International Seminar on Community Media Sustainability: Strengthening Policies and Funding

14-15 September 2015
UNESCO, Paris

Recommendations

Background

Community media stakeholders, representing governments, regulators, practitioners, NGOs and experts from all regions of the world pooled their experiences and developed the following recommendations. They are addressed to Governments and Regulators, to Community Media Outlets and Associations, and to UNESCO - the UN organization with the mandate on media, and to the international community.

The Seminar made recommendations on the legal, financial and administrative measures to achieve a free, independent and pluralistic media environment, with due consideration for relevant international human rights treaties and obligations.

The recommendations are targeted particularly at community broadcasting, and are based on an understanding that:

- airwaves are a public resource and that community broadcasting is an important use of this resource, particularly in the light of progress towards the range of Sustainable Development Goals, including the target on public access to information and fundamental freedoms;

- community media as a whole rely on an environment in which a free and vibrant civil society sector can flourish, including groups which promote and support community media.

The recommendations below aim to foster a strong and effective community broadcast sector, which is recognised as being as essential a part of a free, pluralistic and independent media landscape, as public and private broadcasters.

Recommendations

To Government and Regulators:

1. Put in place an enabling legal and regulatory framework for community broadcasting founded on a rights-based approach, acknowledged within broader media and communications policies, and cognizant of the specific needs of the sector. This framework should:

   i. Recognize and legally define community broadcasting in a way that clearly distinguishes it from commercial and public service broadcasters, based on its non-profit nature, its strong links with and

its capacity to provide a service to the community, while having its autonomy and editorial independence respected and promoted;

ii.   Reserve an equitable portion of the frequency spectrum and ensure that community broadcasting benefits from fair, transparent and equitable licensing and frequency allocation procedures;

iii.   Ensure that licensing is done by an independent regulatory body which has expertise, understanding and the mandate to support and promote community broadcasting,

iv.   Assure that community audio and video broadcast services have due prominence on digital platforms;

v.   Offer low fee or free access to licences and frequencies, including, where relevant, digital terrestrial frequencies;

vi.   Allowing community broadcasters to access funding from a diverse range of sources of funding, including advertising and sponsorship, on an equitable basis with other broadcasters.

2. Create an enabling environment for the sustainability and development of community broadcasting. This should:

i.   Put in place financial support measures (such as transmission fee subsidies or special tariffs for non-profits), while respecting the operational and editorial independence of community media;

ii.   Consider the creation of special funds and/or an appropriate allocation from existing funds including, where appropriate, universal service funds and cross-media funding mechanisms, administered with the involvement of the community media sector, independently from government and in a transparent manner which is consistent with principles of good governance;

iii.   Adopting measures to support the development of community broadcast services in underserved areas.

3. Support the establishment of specialised training bodies and/or specialised courses offered by existing training bodies, to cover issues of relevance to community broadcasting, and support the ability of those working in the sector to participate in training activities;

4. Support research in support of a better understanding of the needs and challenges of, and services provided by, community broadcasters;

5. Respect the status of community broadcast personnel, including issues of accreditation at events, and their right to protect their confidential sources of information;

6. Recognise the important role that community broadcasters can play in emergency and disaster situations and support their ability to play that role, including through training;

7. Take measures to ensure the security and safety of community broadcast outlets and workers, and in particular women workers;

8. Promote greater engagement of women, young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups in the community broadcast sector, including through representation in national decision-making bodies (such as broadcast regulators), and the involvement of these groups in community media outlets and networks;

9. Promote media and information literacy which empowers citizens to engage fully with all communications, including community broadcasting;

10. Carefully consider whether, when and how to undertake a transition to digital terrestrial radio, based on the overall public interest, following a broad, transparent process of consultation, consistent with international treaties and conventions.

To Community Broadcasters and their Associations:

1. Promote the development of local, national, regional and international community broadcast networks and exchanges, including to share ideas, knowledge, expertise, best practices and content;

2. Focus on diversifying funding sources;

3. Protect the autonomy and independence of community media from government, political parties, the corporate sector, faith-based institutions, or self-serving interests;

4. Support the ability of community broadcasting to focus on its core objectives of enabling voice and access to information for the community, as opposed to pursuing the interests of NGOs or powerful community actors, or a narrowly-defined development agenda;

5. Collaborate with other actors to promote media and information literacy, to combat hatred and xenophobia, to contribute to a culture of tolerance, and to raise awareness about the importance and role of community media in their target communities;

6. Encourage complementarities and partnerships between community media and other stakeholders, including independent public service broadcasters, with a particular focus on training, technology sharing and archival digitisation, cataloguing, storage and monetising;

7. Take full advantage of information and communications technologies, as well as associated platforms such as social media and cellular telephony, to enhance operational efficiencies and service to the community;

8. Encourage strong links with the community being served, including in terms of involvement in community media operations, in volunteerism as well as in the creation, ownership and diffusion of content.

