the air, it will need a license from the government. Make sure you understand what is needed to apply for a license and that the CR initiative meets all the requirements.

Myanmar's Broadcasting Law of 2015 says CR initiatives must present the following documentation to the National Broadcasting Council to apply for a license.

- i. the name and registration certificate of the company as a legal entity;
- ii. a business plan in detail;
- iii. technical requirements;

- iv. overall program plan including program schedule;
- v. other requirements that may be set by the Council to be contained in its subsequent issuances.

Radio licenses are valid for seven years.

Step 6: Equipment Purchase and installation

Radio does not require extremely expensive or complicated equipment. A community radio station can generally be set up for as low as a few thousand dollars or costs can run as high as tens of thousands of dollars. There are many variables that affect the price, such as transmitter strength, the studio building, antenna height requirements, etc. At the most basic, the equipment setup can consist of a low-power transmitter harnessed to an antenna, an .mp3 player and a microphone. The basic considerations are:

Studio

The program production studio may be set up in any house or room where there is enough space for the equipment and the operators to work. Some things to think about are:

- Accessibility to community members
- Low or no rental fee
- Neutrality from vested interests
- Secure site for equipment and staff/volunteers
- Availability of power source
- Away from extremely noisy environment (see Soundproofing)

Transmitter

This generates the signal to be broadcast. The more powerful the transmitter, the further the signal will go. (FM broadcasting is preferred over AM since FM requires less electrical power and uses a much simpler antenna. A mono transmitter is preferable to a stereo one – mono transmitters are cheaper and offer a much

greater coverage area.) The following table gives a rough comparison of coverage areas of different transmitter strengths over flat land with a 15-meter antenna mast. However, signal reach will also depend on antenna height, terrain and the quality of the receiver.

- 1 watt: up to 3 km
- 20 watts: up to 16 km
- 100 watts: up to 40 km
- 300 watts: more than 40 km
- 500 watts: more than 56 km

Antenna and Mast

The transmitter's signal is sent out via the antenna, which is usually mounted on a high mast. Because FM waves travel in nearly line-of-site fashion, the height of the antenna is an important factor in signal reach. It can be placed on a tall building, if there is one, but it is usually mounted on a mast. An antenna mast can be made of two-inch galvanized-iron water pipe joined at the ends, erected and held firmly by guy wires. The base can be reinforced concrete, one square meter into the ground. The tower can also be erected above a strong roof. For hilly areas, an antenna is best placed on a mast located on the top of a hill or mountain. The mast needs a lightning arrester and to be grounded.

Mixer

This device allows one to have multiple sound sources connected to the computer and transmitter at the same time. It controls the sound levels from microphone and other sources (such as the computer or phone). They come in a wide variety of types, shapes and sizes.

Computer

The brain of any modern radio studio, today's standard computers can perform playback and editing tasks as long as they are equipped with appropriate playback (such as Zara Studio) and editing software (such as Audacity or Adobe Audition) and a sound card. Audio editing programs are like word-processing programs for sound. It is possible to cut and paste sound in different places, trim interviews, make the sound louder or softer, mix sounds and voices, etc. Audio editing on a computer is quite easy to learn, especially for those with basic computer skills.

Other equipment (e.g. audio recorders, microphones, headphones)

Digital audio recorders: For recording and interviews to be made in the field and brought back to the studio.

Headphones: For monitoring the quality of the sound recorded in the field and the audio broadcast in the studio. These should always be used.

Microphones and cables: The studio should have one or more dynamic microphones with microphone stands. Each digital recorder should have a microphone. The quality of sound recorded often depends not so much on the recorder as on the microphone.

Smartphones: These days, almost all smart phones have audio recording capability and free apps can be downloaded to do editing in the phone.

Power Supply

Even if you are on the electric grid, a back-up generator is extremely useful in the event of an outage. If you are using solar panels or another electricity-generation method to charge batteries, get the advice of a specialist before installation.

Optional Equipment

Telephone Hybrid

This converts the telephone signal into an audio signal that can be recognized by the mixer. This allows people who call into the station to be put on the air without a great deal of quality loss. Some mixers now have telephone hybrids built into them.

Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS)

This device provides emergency power if the grid power fails and protects studio equipment from damage from power interruptions. It differs from a standby generator in that it steps in immediately with electricity from batteries if grid power stops. The runtime of most UPS systems is short (only a few minutes) but long enough to start a standby power source or properly shut down sensitive equipment.

Soundproofing and Acoustical Treatment

The CR studio should be fairly quiet during a broadcast, with as little outside noise leaking in as possible. As mentioned earlier, CR does not have to sound highly professional, meaning some background noise is OK. But there are ways to dampen the outside sound.

Soundproofing is the prevention of exterior noise from entering the studio. It helps if your studio is in a quiet location away from traffic and other noise, or in a room without windows and exterior walls. Since this is not always possible, some other ways to soundproof a room are:

- Insulating studio walls and windows, especially those that face the exterior of the building (e.g. covering walls with two layers of 12-mm gypsum board with glass wool in between them)
- Putting carpet on floors
- Putting heavy curtains on walls or in front of doors/windows
- Laying a 1" layer of glass wool above ceiling tiles

Acoustical Treatment refers to dampening the echo within the studio. You can do this by fitting some sections of the wall and ceiling with soft materials. Options are:

- Hanging curtains on interior walls
- Mounting special acoustic tiles/panels made of foam or fabric on walls
- Even very inexpensive options like cardboard, Styrofoam and egg cartons have some positive effect

Air conditioning unit

It might seem like a luxury, but an air conditioning unit can be important for the studio equipment and to keep announcers more comfortable. (Studios can get hot!) A split ductless unit is best from an acoustic standpoint, since the outside (noisy) unit can be placed away from any windows.

Step 7: Training

CR stations are often launched and run by people who have never been inside a radio studio, have never spoken into a microphone, and have no experience in broadcasting or journalism. Therefore, staff and volunteers need training **before** getting behind the mic or producing a program for broadcast.

Some basic skills will have to be trained, but it is not necessary to make broadcast professionals of everyone who goes on air. A high degree of professionalism in interviewing or newswriting is not as important as having a sound knowledge of ethical guidelines and producing programs relevant to the community.

Training workshops should start early in the CR establishment process and cover the following topics. Following is a list of topics that should be trained. It is not likely people can be trained in all

the following in one workshop, but the topics can be combined or mixed into a series of workshop.

What is CR?

- The philosophy of community radio and basic principles

Ethics

- Ethical standards, the code of conduct and laws to be followed at the CR station. These are still under development. However, you can find the Code of Ethics followed by MRTV at www.mrtvmyanmar.com/mm/code-of-ethic.
- Avoiding defamation and hate speech
- Avoiding programs that violate the rights and dignity of women, children and minorities.

Technical training

- Basic computer training (using a keyboard, mouse, cutting and pasting, working with Windows)
- Use of studio equipment (microphones, mixing board, audio recorders, etc.)

Radio and journalism techniques

- Basic journalism (What is news and information, 5Ws and H, finding sources, asking questions)
- Basic radio techniques and formats (speaking on air, interviewing, different radio formats)
- Basic production techniques (recording audio, working with audio editing software to create different radio formats)

It is a good idea to train more people than needed to be sure to have enough people at a certain skill level at the end of the workshop and who will remain motivated.

Before investing in training people, make sure they have the time to volunteer on a regular basis. They should be residents of the community, of good moral standing, and possess oral communication skills. After all, radio is all about people talking to one another!

Ongoing training

Training is an ongoing process at a CR station since existing volunteers will leave and new ones will come on board all the time. Training might be conducted by partners or donor organizations, but it is a good idea to ask more experienced volunteers to train new people. The station can also hold training workshops for new volunteers on regular basis and let the community know when they will take place.

In addition, offering advanced training for experienced volunteers on more complicated radio formats can be an incentive and motivate your good people.

Training exchanges/visits

As CR becomes more established in Myanmar and more stations start operating, they can begin cooperating around training. People from start-up stations can visit established, well-functioning ones to observe, get hands-on experience and see what day-to-day operations are like.

Step 8: Launch!

You've put in a lot of preparatory work, researched and mobilized the community, gotten your license, trained a group of volunteers, put together a program schedule and equipped a functional radio studio. It is a good idea to run a few weeks of test broadcasts to make sure everyone really knows the equipment and builds up some confidence.

Now, it's time to go on air!

