



## A SPIDER IN A DEVELOPMENT NET

Community radio in participatory development

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It took five hours to drive from the Ugandan capital, Kampala, heading west on bumpy, partly tarred roads, through a hilly and lush landscape, before I finally reached Kagadi. From a distance, I could see the high, 80-meter FM mast on a neighbouring hill: a rather startling sight in this rural, marginalized and poorly equipped region.

Kagadi is a small town, almost a village, with one-storey houses along sandy streets. Still, as the commercial centre of the Kibaale district in western Uganda, it is endowed with the first community radio station in East Africa.

In the outskirts of Kagadi, the non-governmental organisation standing behind the radio station, Ugandan Rural Development Training Programme (URDT), is spread on the slope, a 40-acre campus with numerous buildings such as the radio station, workshops and open-air study huts with thatched roofs. On the wall in the main building, I can read the significant motto of the organisation: "Awakening the sleeping genius in each of us".

I travelled there in 2004 with the purpose of studying a community radio station and different factors concerning participatory communication. I tried to explore the interaction with the community and the exchange of information and knowledge, the down-top perspective, the issue of local language and the holistic approach to development.

### BACKGROUND

In the 90s, the rapidly developing information society fundamentally changed the world. Because of liberalised media and simplified broadcasting techniques, the radio landscape has also been extended. A large number of radio stations, mostly commercial, have emerged all over the world. During the last decade, several countries in Africa have carried out multiparty elections, and political and economical liberalisation has improved the possibilities for more independent media. The

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communication policies have been liberated and brought about a number of community radio stations experiments. The dramatic political development in South Africa was accompanied by a fundamental change in radio and broadcasting styles. As the most widespread medium, radio could play a central role in Africa. Consequently, a large community radio movement in Africa is on the move.

## RADIO AS A DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

In Uganda, the postal service is reported to be slow and many communities have no service at all. Telecommunication services such as telephone, fax, e-mail and Internet are not available in rural areas due to lack of infrastructure. Most people in Uganda still live in rural areas, far away from urban issues and technical progress. The high rate of illiteracy makes the local language spoken in radio especially important. Local language has a strong psychological impact: it stresses nearness and makes communication reliable.

Participatory communication gives access both to information and to the use of media. A community radio can work in service of the citizens. The idea of a local radio run by and directed towards the people has been supported and put into practice by United Nations agencies UNESCO in southern Africa and by FAO in west Africa. Experiences from rural community radio projects in the Philippines and Southern Mali have brought concrete results and shown five basic principles that are crucial. It is essential to: 1) start where the people are, 2) ensure maximum participation of the people being served, 3) become sensitive to the needs and culture of the target audience, 4) encourage creativity among participants, and 5) base programmes on issues representing people's own concerns (Rural Radio in the Philippines, [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)).

## THE COMMUNITY MEDIA PILOT PROJECT

The Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR) went on air in August 2000, as the first of three radio stations involved in the East Africa Community Media Pilot Project (EACMP). The pilot project, which aimed at creating a local radio run by and directed towards the local community, was a new concept for East Africa.

The EACMP's long-term strategy was to achieve community owned media facilities democratically managed, to be able to empower marginalized rural communities and promote local culture for sustainable development. The co-ordinator of the project was EcoNews Africa, an NGO based in Nairobi. The other partners were the Organisation for Olkonerei Pastoralists Advancements (OOPA) in the Simanjiro district, Tanzania, and the Mang'gelete Community Media Project in Mtito Andei, Kenya.

## A TOOL FOR INFORMATION

When I visited KKCR 91.7 FM in January 2004, the radio station had been on air for three and a half years. The station broadcasts 18 hours every day. The weekly radio schedule comprises 126 hours of news and current affairs, educational programmes, announcements and music, mostly African music. Seventy percent of the programmes deal with rural and human transformation and development.

