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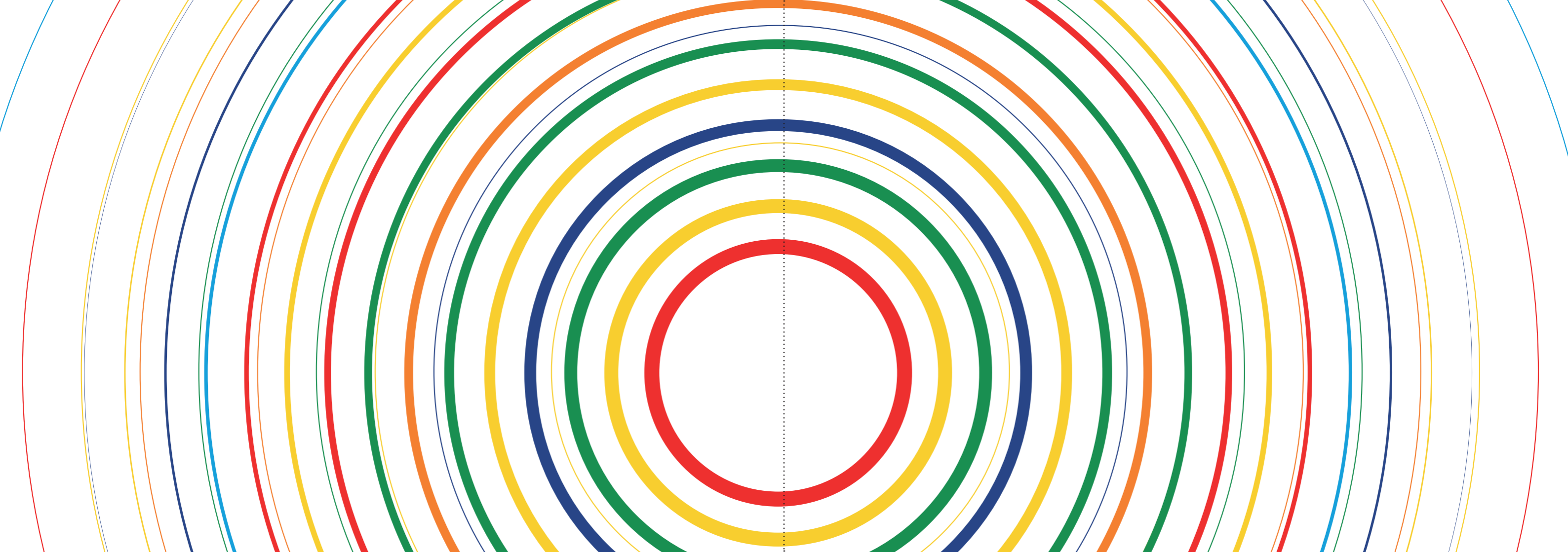
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**EMPOWERING
Local Radio
with
ICTs**



ON AIR WITH RURAL WOMEN

The media act not only as a mirror of society, but also as a creator and motor of sociocultural norms, which have the ability to shape our judgements and cultures. They have a great influence on the societal perceptions of gender, and can contribute to communicating unrealistic, stereotypical and limiting views around women.

Besides biased representation, women are dramatically underrepresented in all media, both in the organizations and in their content. The situation is even more precarious for rural women and girls, who remain one of the most marginalized groups in society. They suffer from illiteracy, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence, as well as from an overall lack of access to information.

Such conditions are embedded in harmful traditional practices (e.g. denying women ownership of land or their confinement to traditional roles) and continue to exclude rural women from public participation, preventing them from raising their concerns and benefiting from opportunities in the economic, social and political spheres.

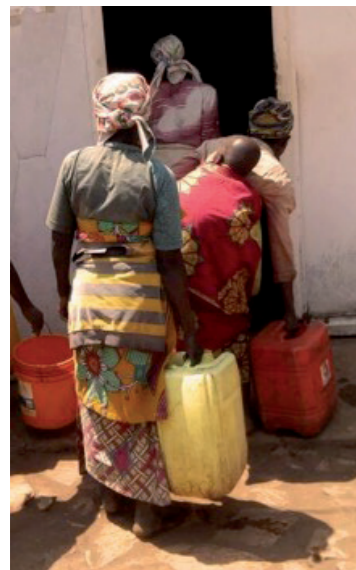
The inclusion of women's voices and gender-sensitive issues in the media has the power to break this circle of inequality and dependency. By training rural women as local correspondents, promoting their participation as sources and experts on air, and integrating their concerns into broadcasts, local radio can act as an advocate for gender equality in vulnerable communities.