9. Promote measures to ensure internal diversity and representativeness vis-à-vis the community being served, including women, young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups, in relationship to participation, decision-making and the production of content;

10. Support the development of programming focusing on a range of relevant sectors and local issues of public concern, such as women empowerment, indigenous peoples, promoting a culture of respect for human rights, livelihoods, health, culture, education, the youth and business;

11. Promote transparency and accountability in the operation of community media, including in relation to funding, in particular vis-à-vis the community being served;

12. Support the professional development and internal management systems of community media;

13. Promote good practice and self-regulatory measures including content and use of audits (both qualitative and quantitative), ethical codes and sector-led performance assessment, where relevant, based on specific targets;

14. Consider measures to assess sustainability gaps in the community media sector and/or within the media landscape as a whole, for example using UNESCO's Media Development Indicators and UNESCO's Media Viability Indicators;

15. Participate in policy formulation for the community broadcast sector;

16. Actively use the recommendations arising from this Seminar to advocate in support of community broadcasting in other fora, local, national and international.

To UNESCO:

1. Continue to promote global recognition of community broadcasting as a distinct and integral part of a free, pluralistic and independent media landscape, including as part of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of promoting human rights, peace and security;

2. Continue to embrace community broadcasting in annual events such as World Radio Day (13 February), World Press Freedom Day (3 May) and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2 November), and in Media Development Indicators studies;

3. Enhance UNESCO's Regular Programme to support community broadcasting. This could include:

    i. Promoting national, regional and international debate on community broadcasters with a view to enriching understanding of and support for this sector, with a special focus on government, elected officials (parliamentarians) and regulators;

    ii. Enhancing community radio services that are low-cost and adapted to developing world conditions, and that take advantage of new information and communication technologies (including in relation to power, technical support and durability/reliability of equipment);

    iii. Supporting specialised training programmes for community broadcasters, including with a focus on sustainability, financial management, governance and production of quality programmes;

    iv.   Advising Member States on the creation of enabling legal and regulatory frameworks for community broadcasters;

    v.   Publishing material and handbooks, such as a Parliamentary Handbook on Community Media;

    vi.   Supporting cooperation and networking among community broadcasters, and between them and other relevant stakeholders, with a particular focus on promoting discussion at national or regional levels on best practices of cooperation between community broadcasting and Public Service Broadcasting, aiming for synergies and common actions;

    vii.   Supporting relevant research and studies on the community broadcast sector globally and at the regional and national level;

    viii.   Promoting the engagement of a wider range of both global and regional IGOs in supporting the community broadcast sector;

    ix.   Continuing to advocate for inclusion in the renewed mandate of WSIS and IGF of recognition of the importance of free, independent and pluralistic media, including community broadcasting, and for equitable integration, in the overall public interest, of the interests of the community media sector in processes and decisions relating to Internet governance;

    x.   Advocating for the view that the spectrum is a common good which needs to be administered in the public interest, rather than based purely on financial criteria, with an equitable and transparent allocation of spectrum to broadcasting uses, including community broadcasters, and support efforts to address the digital divide;

4. Undertake various measures, comprising cooperative approaches and partnerships within the UN system, to increase the participation of women, young people, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups in the community broadcasting sector, including at the decision-making level;

5. Propose that the International Programme for the Development of Communication allocate lesser priority to funding assistance for countries which do not recognise community broadcasting as a third tier of broadcasting, and increase support to community media projects.

To the International Community (donors, INGOS, IGOs):

1. Promote and advocate for the adoption of an enabling legal framework for community broadcasting, in line with the recommendations for governments and regulators above;

2. Earmark funding with a view to enhancing overall support for the community broadcasting sector in line with the recommendations above to UNESCO, taking into account the need for funding models that support sustainability beyond donors' funding cycles;

3. Support the development of national, regional and international funding mechanisms for community broadcasting;

4. Integrate, as relevant, an understanding of the potential role of community broadcasting into their sectoral programmes (such as agriculture, children and so on) without reducing the sector to a purely instrumentalist role;

5. Promote and engage with the idea of corporate social responsibility by the private sector in relation to the community broadcast sector;

6. Monitor cases of interference with community broadcasters, including roll-backs in terms of the enabling framework, and take action in cases where this occurs.