

Community Radio for Development in Jordan

**WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO
AmmanNet Radio**

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Introduction

This paper is concerned with the role of community media in the political and social development in Jordan, with specific reference to the experience of AmmanNet Radio.

The study includes a theoretical foundation that provides a deep analysis of how community media operate and contribute to development, in terms of the interplay between public sphere and civil society.

By evaluating the experience of AmmanNet, the first community radio in Jordan, in a significant context the study draws both on its contribution to, and intervention in, public and political sphere.

The paper also points out the challenges and the limits of such initiative; while it constitutes a realm for the expression of diverse collectives, social groups and their discourses, and their intervention in civic life, it is restricted by a non-democratic political system, conservative practices of politicians and a tribal social system.

Theoretical Framework

Approaching Community Media in Jordan: Theory and Methodology

By Sawsan Zaidah
AmmanNet Radio

Different theoretical approaches have called forth a vital “public-mediated-space” at the very heart of the democratic process by drawing on the interplay between public sphere and civil society.

The freedom of expression underpins all other human rights. It is the means by which other human rights are defended and extended. In the information age the freedom of expression takes on additional importance, as the ability to send and receive information, regardless of frontiers, comes increasingly to dominate our economic, social and cultural life. A new grassroots agenda is emerging to articulate the right to communicate an agenda in which access to new media and communication technologies is seen as an essential part of public life and a democratic culture.

From this perspective, then, community media might usefully be seen as a form of mediation between those relative few who control transnational media industries and the vast majority of people who are essentially voiceless in mass-mediated societies

Locating community media

Community Media is community owned and controlled, giving access to voices in the community and encouraging diversity, creativity and participation. They

provide a vital counterbalance to the increasing globalization and commercialization of the media.

Community Media is providing media and information communication technology access, training and employment and is an exciting source of social innovation and practical 'joined up' outcomes.

Community media has a vital role in reaching out to people and communities at risk of exclusion and disadvantage. Community-based radio, television and Internet projects work by enabling people to become media producers, to send as well as to receive, and, by working together, to reinforce knowledge, dialogue and cultural expression at neighborhood and community level.

Douglas Kellner (1997) refers to grassroots initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content and dedicated to the principles of free speech and participatory democracy. Moreover, the community in this formulation can be defined by geography, as well as by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or more typically, some combination thereof (Browne, 1996).

Community media, according to Kevin Howley (2002), are distinguished from their commercial and public service counterparts in three fundamental ways. First, community media provide local populations with access to the instruments of media production and distribution. Second, the organizational culture of community media stresses volunteerism over professionalism and promotes participatory management, governance and decision-making. Third, and perhaps most significantly, community media reject market-oriented approaches to communicative practices and are philosophically committed to nurturing mutually supportive, collaborative, and enduring communal relations (Devine, 1991). In sum, community media play a vital, though largely unacknowledged role in preserving democratic forms of communication, defending local cultural autonomy, promoting civil society, and rebuilding a sense of community. Community media as a development device

Media theorist Robert McChesney (1997: 6, 7) highlights the implications for democracy on national and international levels. "In non-democratic societies those in power invariably dominate the communications systems to maintain their rule. In democratic societies the manner by which the media system is structured, controlled and subsidized is of central political importance. Control over the means of communication is an integral aspect of political and economic power.... The commercial basis of U.S. media has negative implications for the exercise of political democracy: it encourages a weak political culture, and it permits the business and commercial interests that actually rule U.S. society to have inordinate influence over media content."

Mainstream media represent specific social groups in ways that suggest those groups to be blameworthy for particular economic or social conditions, or to hold extreme political or cultural views. Such groups rarely comprise the powerful and influential elites that routinely have access to such media. By contrast, other groups are marginalized and disempowered by their treatment in the mainstream media, treatment against which they generally have no redress. Alternative media is the home to stories that, for whatever reasons (government advice, commercial pressure from advertisers or cross-media ownership, an innate conservatism in news reporting, news priorities) do not appear in the mainstream media.

