

Chapter 8

Creating & Sustaining ICT Projects in Mozambique

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Introduction

We are standing on the threshold of the knowledge society, in which access to and command of knowledge and knowledge-systems are decisive factors for cultural, political and economic development. As a result, educated and affluent populations all over the world, including in Mozambique, find themselves increasingly part of a knowledge-based and ICT-driven economy.



But what does this mean to the majority of people living in Mozambique – who are neither educated nor affluent and who live in one of the poorest countries in the world at the very early stages of democratisation. What promise does the knowledge economy hold out for a country in which even mid-level education is the privilege of a small urban elite and where thirty years of war have resulted in a basic mistrust within communities that has all but destroyed the social norms necessary for the holding and passing on of traditional knowledge? What role will ICTs have in a country with a virtually non-existent telecommunications infrastructure and in which bad infrastructure and unfavourable weather conditions make crossing the country by road impossible for most of the year, while crossing by air costs some four month's salary of a well-paid civil servant? What will be the role of the media in a place where as recently as three years ago most senior journalists outside of the capital had never seen or touched a computer, many had never watched TV, and where the media are still largely concentrated in the capital, some 2000 kilometres south of the northern border with Tanzania?

This reality places most Mozambicans so far away from the digital divide that one might ask whether modern information and knowledge systems are even relevant to the majority of the country's population – a provocative question that can be addressed by highlighting a few important points.

First, the right to development is shared by all people. If relevant information is not accessible, it is impossible for individuals and communities to become aware of important aspects of their situation, analyse it, and take action to improve it. Denying access to information and knowledge systems to certain parts of population also denies them the right to (participate in) their own development.

Second, even a remote community in Mozambique is interconnected with the outside world through family, political, administrative, economic, cultural and environmental ties. In order to influence their own development, rather than being the object of external decisions and developments, communities and individuals need access to information and knowledge, and they need the means to make their voices heard.

A more interesting – and difficult – question is how to provide access, and thus empowerment, to much larger parts of the Mozambican society than is currently the case. The next section of this chapter looks at a number of opportunities and obstacles to ensuring access to both infrastructure and relevant content. Following that we will look at UNESCO's approach to creating relevant and sustainable media for the Mozambican context with

community radio. Finally, the last section deals with the question of how these (and other) approaches can further develop in order to reach a growing segment of the population.

New developments – against all odds...

Mozambique enjoys a relatively free press. Public media are in a gradual process of decentralisation and independent media are becoming increasingly familiar on the media landscape, though still with limited impact. The community radio movement is in early stages, but could develop into a powerful force. At the same time, the slow but constant introduction of computers and Internet connections is opening up new possibilities.

The cultural richness and complex geography of the country present a series of important challenges for the media. Mozambique has no fewer than thirty national languages that can be grouped into fourteen different language groups. There is a corresponding number of distinct local cultures, with eighty percent of the population living in rural areas. National solutions to Mozambique's information and communication problems must take these factors into account, and must be directed at the needs of the whole country, not only educated Portuguese-speakers in urban centres.

Media also face challenges of sustainability. Of the seven community radio stations in Mozambique in 1999 and 2000, five were off the air for technical, financial or organisational reasons for periods ranging from a low of five months up to the entire two years. Other media projects have proven equally difficult to sustain. For example, half of donor-supported independent print media outside the capital stopped publishing as soon as the donor funds ran out, while the other half struggled on with varying degrees of irregularity.

There are many new media initiatives in Mozambique. Their success will require appropriate solutions and structures that can capitalise on the existing political, legal and technical openings. The development of these solutions can only happen through strategies based on an in-depth knowledge of the local situation. This will be decisive for the successful and democratic development of independent, pluralist media projects – especially community radio and ICTs projects in Mozambique.

Waiting for the Community Magic on the air!

Maria Limamo stopped in the middle of the road, looking at the beautiful building prepared for the radio station. The team from South Africa had just arrived with the materials for the tower and antenna. They were working right outside the building now. For two years they had prepared the community for arrival of the equipment for the station. After this period of mobilisation and intensive training, they were ready. The editorial policies and all the internal regulations were ready. The membership cards had been prepared and distributed to the more than 200 community members of the radio association. Audience research had been carried out and the responses analysed and a community programming grid prepared. Forty trained volunteers had signed contracts with the management committee of the radio and were eagerly waiting to go on air – so now was the time!