KKCR is powered by a 100 KVA generator and has an 80-meter high FM mast covering a radius of more than 100 km, covering not only the Kibaale district but mid-western Uganda, including the neighbouring districts of Kiboga, Hoima, Kasese, Masindi, Mubende and Bundibugyo.

The radio programmes are made mainly in the local six R-languages: Runyoro, Rutoro, Rukiga, Runyankore, Rwamba and Rukonjo. People do understand each other's dialect and all languages are mixed during broadcast. English and Kiswahili are also used, but to a smaller extent. Ninety percent of the programmes are broadcasted in vernacular languages, which thereby makes KKCR the first local language radio in Uganda.

A station manager and five staff members run the radio station, but most programmes are broadcasted by about 30 volunteers and URDT programme officers. They produce programmes in their own areas of speciality, be it agriculture, health, education, land or human rights.

The 19 sub counties in the Kibaale district have their own programmes once a week, in which the local council informs the community and discusses development plans in different areas. Other officials, such as the local or district police officers, regularly produce programmes concerning their own sphere.

Each of the sub-counties also has their own information officer, who is regarded as the local radio representative. The information officer is elected locally and trained by the community radio station. These so-called 'local stringers' collect information and announcements from the communities and pass on the reports and events to the radio station in Kagadi. They receive no salary, but are provided with a bicycle and get refunded for travel and accommodation expenses.



*The small  
KKCR studio in Kagadi, built in a container. Photo by Ann Jornéus Tenfalt.*

## INFORMATION HINDRANCES

Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio is established in a poor, rural area where the people have been marginalized for a long time. The western part of Uganda has been affected by wars during long periods. Moreover, there have been problems with land rights and conflicts with absent landlords.

The infrastructure in the area is bad. There is no electrification, only a few telephone lines and the roads are narrow dirt road with deep holes. Public transportation is sparse in the Kibaale district. Transport consists of mainly overloaded scattered taxis or hitching a ride from trucks and Land Rovers.

The occurrence of mass media is rare: no local newspapers are published and the distribution of national newspapers is sparse. The possibility of receiving the National Radio's broadcast is unlikely and getting in contact with the central radio office for announcements and messages takes time. There are some local commercial radio stations in neighbouring districts, but they have mostly musical content.

Together, these aspects lead to communication and information hindrances that severely affect the concerned communities' possibilities to develop. The lack of electricity aggravates the communication prospects and delays the shift to a more modernly equipped society.

## HUMAN RIGHTS TOPICS

Human rights and social justice on all levels are a great concern for Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio. Domestic violence is a crucial issue, because it affects almost every aspect of the daily life of a community.

KKCR has several programmes every week dealing with human rights, social justice and family issues with the purpose of sensitizing people. The aim is to spread the message that everything starts with the individual, but matters to everybody. The programmes want to stimulate interactive

communication among listeners.

The family and human rights programmes are broadcasted by two URDT programme officers respectively. They gather groups of village people every week and issues considered important at the group meetings can be further discussed in the radio programmes, thereby reaching much more people. In turn, listeners react and receive information about other activities taking place elsewhere in the Kibaale sub-counties. The programmes seem to have a great impact on the ongoing discussions in the communities and families. Many people I met in Kibaale -local authorities, professionals and common people- refer to the importance of these specific programmes.

The family programme is broadcasted every Monday between 9 pm and midnight. The frame is deliberately chosen to match the time when children are asleep. The programme deals with relationships and sexual issues, hygiene and cleanliness in the families, the problems of early marriages, family economy and shared work within the family. There are also radio plays on these issues.

Listeners participate to a large extent. They write letters and ask for advice. Some comment and give further advice to fellow listeners. There are also phone-ins and people react with opinions on different sensitive issues.

## RAISING AWARENESS

During my visits to several Kibaale sub-counties and in interviews with local authorities and politicians, the family and human rights programmes are often mentioned as very important, since they have raised common people's awareness and consciousness. Community members have internalized information about human rights and prepared to stand up for their rights.