The time it takes to go from first CR initiative to actual broadcasting varies greatly. But it does not happen overnight. Usually getting everything in order – from initial organizing to creating a business plan and programming schedule to applying for a license and training volunteers – takes at least a year.

You should be proud of what you've accomplished. Why not throw a launch event and invite the community? You've earned it, and more people will see what CR can do for them, and what they can do for their new CR station.

Chapter 3

Financing a CR station

Community radio is usually not as expensive an operation as other kinds of media outlets. Operating costs are relatively low (no printing presses or TV cameras are needed) and the stations are run mostly by volunteers.

But financial sustainability is still a big challenge for CR stations since they still have bills to pay—electricity, personnel costs, office supplies, batteries, etc. It is crucial that any CR initiative think about keeping costs down and generating income from the very beginning.

A mix of revenue streams is the best strategy to follow.

The money coming in to pay for running costs should not just be from one source. If that source of funding dries up and the station does not have a backup plan, it could be forced to shut down. It makes sense to plan ahead and look for several income sources.

Possible funding sources for CR in Myanmar

Myanmar's Broadcasting Law allows the following funding methods for community broadcasters (Section 58):

- a) voluntary contributions by community members
- b) donations by local and foreign partners provided that such support are provided without political and economic conditions
- c) revenues from local advertisements
- d) proceeds from local merchandising
- e) other revenues which are consistent with their status as community broadcasters

The list below goes into more detail on the options included in the law, and adds a few more that could be possible. But it's not exhaustive. Get creative with your fundraising and think about what might work well in your own community.

Community contributions

Some stations ask for contributions from community members themselves. Voluntary contributions can be cash, but not always. They can also come in the form of labor, supplies or other materials. Some CR stations have had studios and antenna masts built through these kinds of in-kind contributions.

Membership/subscription fees

Asking for a low fee from listeners in return for membership in the station is an option. It can help connect the station to people since paying members feel they have a stake in it. They can also get certain benefits (invitations to special events, tours, etc.) The station must decide if this is realistic given the community's economic climate.

Donations from partners

Donations from local, national or international partners are common, especially when it comes to setup costs. Find out what groups in Myanmar are supporting CR initiatives and get in contact with them.

Careful! These donors can be very helpful in covering initial costs, but do not become overly dependent on them. The funding will likely be reduced and stop at some point, so the station should develop additional sources of revenue.

Advertising and sponsorships

Advertising and sponsorships are common revenue generators. Contact local businesses and see if they would be interested in advertising on your station. Make an ad rate card that is affordable in your community and offer to help businesses produce ad spots.

Careful! Avoid any undue influence by an advertiser. Even if a business pays a lot for ads, it should not make decisions on editorial content. Think about if there are some products you would rather NOT advertise on your station. Ads should never run counter to the public-service character of the station.

Merchandising

Some stations sell t-shirts, mugs, soap or other products with the station name and logo on them. The products can be bought or, even better, donated to the station. This can be a good tool to spread the word about the station and boost community ties.

Public-service announcements

Airing public-service messages on a range of topics such as health, social and economic issues can generate income. Clients are often government bodies and NGOs. Contact local officials and national and international NGOs to see if there is interest.

Community messages/Music Requests

CR stations can become a “community telephone” or “community notice board”. The station broadcasts personal messages, birth and death announcements, invitations to social functions and events, or song requests for a small fee. Besides generating revenue, the message service is a way for the community to participate and feel connected to the station. These messages are especially useful in areas where the communications infrastructure is weak.

Selling services

CR stations can charge for services that make use of their equipment and expertise. A station may produce advertisements, announcements, documentaries or educational programs for the government, NGOs or the private sector. Radio stations can provide “party” services – renting out a package that includes audio equipment, music and DJs for parties and festivals.

Rental of airtime

Some stations cover some of their costs by renting airtime to other organizations. However, any broadcasts by outside parties should not violate the station’s code of ethics, such as content that advocates violence and discrimination, political campaigns, etc. Station management should put in place strong guidelines about what kinds of groups should be allowed to broadcast on their frequency.

Stay accountable

Community broadcasters should make sure that they are accountable to the community in terms of their finances and funding sources. That means that records of income and expenses should be carefully kept and an overview presented to the General Assembly.