Maria Limamo is one of the community members initially elected to the community radio installation committee by her community, one of eight in which UNESCO supported community radio stations between 1999 and 2001. UNESCO is one of several development partners working to support the establishment of community radio in Mozambique. UNESCO's radio efforts initially grew out of a major media development project: "Strengthening Democracy and Governance through Development of the Media in Mozambique". The project seeks to establish the basis for generating and disseminating local knowledge and community radio was selected because it is a very appropriate response to

development issues in a country like Mozambique, with low literacy rates, multiple languages and cultures, rural population, and large land mass.

In preparation for setting up the stations, UNESCO carried out a number of studies to assess sustainability potential and obstacles. One of the important factors confirmed by the studies was that rural areas lacked experience in setting up and managing any type of organisational structures, let alone the specific types of experience that would facilitate the establishment and operation of a radio station. To succeed the project would have to develop local capacity in many areas. Four factors were identified as essential to minimise vulnerability and thus to ensure the sustainable functioning of the stations:

- 1) a strong sense of community ownership;
- 2) an effective training programme;
- 3) technically sustainable systems; and
- 4) long-term financial viability.

1. Community ownership

In many parts of the world, community radio stations grow out of civic movements that set up radio stations to voice their concerns and pursue their objectives. Few such movements exist in Mozambique and UNESCO's first challenge was to design a social mobilisation process in each of the eight targeted communities, identifying the key actors, organisations and sub-communities, and then ensuring dialogue with and mobilisation of all of these. This stage culminated in a large public meeting at which all were invited to participate in the election of a representative and credible *installation committee*.

The first challenge for the *installation committee* was to form a legally-recognised association that could be granted a license and a frequency. This required the committee to achieve a certain level of consensus on the objectives and modalities of the association, and thus of the radio station. Later, once the provincial governor confirmed the association's legal status, the general assembly elected various bodies, including the president of the association, the management committee, and the supervisory inspection committee. With each step of the process, community members gained more experience working together, but they also discussed the radio station itself, gradually identifying a common vision of what it would be and do.

In addition to skills development, the training programme, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section, also had an important objective of mobilising community participation and ownership of the radio station. Of particular importance was the "Process Coach Scheme" in which community programmers were recruited and trained by a locally employed community animator. This scheme proved to be extremely effective, creating a basic nucleus of between 20 and 70 knowledgeable, trained, committed and highly motivated community members around the station. It also ensured that other community members were informed about the processes and plans, thus ensuring their "ownership" of the process.

In addition to these two parallel processes – creation of the association and the process coach scheme – a number of other, very different measures were undertaken in order to facilitate community ownership of and participation in the project. These include recruitment, registration and documentation of members and public involvement in the identification of a strategic location for the future station.

2. Creating adequate training solutions

Communities in Mozambique have virtually no experience in many of the key areas that are crucial to running an effective community radio station. This includes radio station management, organisational development, staff and volunteer relations, administration and financial management (including donor relations and fundraising), programme design,

production, audience research, technical operation and maintenance. Based on a needs assessment, a five-point training strategy including the following components was designed:

2.a Intensive Community Radio Training Courses

UNESCO ran a series of intensive eight to ten day training courses in starting and managing a community radio station, community radio programming, audience research, and preventative maintenance. Up to four representatives from each community participated in each course. On their return, participants organised seminars for local community volunteers, thus sharing the skills they had acquired. In addition, tailor-made training materials in Portuguese were developed for the five course areas. Participants were able to take these back home and use them as a basis for further community training.

The strength of these courses is the special, intensive training and capacity-building dynamic of bringing people together for an extended period – day and night – to learn, discuss and live with new concepts, insights and skills. The effect of this type of training covers all three of the well-known *KAP* set of factors, providing *Knowledge*, working on the participants' *Attitudes*, and imparting new skills through *Practice*. All of these factors are crucial to obtain a broad-based insight into the many factors that bring life to the community's radio dreams.

The downside of these courses is their high cost (travel, board, high level trainers, course and material development and printing), the need for a full-time person in charge of their organisation, and the fact that the courses can only provide training for two to four representatives from each community. The "Process Coach Scheme" was designed as a complement to minimise these negative aspects.

2.b Process Coach Scheme

Process coaches are individuals who work part time in the community as facilitators, animators and trainers. The challenge for the coach is to empower people who have very little experience in seeing themselves as dynamic forces in their community's democratic development. The coaches were recruited locally, mostly from the national public radio network. Some were local school teachers or community organisers.

After receiving training, each coach worked approximately thirty hours per month in his/her community. Once the stations are up and running, the functions of the process coach, including community mobilisation, management and training of the volunteers, is taken over by an *animator*, filling one of the four paid posts in the station. Together with the coordinator, the animator is responsible for organising and managing the volunteer programmers, general support for the station and training.