Both local leaders and common people testify that domestic violence has decreased, there is a decline in family quarrels, divorces have been reduced and people have learnt how to relate to each other. The family programme has narrowed the gap between men and women. Widows are standing up for their rights to homes and heritage, and women want to know how to make wills. Women have learnt that they are worthy and become aware of their rights, and they are enjoying themselves.

"Most important are the programmes about self-reliance of women", says Paulina Sanyu, 30-year old mother of seven children in Katikara village, and she adds, "It is critical for women to be independent because of the family size and changing demands at family level".

## RADIO REDUCES CONFLICTS

Land rights have been a crucial question in Uganda for a long time. In western Uganda, the issue of land is affecting everybody. Ninety five percent of the population are farmers and get their income from cultivated land, but often they do not own the land. In the Kibaale district, there have been many brutal conflicts between landowners and tenants, and people have even killed each other. A new Land Law now regulates the rights and obligations for both owners and tenants.

The land rights programmes are broadcasted twice every week and consist of family and land issues, including inheritance and succession. People participate in the radio programmes by raising questions on the phone, writing letters or physically visiting the studio or the office centre. The Land Right Office and KKCR are working side by side to mediate and help peoplesolve their land disputes amicably.

“The radio is part of the community and it saves time, money, fuel and personnel to address more people at a time through broadcasting”, says Novato Nyakatura. He is executive director of the Kibaale Youth & Women Development Agency and broadcasts a programme on land sensitization every Thursday.

The Land Law is now better understood among the population. The increased knowledge makes people communicate more easily and friendlyly. Land right conflicts and disputes have been reduced. More people also have the possibilities and knowledge required to acquire their own piece of land.

“People are building permanent houses and plant more permanent crops because they are now sure that they will stay on their property or land access”, says URDT Land Rights Desk Officer and broadcaster Joseph Wasibi.

## PROMOTING EDUCATION

Education is a determining element in terms of achieving further development.

Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio broadcasts several hours of educational programmes every week and promotes education, especially young women’s education. Students from the URDT Girls Boarding School produce and present their own radio programmes on air at KKCR, sharing what they are learning and debating current issues. Every Monday evening KKCR broadcasts an educational programme on literacy in everyday life.

In the Kibaale district, 85 percent of the children attend school. During the last decade, the numbers of primary and secondary schools has increased. More children attend school than before, school dropouts have decreased and many children are returning to school. More parents are now even interested in sending their girls to school.

Many new schools have been built in the sub-counties lately, and parents have responded to the radio's call to take part in the construction work. The number of schools, both government-aided and private, has increased remarkably, and there is a demand to build even more schools. There is a serious need for more classrooms due to higher enrolment.

Adults demand more literacy training in the community. Some of the sub-counties' Community Departments offer books, blackboards and materials and also train teachers. "We have more literacy classes here than ever before, they are mushrooming", says Maabale Sub County Chief Justine Asiiimwe.

## HEALTH SENSITIZATION

The Kibaale district is a remote place, far from higher education centres, and has a poorly educated population. There are few doctors and nurses in the districts and the health services are sparse. Kibaale, with 400,000 inhabitants and more than half its population below 18 years of age, has eight doctors in the whole district. The Kagadi hospital is the only one in the district, has no running water or electricity and is staffed with only three doctors. There are four health centres in all at the county level.

The Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio broadcasts health programmes once every day, totalling more than four hours per week. Volunteers from the hospital, various organisations and people from the community participate in the broadcasts. They talk about all the dimensions of disability, what causes it and how to possibly prevent the different kinds. The programmes also discuss nutrition, control of HIV/AIDS, sanitation, home improvements through better ventilation and clean beddings, food production and secure food storage. There are health programmes targeting schoolchildren that teach them about hygiene and how to take care of their brothers and sisters at home. People trained in the district health service programmes attend the radio shows and talk about the health service and the achievements and problems within their community. The sub-counties pay for the airtime.

