

Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa

An AMARC Initiative

Background

We are proposing, in the context of the efforts by the international community to support Africa's development, the establishment of an innovative donor/civil society partnership, the "**Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa**". This Fund will invest in and support community based media information and communications initiatives combining traditional media such as radio, with new ICTs. It will also include in its scope for investment, projects that make provision for the poorest communities, for cultural and linguistic diversity and for equal participation of Women and Girls.

The number of community radio stations is growing in Africa. There is demonstrable demand for new services and considerable evidence of benefits to be gained in terms of civic engagement, empowerment of communities and access to information. A significant limiting factor is the cost of acquiring and installing equipment for the development of existing services and the establishment of new ones. For less than one dollar per person a village of 20,000 people can have their own community radio with a connection to the Internet. This demonstrably the fastest and most cost effective means to invest in access to communication for the most marginalized communities. However funding availability is uneven and often not well targeted towards greatest need.

Objectives

- to establish a strategic "Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa".
- to support the upgrading of equipment and facilities of existing community radios and the establishment of new community radio services
- to provide technical support to ensure value for money and sustainability

Description of the initiative

Funding for community radio has tended to be in the form of isolated relationships between a single donor and a single recipient. There are many successful examples of community radio to be found in Africa but few funding sources readily available to scale-up successful models when the opportunities arise. In very few cases, notably recent developments in Niger, efforts at scaling up have been made at country level. There is no readily accessible regional funding programme to ensure strategic support for new community radio opportunities as and when they arise.

A well-resourced "**Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa**" would have major impact on the pace of development and provide a cost-effective mechanism of getting resources down to local community level. Transparent and competitive procedures backed up by specialist technical support would assure value for money and quality of outcome. Strategic impact and effective decision making would be ensured by involvement of key donors and support agencies in the region and a panel of expert advisors with practitioner experience in community radio.

The structure proposed is that stakeholder organizations, donors and NGOs compose a new separate entity with an independent Board of Directors. The "**Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa**" will first be established in a first meeting of "champions" for the Fund to constitute an initial "Task force" to be held in October 2004. This "Task Force" will assist in latter establishment of the Board and will establish governance, fund management mechanism and value for money procedures.

The Organizations invited to participate in the Fund, will be International Cooperation Agencies from the United Kingdom (DFID), Canada (CIDA), Denmark (DANIDA), Sweden (SIDA), Switzerland (SIDC), France (Ministère des Affaires étrangères) Norway, Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain. Some Foundations will also be approached (Friedrich Ebert, Ford, Soros, EED, among others). Multilateral organizations such as the WB, UNESCO, FAO, UNDP will be invited to contribute. NGOs will include AMARC, Panos and other leading civil society organizations in Africa. Sustainability of the Fund and exit strategy beyond fixed term

donor contribution by the establishment of a levy on spectrum sales or satellite orbit fees are to be explored in terms of feasibility. is a key element.

The core activities of the Fund would consist of:

- Grants for studio design, equipment purchase and installation;
- Technical support service to ensure best value and sustainability;

The expected Impact of the Fund

- This measure will lead to the upgrading of 10 existing community radio stations per US\$150,000 in grants.
- The Fund will lead to the establishment of 10 new community radio services per US\$300,000 in grants.
- The measure will benefit people and communities as audiences and contributors to the radio stations supported.

Time frame

The programme is expected to initially operate over a 5-year period. Additional donors will be sought to enhance the programme and to continue beyond the initial period.

First Phase of the “Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa”

The set-up of the fund will be through the creation of a “Task Force”, with technical support charged of establishing the basis of the governance, fund management mechanisms and value for money procedures

Second Phase of the “Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa”

This will consist in the establishment of the Fund itself and its continuous work to be announced at the WSIS summit in Tunis. The evaluation of the Fund will be done three years after its inception.

Delivery partners

Delivery efficiency will be ensured by AMARC in partnership with Panos Institute and other international NGOs plus country level and regional agencies who would be involved in disseminating Fund information, support for applicants and monitoring impact and effectiveness. Grant decisions would be the responsibility of the independent Board drawn from support organisations and donor agencies with a track record of work in the community media field.

Other institutions besides those forming the Board of the “**Equipment Fund for Community Radio in Africa**” that will be invited to be involved include Media Institute of Southern Africa, National Community Radio Forum, West African Broadcasters Association, Econews Africa, URTEL,

Concrete deliverables

- Grants and technical support for new and existing community radio stations

Costs

It is envisaged that the Fund would initially be set up to deploy US\$8 - 16 million dollars over 5 years of which 10 to 15 per cent would be spent on administration costs. The Fund would provide Small Grants of US\$5 to 8 thousand and Development Grants of US\$15 to 40 thousand. A proportion of all Development Grants would be spent on technical support and evaluation.

Around US\$150 thousand would be spent on establishment of the Fund including planning, recruitment of administrative staff, acquisition of equipment, software for fund administration, appointment of an independent Board and recruitment of a Panel of expert advisors.

Further information

Steve Buckley, President, AMARC

steve@commedia.org.uk

Marcelo Solervicens, Secretary general, AMARC

marcelo.solervicens@amarc.org

Michelle Ntab, Africa Regional Director, AMARC

Regionald@amarcafrica.org