An élite of experts and pundits tends to have easier and more substantial access to a platform for their ideas than do dissidents, protesters, minority groups and even 'ordinary people': 'powerful groups and individuals have privileged and routine entry into the news itself and to the manner and the means of its production' (The Glasgow University Media Group, 1980: 114). The aim of that part of the alternative media interested in news remains simple: to provide access to the media for these groups on those groups' terms. This means developing media to encourage and normalise such access, where working people, sexual minorities, trades unions, protest groups - people of low status in terms of their relationship to elite groups of owners, managers and senior professionals - could make their own news, whether by appearing in it as significant actors or by creating news that was relevant to their situation. Significantly, community media represent strategic alliances between social, cultural and political groups mounting and organizing resistance to the hegemony of dominant media institutions and practices. As a resource for local social service agencies, political action groups and others whose missions, methods and objectives are antithetical to existing power structures, community media publicize oppositional messages that are either distorted by or altogether omitted from mainstream media coverage. In this way community media reduce the debilitating effects of political systems that cater to well-heeled special interests by enhancing the capacity of local communities to organize themselves and participate in political processes.

Equally important, as a forum for local arts and cultural organizations, community media support and encourage local cultural production. In the face of the homogenizing influence of national media industries and the encroachment of cultural forms produced and distributed by transnational corporations, community media provide a measure of local cultural autonomy in an increasingly privatized, global media environment. (e.g. music radios based on foreign music). So community media should not be seen as the starting point for organising people, but rather as an extension of an existing desire to communicate to establish a sense of personal power and community power (Hochheimer 1999, 451). In this way, community media play an important cultural role by encouraging dialogue between diverse components of a community—this process is integral to community social structure. This happens in various ways—

through news and information programs, talkback, request shows etc. In this way, local media both produce and maintain the culture of a community (Ewart 2000).

Mediascape

What makes the study of community media decisive in the particular context (Jordan) is the absence of a strong civil society in institutional terms and the heavily centralized character of Jordan mediascape.

Community media in Jordan emerged as a reaction to government monopoly on local media outlets, rather than a reaction to commercialization of media, as in the US or West Europe. As in other parts of the world, community media in Jordan balance the effect of media globalization which is based on one-way flow of information. They might help communities to deal with the effects of the globalisation of mainstream media which tend towards abandoning the local. Globalization of media has led to centralization of media by international, regional or national/ big networks where local news is marginalised. Jordan's media industry is fully centralized in Amman, yet over 60% of the people reside outside the capital city.

By contrast, in most other countries of the world, local citizens typically seek information above all about their neighborhoods and locales – in addition to receiving national and international news. Due to the often high interest by audiences in local affairs reporting, well-managed local media can often thrive financially, even in very poor or low population markets.

The political development and democratization, which the Arab region is undergoing, provide community media with tools of sustainability. International organisations remain the main source of financial and technical support for community media in Jordan. They pay considerable attention to community media since they have contributed in raising the level of freedom of expression by allowing people to have their own media and providing communities with an independent forum to express their local issues.

Jordanian media is undergoing some developments in media policies that encourage private media sector to grow and pave the way to an entire free market of media. However, the new Audio Visual Media law is business-oriented, it puts no limits on ownership shares of the local media market.

The technological developments have also empowered community media, since the technology has the potential to be used (and indeed has been used) to create alternative information flows, broaden political space, and encourage interactive dialogue in a way that other media cannot. Internet use is growing in Jordan, although overall penetration remains extremely low. According to the

International Telecommunications Union, in 2003 Jordan had around 457,000 Internet users, with around 834 users per 10,000 inhabitants and 3.75 PCs per 100 inhabitants. Therefore, radio remains the most popular and reachable media outlet.

Community radio in Jordan: Political and historical background

By Tamara Aqrabawi

The first real step toward creating free private Jordanian media institutions was the parliament's approval of the 2002 Audio Visual Law. This approval led to the launching of the Audio Visual Commission in 2003, in 2004, many licensing applications were received, which complement the political and economic reforms taking place in Jordan.

Functions of Audiovisual Commission's are developing and organizing the audiovisual sector licensing categorized items, Accrediting correspondent offices and licensing equipment.

Following are the categories of licensing in accordance to the article No. 3:

1. Transmitting radio or TV programs, including political programs and news coverage of the Kingdom or any area within its borders.
2. Transmitting radio or TV programs, excluding political programs and news coverage of the Kingdom or any area within its borders.
3. Transmitting all kinds of radio and TV programs through satellite.
- 4.