## EVIDENT HEALTH CHANGE

"Radio is a very good tool and it could even be more airtime", says Tophas Muhereza, nurse and organiser of District Health at Kibaale District. She

emphasizes that people learn a lot from the radio; they exchange ideas and knowledge, thus improving the levels of awareness in the community.

The health change is evident, e.g., the cases of malnutrition in children and pregnant women have become rare, since the amount of fruit available in the homes and in the markets has increased. The number of HIV/AIDS tests has increased. In the past, people detested immunisation because they thought it gave them diseases, but now measles, polio and whooping cough are being reduced.

Musa Basalirwa is a physiotherapist in the Kagadi hospital who has been broadcasting health programmes since the radio started in the year 2000. He points out the following challenges: people have got greater expectations in terms of getting help and come more; they want more information and help at home in their own communities and sub-counties. This can be overwhelming, since medical officers lack money, transports and the required medicines. “We wake people up, they come for our services but we don’t have enough resources”, he says.

## TRAINING FOR AGRONOMIC PRACTICES

Agriculture and livestock are the predominant ways of earning a living in East Africa. In the Kibaale district, over 95 percent of the population depends on agriculture. The predominant crops are coffee, bananas, cassava, sweet potatoes, tea, tobacco, nuts, beans, rice and maize. However, the obstacles for businesses to be effective and productive are many. Planting materials and seeds are insufficient and farmers have limited knowledge about what to grow and how and were to plant in an effective way. The high prevalence of pest and diseases affects the harvest and farmers have difficulties to sell their products with a profit. Livestock keepers have tremendous problems with deceases and lack access to medication. The environmental influence of forest clearing and other forms of bad management of the natural resources are an overall problem and a challenge for the rural people.

From the start, the Kagadi Kibaale Community Radio has broadcasted at least three hours of programmes on agricultural matters every week. URDT’s Natural Resource Agriculture Management and Livestock Program uses the radio to train both farmers and villagers in agronomic practices. The District Production Officer broadcasts and provides advice regarding a wide range of agricultural matters and gets direct feedback from listeners through phone-ins.

“When we have talked about e.g. banana weevils on the radio people come and ask for more information and advice. That amount of advice has increased”, District Production Officer Peter Ssentayi says with



satisfaction. He also states that farmers are adopting improved planting materials, establishing fishponds and keeping better livestock breeds. The fact that farmers are also attaining better bargains thanks to advice on prices, and thus improving their income, is confirmed by several sub-county chiefs.

## SENSITIZATION LEADING TO MOBILISATION

Among people I met and interviewed while conducting my fieldwork, two keywords were often used to point out the impact of community radio in those rural areas: *sensitization* and *mobilisation* - closely linked to each other.

The radio transfers information and knowledge about health, human rights, agriculture and education, and people listen and learn. *Sensitization* is the process through which people become aware of important issues concerning their everyday life, a process described as crucial on the way to sustainable change and development. But sensitization is not an object in itself: it is a prerequisite for further action. It is expected to progress into *mobilisation*, which is visible, and furthermore, partly measurable.

In Kibaale, community radio has been used as a tool to mobilise people at the community level for various development work in the sub-counties. Each sub-county in Kibaale has its own weekly programme with news and information about local current issues. People also get to know about plans for progress in the community and sub-county officials take the opportunity to gather people for community work. It can be different kinds of public goods; road maintenance, school repairs and caring for water sources. It is community work with practical and economical implementations.

A concrete result of the information and announcements from the sub-counties is the increased tax revenue: during the last years, it has been gradually easier to collect taxes from the communities. Local authorities emphasize the importance of radio announcements to urge and remind the community to pay tax and confirm the increased tax revenue.

## A DOUBLE-BARRELLED GUN

Information shows to be crucial for a democracy and accordingly influences the political conditions. In Uganda, the bad infrastructure complicates the communication and transfer of information between national and local political leaders and between the different sub-counties and villages. Community radio improves the people's possibilities to communicate on political issues and transcend trivial differences.