With this scheme in place, the crucial question was how to turn the themes that had been discussed in the training into radio programmes of interest to the community. Most participants had never seen a radio studio, and had only a vague idea of what it might look like. It was therefore important to couple the formal courses and the work of the coaches, with some exposure to radio station realities – as diverse and different as possible.

2.c Exposure to Related Realities, including Study Trips

As an important part of our training strategy we encouraged – and often actively planned and organised – visits to as many other related realities as possible. This was so the project volunteers and 'owners' could pick and choose the elements most suitable to their

context from various real-life models. Study visits were made to provincial facilities of the public broadcaster, Radio Mozambique, and to other community-oriented radio stations.¹

2.d Management Seminars and Workshops

On the basis of continuous needs assessment, a number of tailor-made management seminars and workshops were developed. Examples include revamping and strengthening financial systems, and devising effective and efficient organisation structures and workplans. They are implemented between three and five times per year for the management committees and staff of the radio stations.

2.e Establishment of a Training Station

At the time of writing, in early 2002, three of our eight partner stations are on air, with the remaining five to start later in the year. One of the stations will be designated to function as a training station. Teams from new stations will come and “shadow” existing staff members. The visiting team will stay for two to three weeks, and ensure time for analytical assessments of what they are seeing, what they want to copy, and what not. It is expected that these internships will provide training that is more detailed and targeted than is possible in traditional courses.

3. Technically sound and sustainable responses

While relevant and effective community content is key to community radio, nothing will get on air if the technical side does not work. In a country like Mozambique, the importance of this cannot be exaggerated. UNESCO’s initial studies had examined at similar stations in Mozambique and neighbouring countries and found that many were off the air because of a combination of factors related to insufficient technical planning. In an attempt to learn from these sad and painful experiences, UNESCO encouraged the stations to adopt a series of technical policies and placed importance on technical training.

3.a Technical policies and configurations

For the Mozambican situation the best technical configuration will emphasise sturdiness, standard brands with spare-parts easily accessible, ease of maintenance and compatibility with other brands and simplicity of use. Whenever possible, a station should have two studios, ensuring redundancy of facilities in the event of breakdown and to reduce intensive use of facilities, which translates into better maintenance and longer equipment life. As Mozambique also lacks qualified repair technicians, it was necessary to look for suppliers (usually from neighbouring countries) that were more than sales-people. They also had to provide adequate after sale service and the necessary initial training of the staff and station members in maintenance and repair.

Finally, none of the above will have the needed impact unless the station adopts precise technical policies and regulations governing such things as: who has access to what equipment; who is responsible for the scheduled maintenance routines; and when breakdowns occur, who carries out which diagnostic routines, and with which sequence of reactions?

3.b Training for technical sustainability

To prepare the community programmers and technicians we devised a four part sequence for technical training. First, a formal training course was organised in Preventive Maintenance. This course focuses on the prevention of problems, front-line maintenance, and

¹ Four different types of community-oriented stations can be found in Mozambique: those initiated by the State communication institute, by Catholic associations, by independent community-based associations, and by municipalities.

basic diagnostic routines. Both the core technician and the co-ordinator of the station were requested to be amongst the three to five people from each station participating in the course.

The second part of the technical training involved sending the main technician from each station to Cape Town, South Africa. There they participated in a ten day intensive process of learning-by-doing, during which they assembled their own future studios. After the South Africa training, the technicians and the volunteers foreseen to be active within the technical area installed the studio onsite with support from the South African installation technicians. During this practical installation-cum-training process, the local group of technicians works with a technical manual, which the supplier has developed specifically for each individual studio.

The final part of the technical package within the first phase of the UNESCO Media Development Project, will be a more in-depth Preventive Maintenance training course. This will take place once all the stations have been operational for a few months and will specifically address the real-life problems encountered.

With these measures, it is expected and hoped that the stations will be able to avoid many of the initial technical problems identified in the initial studies of the community radio environment in the country. For the more complex technical problems that will unavoidably arise in the future, UNESCO is planning to establish a national pool of technicians.

4. Sustainability: Looking to the future in anxious expectation

UNESCO in Mozambique has aimed to ensure that the community itself forms part of the active creators, promoters and beneficiaries of an appropriate knowledge-based local development. We believe that the training activities described above form one part of the response to the complex and persistent challenges at hand. Once on air, each station will have four paid staff members: the co-ordinator, the administrator, the animator and the technician. In addition, the volunteers will be organised in editorial groups, preparing adequate community programmes in their area of specialisation (health, education, culture, agriculture, environment, youth, women, etc.).