Through UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project, supported by Sweden, the reinforced involvement of rural women in local radio has led to positive transformation in their communities.

The exhibition "On air with rural women" serves as a testimony to this positive impact. Through this booklet, you will discover some of the personal experiences and achievements of women involved in the project, as well as how the inclusion of women in local radio has led to progress on gender issues, such as gender-based violence, women entrepreneurship, child marriage and FGM, in several hard-to-reach African communities.

GENDER-SENSITIVE REPORTING ECHOING IN THE COMMUNITY

Local radio programs are challenging gender norms in Africa and their messages are echoing in the community. Broadcasts dedicated to women empowerment are helping to inspire local women to take positive action and promote their autonomy. Community members are responding with the creation of their own dedicated listener clubs and associations.



Radio Isangano in Rwanda is one such radio station that is working with local listener groups to include women voices in public debate and to promote healthy gender portrayals in the media. They have helped to found two women listener groups in communities within their broadcasting range, Bumba and Mubuga. The main occupation of the listener group members are farmers, with the key objective of the clubs being the increase of media and information literacy amongst women.

Even in hard-to-reach areas, local radio stations are creating awareness and broadcasts are sounding out favourable responses in the community. Radio Bangu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is receiving strong local support for its programs. They are dedicated to positive action that can contribute to greater social independence and empowerment among women. The broadcasts have been so well-received as to result in the creation of a listener's club and NGO that in turn supports and promotes the topics of the program.

Social perceptions and tolerance for gender-based violence, especially that occurring domestically, are significant obstacles to the empowerment of women. Gender issues and their solutions require action that targets both men and women in order to change the social landscape that facilitates such behaviour. Targeted radio programs have the capacity to challenge masculinity norms and the unfortunate tolerance for gender violence, as shown by Radio Ijwi ry'Umukenyenzi (Women's Voice) in Burundi.

RIU created a gender unit in their station dedicated to investigating gender related issues, to monitor the content of broadcasts and to host awareness programs. They advocate positive behaviour amongst men and women that promotes intolerance for gender violence and disrepute for perpetrators. The program has been popular enough in the community that listeners' groups have been formed and grateful residents have even begun to support the station by supplying RIU with water free of charge.



Photo left: Listeners show their support for RIU's gender-specific broadcasts by supplying the station with its water needs (© UNESCO/RIU).

Photo right: © Hector Conesa/ Shutterstock

CONFRONTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Local radio is raising awareness on the issue of violence against women across many hard-to-reach regions in Africa through dedicated gender-sensitive programming. Training in gender-sensitivity is assisting radio staff in the identification and removal of harmful biases and stereotypes from broadcasts and encouraging positive change in the communal perception of gender equality. UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project is helping radio stations to inspire intolerance for gender-based violence and hold perpetrators and duty-bearers responsible.

Gender-based violence poses a substantial obstacle to the empowerment of women. In many regions, particularly in isolated rural areas, violence against women is a prevalent domestic issue, considered to be a private matter. These conditions display the urgent need to address the issue in the minds of men and women by spreading intolerance for gender-based violence and encouraging women to report and speak up against such abuse.

Local radio journalists are contributing to raising awareness for major issues facing local women and inciting action to resolve these oppressing impediments to development.

Gender-sensitive training helps local radio staff identify and cover relevant stories, but the interest to remove harmful stereotypes in pursuing these issues is coming from local reporters.

"I'm interested in gender-sensitive reporting because gender equality levels are low and more knowledge is needed. Training helped me to report on stories dealing with gender violence and child marriages in ways that can improve the situation in the community," said *Rebecca Ayo*, correspondent for Radio Apac in Uganda, during a workshop organised by UNESCO.

Local radio stations participate to hold duty-bearers accountable to the responsibilities of their office. In Zanzibar (Tanzania), Tumbatu FM is bringing gender-based violence and the role of authorities to the forefront of social discussion through their programs. Prior to the radio station's coverage, cases of gender-based violence often went unreported and were dealt with on the family level.

Broadcasts stressed the importance of intolerance towards gender violence and the necessity for reporting incidents to the local authorities. As a direct result of the awareness spread, the police have established gender desks at local police stations where residents can receive information and report gender-based crimes.

