

## **TEXT ON COMMUNITY RADIOS by: Doreen Rukaria (KCOMNET)**

Community radio has been accepted in Kenya as a third sector in broadcasting besides Public and Commercial/Private broadcasting. However, no legislative and policy framework has been put in place despite the drafting of a policy document in 1997. Stakeholders are still lobbying for the bill to be passed in parliament and put into law because proper mechanism has not been put in place to enable a conducive environment for the promotion of community broadcasting. This is in terms of infrastructure, licensing and frequency allocation.

Uncertainties surrounding licensing and allocation of frequencies continue posing major challenges to community broadcasters. This is because allocation of frequencies continues to exclude the most deserving. The winners are politically connected Africa elites in cahoots with foreign capital, while losers are mainly the small scale entrepreneurs and the public. One of the mainstream media has over 60 frequencies countrywide. This particular media house runs 9 radio services in the main vernacular languages of Kenya while several other media owners have over five or more frequencies and are yet to use them. This is despite the fact that five community radios in Nairobi have to share one frequency.

Being non-profit making projects, community stations depend on volunteers for their work force. This is a main challenge because as is characteristic of community stations in other countries, once the staff has enough training, they usually move to the more lucrative commercial sector. However the greatest challenge confronting community stations have to do with ownership and ownership structures. Ideally these stations should be governed through representatives of the communities who sit in the local management committees. Some are already practising this but others are still struggling to put governance structures reflective of the communities that they serve.

Following the post election violence, a lot of confusion has been caused about community broadcasting. There has been an assumption that vernacular radio stations which are mostly owned by politicians are community radios and many of them were used in the campaigns with some sending hate messages. There are many vernacular commercial stations who feel that because they serve an ethnic community in terms of language, then they are a community stations. The vernacular FM stations, which predominantly broadcast from the city are purely commercial enterprises. Infact, since some of these FM vernacular stations whipped people around ethnicity and instilled violence, some people have condemned 'community radios' for this crime.

As a result, the government has threatened to close them down. The Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET) is working hard to clearly define community broadcasting as a non profit-making tool for development so as to distinguish it from the private vernacular radios and radios run by religious bodies. A clear definition will also help in lobbying the government to waive the licensing fee.

Currently there are only six community radios on air with five others yet to go on air. The legal area of coverage by community radios is 8km radius.

The key governance issues that need to be addressed by community radios include: corruption, tax justice and implementation of development programmes. Development challenges to be addressed by community radio are unemployment, water and sanitation, agriculture and food production and reproductive health issues e.g. HIV and AIDS, family planning, teenage pregnancies and abortion etc. Other issues affecting the community are drug/alcohol abuse, affordable health care and poverty eradication.

Due to the post election violence, Kenya is in a healing process and peace and reconciliation initiatives are being put in place. Community radios can play a major role in these peace initiatives and in conflict resolutions among communities and ethnic groups.

Amarc needs to research on and promote different types of radio programmes e.g. radio 'soaps' and radio magazine. This is because there is need to develop programmes that have measurable changes in Knowledge, Attitude and Practice on a wide range of subjects affecting sustainable rural livelihoods. Such programmes may initially require funding to develop the capacity to produce and ensure the programme meets the audience needs but after a period of two years the programmes would become sustainable through advertising and other donor participation. With proper programming, sustainability for community radios would be achieved.

Amarc would contribute to the development of community radio in Africa by strengthening and capacity building networks so that they can be able to lobby respective governments for proper legislation and regulation of community broadcasting. This can be done through trainings, networking and sharing experiences among networks within Africa, fundraising and improving infrastructure for the establishment of more radio stations. Amarc should also partner with donor organizations towards the strengthening of community radio as a tool for development and poverty eradication by developing radio programmes.