It is obvious that the common feature in the different types of licensing is the presence and/or absence of political programs and news coverage.

It will become clear how this point has been manipulated to reduce the number of stations that broadcast these programs, through forcing stations broadcasting those programs to pay high fees in comparison to stations specialized in art and social programs.

The sixth article in the law states that licensed stations are not allowed to transmit the following:

1. Any program that contains blasphemous material or doubts religious beliefs.
2. Any program that disrespects the values, culture, and unity of the Jordanian society.
3. Any program that is offensive in general including pornography and/or violence.
5. Any program that violates human rights and citizenship.
- 6.

These regulations indicate the commission's desire to set limitations to stations' transmission, since this experience is new in Jordan.

The point related to blasphemy or doubts about religious belief is considered crucial in a Muslim society. However, this does have negative impact on people who may question granted beliefs, particularly concerning God and Hijab (the veil) and women issues.

The second point, which talks about values, culture, and unity of the Jordanian society, leads us to question how broadcasting stations will lead people to reevaluate their negative given sets of values in an attempt to accomplish reform in this area.

Let us now tackle financial limitations influencing the content of transmitted material, as it is stated in article 12 of the Transmission Law.

Fees reach up to \$32,000 in Amman, \$18,000 in Irbid and Zarqa, and \$10,000 for the rest of the areas.

The most significant factor that restricts political freedoms is the addition of 50% to the fees of transmission in the case of transmitting political programs or news coverage.

The commission's interest in establishing local stations

In some cases the commission supports stations broadcasting outside the capital of Amman by exempting them from the license fees, such as the ones in Maan and Karak. This indicates the commission's interest in spreading stations in rural areas.

However, investors find no financial benefit in those areas. Accordingly, stations are mostly located in the capital of Amman, and their transmission outreaches rural areas without launching any stations in the suburbs.

The commission's head of engineering department "Sufian Alnabelsi" states in an interview at "Alghad daily newspaper": "we should encourage the launching of broadcasting stations in different governorates to cater for the needs of the local community, especially that 7 out of 8 stations only broadcast songs."

Experiences of Community radio in Jordan:

After setting audiovisual regulations which allow independent stations, Jordan witnessed establishing some community radios in Amman and rural areas. Some of them are still under construction and others on air. This new experience presents how the government and citizens deal with the stations. Many in local communities have welcomed this new type of media which serve them. On the other side there were and still some unsolved issues between the government and the stations. It is clear that there are some institutions or officials who are still worried about how to deal with those stations.

First community radio station was Ammanet radio established in 2000 as an internet-based radio broadcasting local issues. In July 2005 it started broadcasting on FM presenting social and cultural issues aim to promote human rights and democracy.

The first problem Ammanet has faced was in Aug 2005, it "was not allowed to air an open session of the Greater Amman Municipality's (GAM) council. AmmanNet sent a complaint to the Higher Media Council.

The radio station's founder and director, Daoud Kuttab, said He requested in the complaint that the council intervene in the situation to stop "discrimination against radio journalists".

The radio reporter said he overheard Mayor Hadid saying he did not want this session to be broadcast on AmmanNet. Ammanet is still not allowed to air the municipality sessions, despite the Higher Media Council's efforts and discussion with the municipality.

Second tension with the Audio Visual Commission was when Ammanet received a warning notice for breaking out the license conditions due to broadcasting a press conference by the government spokesman, the vice Prime Minister Marwan Almu'sher about the rise in fuel prices, saying that AmmanNet license doesn't include news and political programs.

Daoud Kuttab, radio director, says the press conference was about fuel markup and this issue concerns our society, it's not political. The commission replied that the same conference includes discussion about Palestine, Iraq and Israel and this is political subjects. Originally, the Prime Minister himself is a political character! Hence, any media coverage for this conference is considered political one.

After a long discussion, the commission asked the radio to apply for a political programs license promising that they will help the radio to gain that license, then there will not be any problem.

Having news and political programs license costs an additional fee of 50% from the regular license fee. Ammanet applied for political license and paid this additional fees to start broadcasting news and political issues.

