

Review of *Empowerment Radio. Voices Building a Community* by Birgitte Jallov

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This excellent and highly useful book is the culmination of over twenty years work in the area of community radio and communication for development (C4D) in various countries around the world. Through her extensive experience in planning, developing and evaluating C4D initiatives, Birgitte Jallov has learned many lessons about how community radio can become more successful and sustainable, which she has drawn on to write this valuable book.

Jallov's key argument is that the effectiveness and sustainability of community radio requires a clear community development vision, active community involvement, community ownership and empowerment, bottom-up processes, and a holistic, partnership approach. While such processes take time and effort to do effectively, the end result is considered to be well worth it, in terms of sustainability and community empowerment. Jallov's model of sustainability suggests that this requires a systems approach that takes the 'enabling environment' into account, as well as effective capacity development and the social, organisational and financial sustainability of the radio station.

This book also lends additional weight to arguments about the importance of two-way communication, dialogue, learning-based capacity development and ongoing participatory research and evaluation to generating sustainable social change through C4D. My colleague Jo Tacchi and I make similar arguments in our book *Evaluating Communication for Development. A Framework for Social Change* (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013) which sets out a new framework for researching and evaluating C4D, based on the following key components: participatory, holistic, complex, critical, emergent, realistic and learning-based. In keeping with this approach, Jallov acknowledges the many challenges and issues that emerge in planning and establishing community radio in the complex development context.

Empowerment Radio is clearly set out into sections that explain the four key phases of community radio development: exploration, preparation, establishment and strengthening. Using this useful framework, the key steps and processes that need to be undertaken are clearly explained. This book is packed with practical and interesting examples and information that cover the social, cultural, technical, political and legal aspects of the process of building a sustainable community radio station. It is illustrated well with numerous photographs, graphics, figures and short case studies from Jallov's own work in the field and that of others. This makes the book very readable and accessible to a wide range of readers. The photographs included throughout the book personalise the text and emphasise the importance of focussing on the human and relational dimensions of the processes described.

I particularly appreciated Jallov's emphasis on considering all of the diverse 'communities within the community' that ideally need to be involved in the research, planning, development and evaluation process. Jallov highlights the key role of women in community radio and the empowering effects of successful community radio on women's lives. Based on her extensive work in this field, Jallov

observes that 'when the community radio moves in women are beaten up less; their children are exposed to less violence and other abuse'. These are powerful effects that need to be better appreciated by those who fund and support community radio and C4D initiatives.

Other sections that I found particularly interesting and useful included the section on community mapping as a 'powerful learning process' and the section on community capacity building as an ongoing process that includes training, mentoring and coaching. Jallof advocates taking an approach to capacity building that aims to go beyond the development of specific, individual skills to developing a 'well-anchored, effective community radio as an organic organisation'. This type of holistic approach to organisational capacity development has been found to be more effective than traditional linear approaches that focus on training individuals, as Horton et al (2003) point out.

While there are many challenges and complexities in assessing the impacts of C4D and community radio and undertaking audience research, Jallof outlines a range of accessible, cost-effective yet rigorous methods for conducting community-based research and impact assessment. Jallof suggests that such research needs to be participatory, regular, transparent and simple. It needs to be based on effective community mapping, establishing baseline information that feeds into a strategic plan, followed by ongoing monitoring and regular impact assessment. A useful checklist of the many key questions that need to be considered in undertaking community needs assessment and information needs assessment is provided.

Jallof suggests using qualitative methods such as focus group discussions as part of the monitoring process and the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology and 'Barefoot Impact Assessment' for the impact assessment process. The MSC technique involves collecting, selecting and analysing stories of significant change and has been found to be very effective in the development context, especially with less literate groups. However, while Jallof suggests that this methodology is 'easy for community groups to use', recent research has identified a number of challenges and issues with using this tool that need to be taken into account (see Lennie & Tacchi, 2013 and Willetts & Crawford, 2007).

The book concludes with a valuable chapter on 'Community radio, the internet and social media' which highlights the need for community radio to constantly adapt and evolve as new technologies are more widely used and people listen to and interact with the radio via different forms of new and traditional media. Jallof suggests that the 'mandate and capacity' of community radio stations, coupled with their use of new technologies such as high-speed internet and smart phones 'provides them with a powerful role in futhering their community's and their member's needs as well as strengthening their own services, network and outreach'. Jallof convincingly argues that while social media can complement community radio, it can never be a replacement for 'well-functioning community radio for development and empowerment'.

This book will be of great value and interest to C4D practitioners, planners, policy-makers, donors, researchers and students who are interested in community radio and C4D more generally. It will be particularly useful to NGOs and community facilitators who wish to learn more about how to successfully set up a community radio station, ensure that it meets diverse community needs and interests, and is sustainable in the long-term.

References

Horton, D., Alexaki, A., Bennett-Lartey, S., *et al.* (2003) *Evaluating capacity development: Experiences from research and development organizations around the world*. The Hague: International Service for National Agricultural Research. Available at <http://web.idrc.ca/openebooks/111-6/>

Lennie, J. and Tacchi, J. (2013) *Evaluating Communication for Development: A Framework for Social Change*. London: Routledge.

Willets, J. and Crawford, P. (2007) 'The most significant lessons about the Most Significant Change technique', *Development in Practice*, 17 (3): 367-379.

Possible journals that this review could be submitted to (after relevant modifications to meet the requirements of the journal) include:

Development in Practice <http://www.developmentinpractice.org/about-dip/about-journal/about-journal>

Journal of Development and Communications Studies <http://www.devcomsjournalmw.org/jdcs-home>

The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media
<http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-journal,id=123/>

The Philippine Journal of Development Communication
<http://journals.uplb.edu.ph/index.php/PJDC/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>