On the other hand, authorities both in western Uganda fear that the radio could be used as a weapon on sensitive occasions. Rival tribes in the Kibaale district have expressed opposed opinions on the radio, which almost roused violence. Several politicians and local authorities emphasize that the radio is a sensitive tool and must be handled with care.

The 19 sub-counties in the Kibaale district broadcast their development agenda every week to inform the community, which also works to exchange good ideas and information between the sub-counties.

Information also increases the interest in politics among people in the community. Many local political leaders affirm that an increasing number of people gather at the sub-county office and want to talk to the local council.

“The more people listen to the radio, the more enlightened people. They get to know their rights and the more they demand accountability the more the leaders must be alert. People want value for money and we must make proper management”, says George William Namayaka, District Chairman of the Local Council V, Kibaale.

## CONCLUSIONS

Social mobilisation and participation are easier to achieve at the local level. In that sense, the closer the media are to the people in the community, the better.

## BUILDING CAPACITY

The educational element is predominant in the community radio programmes. The linkage with the local non-governmental organisations is crucial to identify the communities' relevant needs, in line with the participatory development approach that recommends building alliances with NGOs and other institutions to contribute to horizontal networking and knowledge sharing, thus building capacity and leading to empowerment.

“People get enlightened. They get the insight that social and economical development can grow from them and it help them to take responsibility for their own life”, states Georg William Namyaka, Local Council Chairman in the Kibaale district.

There are many evidences of the fact that the relationship between authorities, politicians and people from the community has improved due to the community radio. Participatory communication has broken up the traditional one-way communicative relationship between the leaders and

the common people.

“People have become aware of their rights and obligations and the gap has been bridged”, witnesses Justine Asimwe, Maabale Sub County chief (the first female sub-county chief in the Kibaale district).

## Establishing people's needs

The sustainability of a community radio in general - and of this media project in particular - is a crucial issue.

Radio stations are financed mostly by donors, and some financing is generated by the stations themselves through selling airtime to institutions and commercial advertisements. Sales do not always work smoothly, and radios lack operational funds. In Kibaale, the sub-counties are obliged to pay an annual airtime fee for their weekly programmes, but at the time of my fieldwork, only three out of 19 sub-counties paid their contribution. The radio station pays a high fee for its broadcasting licence, which must be renewed every year.

Remaining on the cutting edge requires that community media remain in touch with the community they serve. As Henry Lutaaya, KKCR station manager finally emphasizes, “The moment the media institution stops being useful, it closes shop”. Community radio must assess people’s aspirations, values and needs over and over again.

## A HUB IN A DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

There are factors in participating communication that are demanding and delicate. Community radio can make a significant difference to overcome problems and difficulties regarding community interaction aimed at development.

Participatory development implies: a horizontal perspective, a bottom-up viewpoint, the community’s involvement, local and agency-oriented views, plural and diverse strategies, and microstructures.

However, there are factors that could complicate participation.

There is the risk that multiple agents, such as local non-governmental organisations, development organisations and other institutions, carry out disconnected projects.

Participatory approaches sometimes do not deal with the fact that people who live or have lived in non-democratic societies might be wary of

participating out of fear of retaliation.

Communities are not obviously in harmony and participation could expose divided positions.

Communities may not be interested in spending time in decision-making participatory processes.

Men could be favoured, because participatory processes often mean an increased burden for women who already have huge responsibilities.

Participatory development takes time, but funding agencies and other development actors are sometimes impatient.

To tackle these complicating factors, participation requires *coordinated* information and action. Community radio can play a substantial role in development, providing a forum for creative dialogue on development and close interactive communication regardless of actual distance. A forum which can present participation in development in an attractive way, bring up different kinds of development issues, respond quickly to demands from the communities, present traditional folk media to a broad audience and reflect and transfer cultural identity and pride.

A step forward towards satisfactory development processes could be *to place radio as a hub in the development scheme.*

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