Community radio in the rural areas:

"Ma'an Voice" radio is considered the first community radio outside Amman. It is the result of a partnership between the governmental university "Al Hussein bin Talal" and the "British council" with the Audio Visual Commission's encouragement.

The station aims to improve the capacity of Ma'an community in general and its youth in particular. It expects to reach and interact positively with the community's social, economic and cultural challenges through a democratic and participatory utilization of the media

"The station is broadcasting human rights programs, health, cultural and local community's activities, through cooperation with the university's students, Widiad Adas, the project manager, said.

Azza Hammoudi, deputy director of the British Council in Jordan said: "We work to develop the idea of community ownership at a local radio and encourage the community to participate in running it. We hope that this experience would be a successful model for all local stations in Jordan."

"The commission shows an understanding and support to the project, and the station is not obliged to pay the fees in accordance with its advanced role in the region," said Hussein Bani Hani, the director of the Jordanian Audio Visual Commission.

This project is important because it takes place in a poor desert city which is described as a conservative community and has witnessed four political crises accompanied with extreme violence and strikes in 1989, 1998, 2000, and 2002. Second project which is still under construction is Karak city radio created by the Popular Committees Forum.

The man behind the request is Rakan Aldmour, who has 36 years of radio experience. "Establishing a community radio in Karak is an old dream since 1983," Mr. Dmur says. Having a station will increase citizen's awareness and their participation in public life."

The head of the Karak Popular Committees Forum and former head of Karak municipality, Khaled Aldmur, Rakan's brother, says the station could encourage economic activities. The city has many antiquarian, natural and touristic sites, but its economic benefit is weak, he says. So the radio can encourage tourist activities through promotion and publicity, besides helping residents to establish and run small, profitable projects making use of the touristic sites and activities in the city.

Aldmur brothers report a marvelous response to a questionnaire they distributed asking the public for program ideas and possible logo designs. They said the reaction was amazing and reveals talents and ideas to develop the society. They said the radio has a duty to do an effective bridging between the community and municipality, cultural clubs and non-governmental organizations.

The Third one, under construction, is in a rural village near the city of Madaba.

Samir Badran, Head of Communications department, said "UNESCO is working on creating a community radio for women in the village of Maliha near Madaba. This project is done in cooperation with UNIFIM and the Hashemite Fund for human development". "We will train individuals with interest in journalism through the help of other community radio which has good experience "Amman Net" as well as others from abroad so that they can put the basis for a community radio station"

"UNESCO sees in community radio an effective instrument to develop far areas and a means of reducing poverty by providing the public with the needed information so that they can develop their own lives. Jordan needs such radio stations because of all the social, economical, and political focus now is in the capital thus leaving other districts in bad need of help. UNESCO believes that we need help in various ideas including AIDS education especially because this country is active in tourism. Also we need to use such community radio to teach languages such as French and English so that the population living outside Amman can better communicate with tourists."

Director of the Higher Media Council, Ibrahim Ezz Eddin, said that "Community radio in rural areas should present main issues of the society without tackling controversial subjects which may leave listeners away and turn to entertainment-driven radios. Specialists in health, religion and social issues should be part of community radio to set the strategies and themes of the station."

Social and political context

After establishing independent local media institutions, citizens, politicians and social activists have noticed the differences between the governmental and community media coverage for local issues. This step raised awareness in the community of how to evaluate the news and the decisions which affect their daily life and encourage them to participate actively in the community media because they found more free space in its programs and news, as they said.

Jameel Abu Bakar, spokesman of the Islamic Action Front Party, said "We notice that there is an apparent planned absence for local independent institutions' activities in the governmental media. This planned ignorance aims to minimize effective role for these institutions in the governmental media as it is known with constant support to government politics."

"Community media makes better media coverage, it is to be noted that media scissor is imposed on all media means, so it is certain that the party finds a free space to express its points of view, especially that the party abilities are not able to have its own media means."

"Community media means needs to break many restrictions and to follow up news and investigations in objective way as the party really wishes."

Muneer Hamarneh, head of the Jordanian Communist Party, said "There is a clear difference between governmental and independent community media. While governmental media give a special interest and support to its political activities and decisions, on the other hand the community media has a great interest in popular cases that attract people because they are involved in it directly, such as political, social and economic issues, in addition to the deep analysis of those issues.