Mozambique needs functioning, community-based and community-controlled media for long-term social, economic, cultural and political development. The preceding sections of this chapter have presented a number of the crucial sustainability factors that were identified and for which the project attempted to define a series of adequate, working responses. We will need to continue to closely monitor the development, and to find adequate and creative responses to emerging needs by developing a range of diverse models and experiences that work.

One potential development involves the transformation of the radio stations into community centres, providing not only production of radio programmes and increased community empowerment and capacity, but also becoming centres for a variety of other community activities. This is already developing in the first three of the eight radio stations to go on the air. The stations become centres, where community members can make photocopies, use a computer, and have texts printed out. Once the Internet connections are in place, it is expected that the radios will also come to function as national message centres, an extremely important function since the national mail service is non functional.

Making it all work: challenges for a sustainable future

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Mozambique is on the extreme end of the digital divide and needs to actively address this challenge, with radio being an area where this is actually happening in partnership with UNESCO. This chapter has highlighted the process followed, the challenges encountered and a number of the concepts and strategies designed and implemented in response to these. While we know we have come a long way in our

attempt to create a set of adequate responses to the challenges, we also know that we will need to continue on this path for a long time to come.

Moving towards the end of the chapter, it is appropriate to discuss emerging possibilities for combining radio with new ICTs, and what impact that may have on development.

Future considerations

Community radio provides communities with a medium for local debate, sharing of information, and giving voice to formerly voiceless members of the community. It is also conceivable that community radio stations with Internet access will develop into a system of informal message centres, covering not only the 40-70 kilometre radius of their 250 watt transmitters, but in principle the whole, vast country. With a view to develop appropriate responses to the lack of a functional basic mail system,² it is appropriate to consider whether the rural community radio stations should include a public access telecentre component. Conversely, communication centres could include a small radio component, becoming multi-purpose communication points, or Community Multimedia Centres (CMC), as described by Stella Hughes elsewhere in this book.

UNESCO's media project in Mozambique is currently considering such developments, keeping sustainability perspectives clearly in mind. So far we have been taking small steps – and we will continue to do so. One of the interesting questions is, however: what is a small step? Experience within and outside of UNESCO shows that people who have had no access to ICTs at all are much less inhibited in their access to these than those who have some knowledge and feel very alienated. The step towards CMCs may, for the local community, not present a huge development jump.

National policy development in the ICT area will have an important impact on these possibilities. In Mozambique, broadcasting is not mentioned in the present media law, and regulations only exist for public and commercial broadcasters. However, progress is being made. The Government of Mozambique has spearheaded the development of a national ICT policy, the implementation of which is presently being concretely planned. The objectives of the policy are to extend the coverage of ICTs, to raise the quality and the number of professionals in the area, to modernise the support infrastructure and provide access for the greater part of the population by means of telecentres, and to create an electronic government network which will raise the effectiveness and efficiency of state institutions.³

At the same time the Prime Minister's information office is working to develop a set of regulations to complement existing media legislation in the area of broadcasting. In this context it is being discussed whether an independent body should be charged with the granting of licences to public, community and commercial broadcasters alike. It is hoped that the new regulations will facilitate future independent community broadcasters' access to broadcasting licenses.

Conclusion

Mozambique has had its share of white elephants, the remains of optimistic development plans that do not succeed for a variety of complex reasons. The collapse of dreams carries along disappointment and frustration among the development beneficiaries – and the loss of yet a bit more willingness to strive for things to ever change.

² Today the best way of getting a letter from one part of the country to the other is to go to the airport and find someone travelling to as close as possible to the recipient, and to ask him or her to bring the letter or package.

³ Cited from: "Summary of the ICT Policy Implementation Strategy" produced by the official Comissão para a Política de Informática.

Birgitte Jallo – Creating and Sustaining ICT Projects

After years of war, natural catastrophes and a life at the bottom of all international economic and human development statistics, Mozambique deserves better. UNESCO Mozambique is presently one of three parties spearheading the initiation of a national community radio network, with the core mandate to establish sustainable systems in the area of training, technical maintenance and appropriate financial solutions. These efforts are at an initial stage of development. But we need to start somewhere. And without such concerted efforts, we will not go anywhere. While real magic seems to come from nowhere, we know that in Mozambique, the *community magic* for social change will only work if it is a result of concerted efforts of development actors based on understanding and analysis and directed by empowered community commitment.

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