An Assessment of the Role of Community Radio in Peacebuilding and Development: Case Studies in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Summary
This five-page report details the results of an evaluation of four community radio stations in rural Sierra Leone and Liberia. The evaluation focused on areas still struggling to achieve meaningful development in a post-conflict setting and was designed to assess the relationships between drivers of development and community radio stations. The study found that community radios are significantly impacting development in their communities via relationships with local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The study included an analysis of current radio programming for its impact on local development processes, while an audience survey and focus groups were used to better understand audience perceptions and uses of local radio. Stations were also evaluated on their capacity as independent development agents with an eye towards ongoing peacebuilding functions.

According to the report, the impact of community radios falls into two categories: support for programme implementation leading to improved efficacy, broader reach, accountability, and community feedback; and regular airing of education and awareness programming - yielding results in changing attitudes and behaviours. The study found that the community stations had a positive and engaged relationship with local government as well as civil society organisations. Overall, the study found that community radio plays a central role in disseminating information related to development and in improving development outcomes through partnerships at all levels.

The study found that sensitisation and awareness programmes were often cited as audiences' favourites, as was interactive, public forum programming. A majority of listeners credited community radio stations with improving basic living conditions and encouraging an attitude of community responsibility and pride. Audiences also expressed a desire for expanded broadcast times. Station leadership was found to be the single overriding factor determining a station's impact and effectiveness.

According to the report, the stations also positively contributed to peacebuilding in their communities. Listeners reported a high impact from programmes that address peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. Community stations in all locations were also described as active participants in diffusing potential violent crises. It was found that radio helps marginalised people without access to other means of communications and was universally cited as vital in facilitating peaceful election processes.

The report concludes that community radio does play a strong role in local peacebuilding, and that radio stations' promotion of inclusive development processes has a broad impact in promoting sustainable peace. However, it also found that radio's impact is often reliant on the cooperation of government, and that community radio stations are making limited use of their power as media outlets to compel government participation in media.
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