Create a business plan

Another step toward financial sustainability is knowing the costs involved in running the station and if the revenue coming in covers those costs—and acting accordingly. A business plan helps with this. It summarizes the objectives of a business with a plan on how those objectives will be reached. It acts as a road map, guiding station activities and giving it a long-term business focus.

A business plan is required to get an FM license in Myanmar.

A budget is part of a business plan, and below is a simple table of possible CR costs and sources of income.

Cost Item	MMK
Personnel costs	Xxx
Electricity	Xxx
Telephone charges	Xxx
Transportation	Xxx
Equipment maintenance	Xxx
Training	Xxx
Fees	Xxx
Other program costs	Xxx
Office Supplies	Xxx
TOTAL Outflow	Xxx

Income Source	MMK
Advertising	Xxx
Sponsorships	Xxx
Grants	Xxx
Merchandising	Xxx
Community announcements	Xxx
Donations	Xxx
Production Services	Xxx
TOTAL Inflow	XXX

Other types of sustainability

The information above is about financial sustainability. But there are two other types of sustainability that are also essential.

Social sustainability: These are the characteristics that keep a station relevant and interesting to the community and which

encourage community support. It includes things like community ownership, community participation, programs that are relevant to local residents and respecting local cultures and traditions.

Organizational sustainability: These are structures and policies in place at the station relating to governance, management and operation that make it function well and in the interest of the community. Is the station mission and vision clear? Is the board in place and does everyone know about the different policies and procedures? Is the station a welcoming, inclusive place where people want to come and volunteer?

Chapter 4

Staffing a CR station

CR stations are **volunteer-driven**—they depend on the work of volunteers from the community. Few CR stations can afford to pay more than just a few staff, if any. Most rely on volunteers for many aspects of station operation, from the board of directors to announcers, reporters, technicians, fundraisers, etc. Without a team of motivated, reliable volunteers, CR is not possible.

However, many stations do find it necessary to hire a few people for staff positions:

Station Manager – If station hires anyone, it is probably for this key position. The station manager oversees day-to-day operations, including volunteer scheduling, programming, program content, governance issues, etc. They will work closely with the board of directors. The position is probably too big a time commitment for a volunteer.

Other Staff: *A station manager might well be the only person a new CR station can hire at the start, there are other positions that stations with the resources often try to fill. This additional staff lightens the station manager's workload.*

Technical Manager—This individual will assist with all technical matters related to the station, such as recording, editing, broadcasting, equipment maintenance, etc.

Program Manager—This person oversees what goes out on air and ensures it is relevant and reflective of the community. They oversee reporters and presenters and have a good knowledge of regulations and ethical guidelines.

Marketing Manager—This person’s job is to promote and sell the station, attracting advertising or sponsorships. Responsibilities include selling advertising and preparing promotional plans and events.

Finance/Administration Manager—This person is responsible for record keeping and ensuring that the station operates according to its policies and procedures. This includes overseeing financial transactions, music rights issues and reporting to the regulator.

Volunteers

Volunteers contribute their time, knowledge and experience to the station at no cost, which keeps expenses low.

They perform a wide range of tasks, from program production and announcing to equipment maintenance and administrative tasks.

Recruiting volunteers

Because volunteer numbers always change (people leave because they’ve gotten new jobs or their family situation has changed, etc.), you should always be on the lookout for new volunteers. Some steps you can take are:

- **Demystify radio:** Invite community residents to village-level information and production workshops. Many people think that radio is complicated and something they could never do. Not true!
- **Everyone can be trained:** Spread the word that people with little or no education or work experience can also be trained in broadcasting.

- **All are welcome:** Make sure people know that women and men, youth and the elderly are welcome as volunteers.
- **Recruit on air:** Ask announcers to put out calls for volunteers during broadcasts. Hold an interview with existing volunteers in which they talk about their experiences.
- **Volunteers share their stories:** Ask volunteers to relate their own stories in front of community members at meetings about what their experience has been like. It builds excitement and confidence: “If they can do it, so can I.”
- **Promote the benefits:** Remind people that volunteering and the training involved will give them new skills that might help them get a paying job one day.
- **Hold an open house:** Generate interest in volunteering with open-house events at the studio where you invite the community to visit and see the station in action.
- **Offer alternatives:** Consider options for people who live far away from the station. Maybe they can phone in reports on topics or news from their area instead of physically coming in.
- **It’s fun.** Make sure people understand that volunteering is fun. They make new friends while helping their community.