Women issues faced the same obstacles in presenting women rights and problems in the governmental media. On the other hand women NGO's have better access to community media and higher level of freedom to present their issues and activities.

Amani Alkhateeb , member of "Freedom house" International organization dedicated to promoting democracy with special interest of women issues, Amani said : Governmental radios do not show interest in reporting on activities related to women's issues, they cover the issue but in a very typical way. The coverage is more of a brief news report rather than a feature or an investigative story. It does not tackle the issue itself from different angles to show the dangerous impact of violence against women on the society as whole and to raise awareness about this sensitive issue.

Community Radios did not show more interest than governmental except of Amman Net, and that is because the journalists in Jordan are not really interested in such issues, in addition to the editor in chief control, lack of sources and passion.

Amman Net community radio covered the issue more broadly than the other radio stations, dedicated an hour on air for the activities conducted by Freedom House grantees during the 16 days of activism against gender violence and hosted some of the grantees and other experts to talk about the issue.

The Parliamentary institution had new experience in partnership with community radio. Amman net broadcast live on air the parliament sessions. This step allows citizens to evaluate the members and follow up on there activities and opinions. Imad Ma'ai'a, member of the parliament said: "every member in the parliament like his voice to be heard to every one in the state and outside , when we see the government radio giving only short touch to what happen under the dome of the parliament , going to some agencies to be tailored , I will be chocked .but in other side regarding community radio live parliament sessions broadcasting like " Amman net radio " I am so excited to hear from the people around me to express their wonderful feeling when they were minute after minute with us under the dome without tailoring or deliberate cut and choose from the session." Asma Khader, former Minister of Culture and former Spokesperson of the Jordanian government, was one of the officials who encouraged the government to approve the FM license for Ammannet – the first community radio in Jordan.

She said "My support to the right of Ammannet to get an fm license falls within the royal and governmental directives which call for the raising of the level of freedom of expression and giving opportunities to media investment.

There clearly was hesitation in following up with these directives within the government. For my part I supported the request by AmmanNet to change from internet broadcast to FM broadcast and to allow private and non government radio stations to broadcast serious programming. I also thought that supporting this kind of programming will encourage development as well as encouraging investment."

"My support to AmmanNet also stems from the fact that they possess local talent and a keen interest in dealing with issues of concern to society. Their programs were handled in a professional and quality way. News stories as well as programs the Parliament Monitoring, Legal awareness and eye on the media showed me that they have the talent and the ability to enlist public trust."

"Moving in the direction of independent media worried many because of the sensitivity of the political and economic situation. There were some who wanted to go on in opposing such media and to oppose any changes in the media landscape. I supported the application of Ammannet despite all these sensitivities and now Jordan can be proud of this unique and successful community radio experiment."

"The legal limit of sixty days in which the government is supposed to respond to a request was about to elapse and the government was hesitating in approving their license request even though others who had music radio license requests received approval in 3 weeks. Many were questioning the source of funding and the fact that the radio station was interested in local issues. It was clear to me and others that this was a truly independent radio station and in the end Jordanian law was victorious and the station was licensed despite all these fears."

Activists of civil society organizations expressed their satisfaction of the community media experience in Jordan.

Jameel Abu Bakr, spokesperson of the Islamic Action Front Party, said: Community radio as "Amman net Radio" took the initiative to present its aims and to the party, and for its constant corporation the party adopted Amman net radio to establish a special strong coordination between each other, as providing radio with its latest news and activities and gain its exclusive headlines that could not find a chance to be published in the governmental media mass. The radio hosts party leaders in short and detailed interviews, my note to Amman net includes in short time space sometimes that could effect on our points of view."

Osama Alshareef, writer and member of the National Agenda, said: "Ammannet has managed to redefine the role of radio in Jordan as a mass communication

tool that is willing to tackle controversial issues which even the print press may miss or shy away from."

"AmmanNet is positioned to become an influential medium especially as it addresses issues of public concern not only in the political domain but especially social issues as well. It is giving ordinary Jordanians a voice and a public platform that other media have failed to provide or are hesitant to do so. It has departed from the protocol and pushed itself into the fray raising serious issues that are affecting our lives. I hope that this experiment will mature and will become contagious in the sense that it will drive other forms of local media to follow suit."