"We are happy to have community radio," said Omar Naim Suleiman. "We receive useful information on-time that covers a diverse range of subjects that concern us."



ENCOURAGING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Local radio in Uganda is encouraging creativity amongst its listeners to initiate different income-generating projects. Programming dedicated to entrepreneurship and business management in the wake of UNESCO training of radio staff has contributed to the burgeoning small business environment. Listeners of these broadcasts are able to improve their own conditions and raise their prospects using the information they receive.



Kajimu Mahmood works her chapatti stand with zeal while listening to Radio Nakaseke FM in Uganda (© UNESCO).

Through this project, UNESCO encourages radio stations to select local issues as priorities for discussion and analysis in their programming. Radio Nakaseke broadcasts dedicated entrepreneurial and financial informational programs that can change the perspectives of listeners and encourage income-generating activities among community members.

19-year old *Kajimu Mahmood* is a local chapatti vendor and one of the beneficiaries who attributes her recent success to Radio Nakaseke's business programs. "I never used to save money," she said. "Instead, I would spend my earnings gambling or on clothes and other luxuries."

However, since beginning to listen to the local entrepreneurial broadcasts, she began to use the community radio station to advertise her business and develop a savings behaviour. She was able to use her savings to buy a plot of land in the town with the increasing success of her chapatti stand.

"I am now the best chapatti vendor in town and I'm proud of my job. I felt empowered by Radio Nakaseke's programs, and my new target is to save enough to build my own house."

In addition to encouraging saving and entrepreneurship, Radio Nakaseke is also providing a platform for rural women to share knowledge and information.



Ruth Seruwu sits outside her home listening to Radio Nakaseke (© UNESCO/Radio Nakaseke).

Ruth Seruwu is a married woman with four children, and she works primarily as a farmer growing specialty crops. She belongs to the dedicated listeners' club "Mifunya Women's Group" that works to empower other women in the community.

"We use the radio to mobilize our fellow women into groups and to start small projects to generate income, which can help to support their families and stop over-dependency," she said.

Besides her activity in the listeners' club, *Ruth* uses community radio to advertise her own side-project – the rental of tents, decorations and outdoor catering services. With the extra income accumulated by

this venture, she has been able to pay for her children's school fees, including the tuition for her two eldest daughters to attend university.

The impact of Radio Nakaseke on the local community in terms of entrepreneurship and financial knowledge is one of the meaningful spillovers of UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project. By training radio staff to cover such topics of local interest, community radio stations are able to provide social service, which can promote economic development in their area of coverage. These two individual cases represent only some of the many ways in which UNESCO is bridging the gap between isolated women and the information they need to increase their autonomy and to escape poverty.

CURBING FORCED MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Local radio is at the forefront of the fight to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage in Tanzania. Loliondo FM, one of the radio stations benefiting from UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project, is proving to be indispensable in raising awareness for the issue and educating girls on the action to take in avoiding FGM – especially when there seems to be no way out.



© Anca Dumitrache/Shutterstock

Female genital cutting is a common cultural practice in parts of Africa. However, it can cause "bleeding and infection, urinary incontinence, difficulties with childbirth and even death"¹. An estimated 130 million girls have undergone the procedure globally and 2 million are at risk each year, despite international agreements banning the practice.

Radio is often the only way to reach many of the communities where FGM and forced marriage continue to prevail. Local radio campaigns can reach the women and girls at risk. It can change the perceptions of women and men and inform women on their basic human rights.

Such is the case with Loliondo FM where they have provided information on anti-FGM campaigner, *Suzan Koila*, through their broadcasts. Girls have been reported to have avoided FGM and forced marriage by making contact with *Suzan*, thanks to the local radio programs.

In the past, *Suzan* has provided girls with shelter and coordinated with EMBUWAN, an NGO dealing with education, health and income-generating activities run by her daughter, to offer long-term support.

"The NGO is able to identify donors to support the girls. They can then receive vocational training," reported *Suzan* at an anti-FGM meeting in December 2017. Local radio proved essential in distributing the proper information among the at-risk girls of the region and in linking girls to the people able to help.