Keeping Volunteers

As mentioned, running a station using unpaid volunteers results in a lot turnover. Here are a few tips on keeping the volunteers you have:

Train them well: Make sure volunteers get the basic training they need to carry out their tasks. If they have the right skills, they will have confidence and enjoy their tasks.

Offer advanced training: Give volunteers who show commitment and ability training on more advanced topics (such as more complicated radio formats). It keeps them interested and motivated.

Give them special “beats”: Let volunteers report on what interests them. A medical doctor could have a regular health segment or a volunteer who is a farmer might report mainly on agricultural issues.

Get women on board: Staff sustainability will often be improved by getting women involved as they are less likely to leave the community in search of work.

Show your appreciation: Make sure volunteers know the station could not operate without them. That can be as simple as saying “thank you” or organizing the occasional party.

Volunteer contract

Volunteers should never be exploited, and expectations should be clearly set out. Some stations ask volunteers to sign a volunteer contract that lays out the station’s goals and policies.

It lets volunteers know what they can expect from their work at the station and what is expected of them, especially regarding ethical conduct while they are at the station and reporting for it.

It also might ask them to give advance notice if they plan on stopping their volunteer work.

This kind of document can strengthen the feeling of connection between the station and the volunteer.

Chapter 5

Community Radio and Human Rights

Human rights means the rights of individual persons.

Minority rights

Myanmar is a country with rich diversity of ethnic groups. Some groups live in different regions but there are areas where different ethnic groups live side-by-side.

That's why when recruiting volunteers for your community radio project, you should encourage minority groups in the community to get involved. Your programming should include minority languages spoken in the community and the safety of minorities at the station should be a priority.

CR seeks to help bring about a more equal and peaceful society. Therefore, programs should promote community tolerance, social cohesion and a respect for all ethnic groups.

While drafting rules and regulations for your community radio station, you should make sure that programs and even certain terms that could lead to controversy and increase tensions should not be allowed.

The Rights of Children and Women

Myanmar has long had a male-dominated culture, which means that women face discrimination, enjoy fewer protections and have more limited opportunities than men. To make your station inclusive, you should emphasize the participation of women in all

aspects of the station—from board members to managers to volunteers. Of course, their safety in the workplace should be a priority.

It is a good idea to ensure that women’s affairs programs are on the schedule in order that the voices of women from the community are heard.

Programs that raise awareness about domestic violence and the sexual abuse of women and children can help women know how to respond if they or their children are victimized in such a way. Women would know where to turn for help and, importantly, know that they are not alone.

Programs that focus on women’s affairs and human rights can go far in promoting equal treatment and equal opportunities for men and women and help communities make real progress in the area of gender equality.

While music is usually an important part of a community radio station’s programming, songs should not be allowed on air which violate the dignity of women and children.

Conclusion

Community radio is a unique form of media. It put the power of the airwaves into the hands of a community, allowing members of that community to steer the public conversation and discuss issues that are important to them. It can bring about change in people's lives by bringing them information they need to increase their livelihoods and become more informed, engaged citizens.

At the same time, community radio is fun. Volunteers learn new skills and make new friends. The stations themselves often become vibrant places that allow different people, young and old, to cross paths and exchange experiences in ways that they might not have done before the broadcasts began.

Starting and running a community radio station are challenges, but the rewards it brings – better access to information, community empowerment and new voices on the airwaves – are well worth the effort.

Further references (in English)

UNESCO Community Radio Handbook

A good general guide to community radio and what is involved in set-up and operation.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001245/124595e.pdf>

Community Radio – The People's Voice

A clear, accessible guide to setting up, managing, and sustaining a community radio station.

<http://journalism.co.za/community-radio-the-peoples-voice/>

How to do community radio

A comprehensive guide from the concept of community radio through set-up to programming.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001342/134208e.pdf>

Starting a local radio station

This detailed guide from Internews focuses on Afghanistan, but the information in it is applicable to other countries.

<https://www.internews.org/resource/starting-local-radio-station-manual-afghanistan>