Freedom House Organisation created a partnership with AmmanNet radio by supporting a documentary radio program about women personal freedoms which are sensitive issues in Jordan. Amani Alkhateeb of the Freedom House said that "the program "Kharej Al Serb" (Out of the flock) is a very informative experience and very challenging at the same time. Tackling some specific sensitive angles of the general women related issues is very daring and has not been approached before in a radio show, not even in TV programs. This experience gave the two sides an insight to what people in the street think about women, how they think about them and what are their opinions on women's personal freedoms.

Ibrahim Ezz Eddin, director of the Higher Media Council, said: "we are working to solve the tension between AmmanNet and some governmental institutions (Greater Amman Municipality) in a way that suits both parties and respects their privacy, but it takes long time."

He added: "Jordan has good steps forward regarding the journalists' right of free access to information and we are still working to promote the officials' trust in journalism role and the journalists' right to report information to the public."

Breaking state monopolies using internetThe AmmanNet Case

By Daoud Kuttab
Founder and Director of AmmanNet Radio

The idea occurred to me during a conference of the International Press Institute. Having been one of fifty awardees of the Freedom of Press Heroes by IPI, I was invited to attend a regional conference entitled freedom of expression and media in Jordan which was held in the capital Amman on 5th of February 2000. One of the speakers at the conference was the Minister of Information Saleh Qallab who spoke about the reforms taking place in Jordan and he mentioned among other things that his ministry has succeeded in removing all obstacles that were placed previously for the workings of the Internet.

I had previously help establish a unique Arab web site aming.org that was created on the concept that only through the internet can we break up the physical obstacles that Arab regimes place on print materials especially because the press in most Arab countries are free about news of all other Arab countries except the country that they are printed in.

Using the internet to break up the radio monopolies in the Arab world intrigued me. Radio in the Arab world has been a state monopoly since the creation of radio and the independence of most Arab countries. Radio and TV stations are well protected by national forces because in many cases when a coupe has taken place, radio was one of the first institutions taken over and used to issue the first communiqué of the new military powers.

Over the years the Arab public has also lost much confidence in radio because of the abuse that successive governments have done to it using it strictly for governmental propaganda and a mouthpiece of the ruling parties irrespective of the truth. The case of Egypt's Sawt Al Arab (Voice of Arabs) during the first days of the 1967 War is a case in point. During the first days the radio was praising the success of the Egyptian and other Arab armies broadcasting outright lies while the reality was the opposite.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the relations between Arab radio and the presidential palace (by way of the national security apparatus) became obvious and therefore added to the loss of credibility in this medium. What was needed was a credible radio network that people could trust. State run radio stations (as well as TV stations) rarely used live interviews and actualities because of the difficulty of controlling the content. By having an announcer read a text prepared with the supervision of political powers, ruling parties were able to control the flow of information and direct the ignorant public to whatever direction they preferred.

I have believed that one way to begin reclaiming credibility was to introduce actualities and live interviews into current affairs radio programs. Unlike the existing media mouthpieces in which controlled news is read over the air, what was necessary was to introduce credible journalists and to strengthen them by having them use original sounds of people from all political persuasions.

I spoke at the same conference with Steve Buckley of AMARC, the world federation of community radio stations about the possibility of using the internet to transmit audio. He was puzzled because most people create a regular terrestrial station first and then if they have additional funds they try to stream it on line. There was no reason why the streaming can be done without the terrestrial he assured me so long as you have the chance to upload audio on the Net. Later in the same conference all attendees were received by the Jordanian monarch King Abdullah II. I asked him the following question: "in Jordan foreign stations like BBC, MonterCarlo and others are allowed to rebroadcast their

programs on FM from Jordan, when will the local public be allowed to hear stations established by local Jordanians." He responded positively to my question assuring me and the other attendees that he believes in free media including radio and that he hopes what he called the "privatization" of the audio visual media to take place within a couple of years.

So with the assurances by the King that eventually locally owned FM radio will happen and having heard the assurances of the Minister of Information about the removal of Internet obstacles, I began the process of creating a locally based radio station that would be broadcasting on the Net initially with the hope that soon it will be also on FM.