Thanks to UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project, Loliondo FM benefited from training and an extensive baseline study, which surveyed listeners to identify the local issues most important to them, such as FGM. Training increases their ability to effectively cover local stories such as their radio campaign to end FGM in Northern Tanzania, and be of public service. By connecting the radio station to pressing issues, programs could effectively address the primary concerns of the community to bring about positive action.

Loliondo FM received a great response from their listeners, particularly young girls, in their radio campaign to end FGM in the Ngorongoro District. Girls were eager to educate themselves regarding who and where to turn to should they be pressured into a forced marriage or undergoing FGM – vital information that the radio delivered. June presents a peak in the prevalence of FGM in Ngorongoro District as students are on break from school and the radio station plans to repeat the successful campaign.



Suzan Koila speaking at an anti-FGM meeting with UNESCO (© UNESCO).

¹ Source: World Health Organization



INTEGRATION OF WOMEN AND THEIR VOICES INTO LOCAL RADIO

Women participation in local radio is increasing through UNESCO's "Empowering Local Radio with ICTs" project. It encourages the inclusion of women voices in broadcasts and as correspondents. Moreover, women have the opportunity to receive training in the use of ICTs and to improve their reporting. However, they are also breaching the divide to assume positions in management, hardline broadcasting and as part of the technical team. One important spillover effect is the increasing diversity of women in local radio, which is helping to remove harmful stereotypes in broadcasting.

Esther Mugatare, 59, was one such community member from Rwanda who had the desire to work for the local radio station. When Isangano Community Radio was created in 2011, she expressed her interest in working for the station despite her age and remonstrances from friends and family.

Esther was given the opportunity to receive training through the UNESCO project, which allowed her to increase her capacity in reporting on local

issues. Six years later, she continues to work at Radio Isangano as a volunteer reporter where she mainly covers stories related to the region's agricultural sector.

Photo left: ©UNESCO/Masakazu Shibata

Photo right: Esther conducting an interview for Radio Isangano. © Radio Isangano / UNESCO

Beth Wanjiru is another local radio volunteer working with Baliti FM in Kenya. She runs her own beauty salon in Isiolo and contributes to the family farm, but still finds time to pursue her passion for reporting on issues important to the community. *Beth* covers stories related to farming and youth employment, broadcasting both in Swahili and Borana, and making proficient use of ICTs in her work in the field and the station.

Margaret Sentamu is the Executive Director of the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA), the organization managing Mama FM. She has been particularly involved in working with rural populations, especially women, as well as organizing campaigns to curb teenage pregnancy and promote women's rights. Mama FM also provides an opportunity for Ugandan women to enter and gain experience in the local media sphere, a field mainly dominated by men. Under *Margaret* and UNWA's management, more than 60% of the staff of Mama FM are women, with all managerial positions taken by women.

On the technical side, *Neorisha Julius* is working as a sound engineering at Radio Atlantis in South Africa. Despite her degree and strong competencies, she faces ongoing disbelief from associates that a woman is capable of performing well in a technical position.

"For them, it's hard to swallow the fact that I can do technical work just as well, that I can create an advertisement, that I can do recordings, editing and work with technical and sophisticated equipment. You don't see that every day, but it's something that I really enjoy and love," said *Neorisha*.

Photo left: Beth Wanjiru editing a recording using an open source software she learned to use through UNESCO training. © UNESCO/Leandro Pereira Franca.

Photo right: Margaret Sentamu standing proudly in front of the building of her association, UMWA, and the Mama FM studio. © Mama FM / UNESCO

All content featured in the “On air with rural women” exhibition and this booklet has been collected through UNESCO’s “Empowering Local Radio with ICTs” project, supported by Sweden, which aims to strengthen the capacities of local radio stations to provide marginalized populations, particularly isolated, rural and impoverished regions, with a quality and reliable access to information on issues affecting their lives.

Since 2012, the project is reinforcing the capacities of 59 radio stations from 10 African countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The project is centered on capacity-building activities and teaching long-term skills to local radio journalists, particularly on the use of ICTs to modernize the stations’ operations, improve the quality of programs and extend the geographical coverage of news sources. Training additionally focuses on the empowerment of local women through gender-sensitive programming, issues of local concern and investigative journalism, as well as on financial planning to ensure the long-run viability of the local stations.

Through a sustainable and participatory approach, thanks to mentorship and strong ownership of the outcomes by the beneficiaries, the project is providing local radio stations with the necessary tools and skills to properly inform their communities, who are in return able to make enlightened choices about their lives.