UNESCO which has always been supportive of community radio along with other international donors, most prominently the Open Society Institute, contributed for the training phase and the set up of the new On line station which we decided to call AmmanNet.

The relations I have in Palestine where private radio has been operating since the mid 1990s, helped me find some key staff (Fadi Abu Saada became the first radio manager) and also in another important area. The physical distance between Jordan and Palestine is very small. So after the training and the first phase of on line broadcast was successful we began experimenting with having Palestinian radio stations download our programs from the Net, and then rebroadcast them on air. The Palestinian station Radio Bethlehem 2000 and the Ramallah based Amwaj can be heard in many parts of Jordan including in Amman. So within a few months we were not only the first Arab radio station on the Internet but were able to practically break up the state radio monopoly by having audio programs created in Amman and heard on the radio by Jordanian citizens living in Amman. All this apparently illegal work was done absolutely legal. We operated entirely overboard with a license from the Ministry of Trade to perform internet production. The creation of the free media zone a year later allowed us to use the satellite broadcasting through Nile Sat to send an even cleaner audio feed to whoever wanted to listen or rebroadcast us.

Not only were we able to use modern technology to broadcast our programs but we made good use of some of the new portable recording equipment. Minidisks, small mics, mixing software and lap tops meant that you can produce high quality audio in almost any location without having to spend a lot of money. Initially we didn't have a studio with most of the recording and editing done digitally using nonlinear software.

What we were doing was new and slightly dangerous in the Arab world. It is not sufficient to be legitimate legally. In the Arab world there are many unwritten laws, especially when you deal with sensitive issues in a public manner. To provide our new on line journalists with the confidence to do their work properly we worked on two fronts. We sought and received public sponsorship to our

project from the Amman office of UNESCO and from the Greater Amman Municipality. Nine months after the IPI conference, on 15th November, 2000, the mayor of the capital Nedal Haddid and the director of UNESCO clicked the mouse publicly celebrating the launch of the first Arab radio on the Internet AmmanNet. At the same time we worked very hard on developing the journalists professionalism. One of the best protections for journalists is absolute adherence to truth and impartiality. A good journalist who gets both points of view can reduce a lot of the potentially negative reactions that often come when one side is not contacted. We applied this to stories and statements of the opposition to the government- by getting pro government views- as well as when the government was making statements that similarly needed balance by getting the reactions of the opposition.

Being heard throughout the world on the Net and on Satellite as well as in the rebroadcast back to Amman from Palestinian radio stations, did not mean that we would fall in the trap of running away from local issues. The escape from dealing with local issues is one of the reasons why Arab countries continue to suffer internally.

The internal approach to current affairs meant that content is created almost exclusively regarding local issues and from local sources. We tried to stay away from covering the situation in Iraq or Palestine, which may be of interest to many people unless we could find a local angle. When a truck driver from Jordan was killed in Iraq it became a local story. Similarly when a Jordanian soldier was killed in Haiti covering his family reaction was our story and not the situation in Haiti. In dealing with local issues we began with the Greater Amman Municipality. We gave extensive coverage to issues of municipal interest, at times causing us conflict and trouble with the mayor who was unhappy with some of our critical reporting. We had a number of success stories in which our coverage of municipal issues as well as local cultural issues produced tangible results. Exposing the municipal attempts to close down street vendors in the poor district of Wihdat produced a series of audio reports which succeeded in the municipality finding an amicable solution with the vendors. A run down neighborhood of Ein Al Ghazzal received quick

Our attempts to broadcast live the monthly sessions of the city council were barred by the mayor. We believe that this negative intervention was done basically because of the ability of the municipality to control what is published in the print press (due to the high amount of ads published in the newspapers) while they would not be able to control what is broadcast live on any medium. Nevertheless we have continued extensive coverage of municipal issues. Our relations with the parliament of Jordan was not so restrictive. It began with an attempt to give a voice to the parliament members who are by and large sidelined by the classical media. Unless the country's ruler is giving a talk at the national parliament, the regular sessions are rarely covered by the state media. Most MP are not known by the public nor is their voting record made available to

the public. A special web site was created to monitor the MPs that included information about all MPs and an opportunity for the public to communicate with them, a select few representing all political directions was highlighted with more detailed information about their own election platform and regular updates on how they vote on various issues. A weekly radio program was also initiated. Entitled Rúa Baralmania (Parliamentary Views) this program weekly focused on the most crucial issue discussed in parliament. Not only was the audio stream available on line but the text of the interviews was transcribed and made available to the local press.

The inferior state of the media in Jordan and nearby Arab countries was the focus of Eye on the Media, a program that critiqued the media in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan using internationally accepted professional standards. This program was rebroadcast on terrestrial radio stations in Lebanon and Palestine, as well.

A program highlighting success stories among Jordanian women provided positive role models and honored hard working and creative women. Oral history of Palestinian refugees was documented in a weekly program entitled Diary of a refugee where older refugees told their own stories in their own words. Other programs were created to provide this public service. Among them Haqi a legal awareness program in which the public was able to communicate their legal problems and received answers both on line as well as in one of the local papers. School radio empowered high school students to express themselves without and school teachers or other adult pre censorship. Badly needed local cultural programs exposed new artists and literary talents, local sports and music also received coverage.

In 2005 AmmanNet was finally able to realize its original dream of broadcasting terrestrially as well as on the Net. Experimental broadcasting began in the summer and by the fall of 2005 AmmanNet's regular programs as well as regular news broadcasts quickly won the trust of Jordanians of all colors. Senior opposition members as well as government officials and experts became regular guests on many of the station's programs and newscasts. Live broadcasts of the Jordanian parliament in December 2005 made history as AmmanNet became the first Arab radio station to give the representatives of the people an uncensored voice.

A special campaign in the fall of 2005 highlighting Jordanian prisoners still in Israeli jails 10 years after the peace agreement between the two countries won public support and was picked up by the local press. In December the government of Dr. Bakhit included the demand for their release among its priorities.

Other successes include the defeat in parliament of a temporary tax law that was highly favorable to the rich and unfair to those of lower economic stratus.

A content sharing agreement with the number two newspaper in Jordan Ad dustour has already produced a much higher professional coverage in that paper allowing its readers to read many of the ground breaking reports that were previously exclusively available on the net and on local radio (see statement from the editor in chief of Ad dustour).

In the years 2000-2005 the experiment of AmmanNet became the focus of many inquiries. On two occasions UNESCO asked the founder of AmmanNet to be an international expert in conferences in Iran focusing on using the internet to create alternative media. Three workshops about on line journalism using the AmmanNet experience took place in Amman allowing over 35 Arab journalists to learn from this important experiment. Internet radio stations in Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia have sprouted up in the past few years from individuals who participated in these workshops. Many more are slated to get on line soon. While internet radio is still a long way from becoming the tool of the masses, it provides a number of important breakthroughs. It helps provide a unique alternative to classical media, especially in closed communities. The aspect of original audio on line gives this medium a high degree of credibility. On line radio programs are also easily transferable with the possibility that terrestrial stations (and even NGOs) can easily download them and rebroadcast them.

But perhaps the most important lesson of the AmmanNet experience is that the creation and success of an internet radio station in a country that only has state run monopolies provide a major source for activists and liberal minded politicians and government officials to help press for reform allowing for terrestrial radio.

Conclusions & Recommendations

1. In order to ensure the development of community radio the state must waive all license fees that are presently part of the licensing procedure of the Audio Visual Commission.
2. The need to reevaluate the present licensing system of the AV commission which separates entertainments programming from news and current affairs programming.
3. Unify fees for all programming content.
4. Establishment of a training center or to hold continuous training in areas that will allow citizens to learn the basics of community radio broadcasting and management.
5. Provide legal protection guaranteeing the right of civil society organizations to establish community radio without governmental controls.
6. The state should provide symbolic subsidy (possibly through tax incentives) to community radio stations especially for stations outside the capital
7. Encourage legislatures to make laws that guarantee access to information and the need for government officials to respond to requests for information from community radios and other media

8. Provide legal guarantees to protect those working in the community radios and to ensure mechanism for a quick resolution of any conflict between the government and community media.
9. Creation of a code of ethics that deals with the issues of concern to the public and how the community radios should deal with sensitive issues.

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