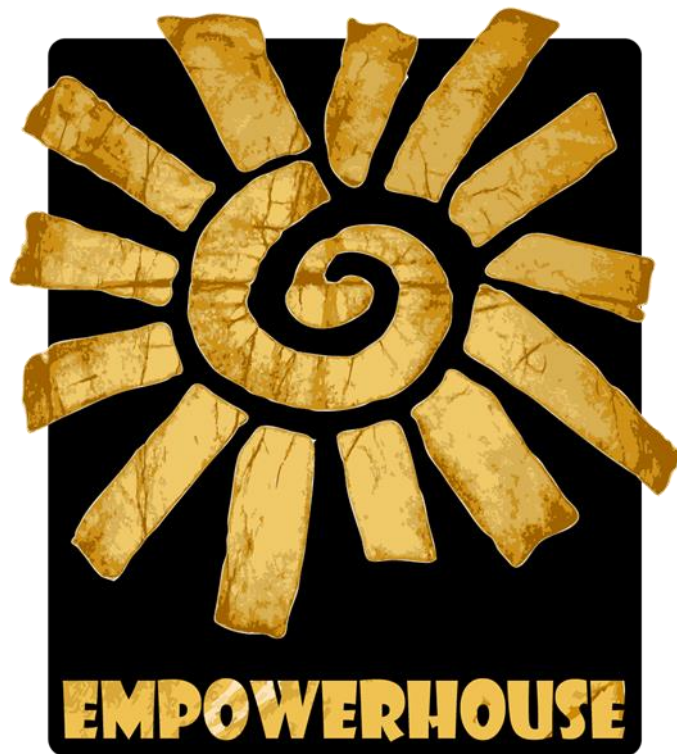


The 10 Traps to avoid

when you want
a sustainable community Radio



By Birgitte Jallov
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Anyone working with community radio in one way or the other longs for a recipe on how to ensure long-term sustainability. Such a recipe does not exist. But there are a number of important factors that are crucial for sustainability - and a related number of traps on the way it is easy to fall into which will effectively undermine long-term sustainability.

'Empowerment Radio – Voices building a community' systematically builds up a framework for sustainable community radios through 13 chapters and 236 pages based on the author, Birgitte Jallof's long and broad experience. But if you follow the 10 areas of advice below, you have taken important steps in the right direction.



The 10 traps to avoid when you want a sustainable community radio:

1. **Don't think a community radio can be a 'quick fix'!**
2. **Don't begin the life of a radio with a studio and equipment!**
3. **Ownership comes from doing it yourself!**
4. **There is no such thing as a free volunteer!**
5. **Prepare for constant change!**
6. **A radio for all must be owned by all!**
7. **A power tool can cause harm!**
8. **Modesty and cleverness can get you far!**
9. **Know – and show – what you can do!**
10. **You are not alone!**

Change is made by people – and takes time!

1. Don't think a community radio can become a reality as a 'quick fix'!

It is true. A community radio can be the source of important community change and important community impact.

But getting this in place takes time.

Either by building the radio around existing community development activities, or by letting the creation of the radio be the motor to begin – or strengthen – such community development.

Well, of course you can put up a radio station, physically, in a week's time. But having the equipment in place is NOT what does the trick, it does not generate social change!



Find the players before starting to play!

2. Don't begin the life of a radio by building the studio and bringing in the equipment!

Once this is in place, all focus is on the microphones and on talking, producing.

To generate community engagement and ownership, it is important for the community to identify who they actually are: mapping all the communities in the community.

How will it otherwise be possible to check that all of these groups in the community have a space, voice and influence on the everyday of the radio? This process may last the good part of a year, or more.

But with such an intro-phase, then the thinking, the vision for the future, and the community structures can be in place, when the microphones arrive – and then the radio has the potential to make a real difference!

Ownership comes from doing it yourself!

3. Don't hire a couple of journalists from the capital city to do the programmes!

Community ownership is at the core of sustainability. The community needs to be in the studios and do the programmes themselves – or at least know those community members doing the programmes.

And they need to be involved in all the important decisions on the editorial and programmatic focus of the radio, the management of the radio and all the other aspects of having a good radio.



There is no such thing as a free volunteer!

4. Don't think community volunteers represent a resource that cannot be exhausted.

Community volunteers are the heart blood of the radio. They are the reason why the community will follow recommendations presented on the radio: our sons and daughters, our nurse or teacher, our neighbour or friend said this on the radio: **let us follow the advice!**

The volunteers give their time, their enthusiasm and dreams for creating a better tomorrow, and they lend their credibility.

And **the volunteers receive** a lot from the radio: training in how to produce good programmes, which requires planning, researching, systematizing material and presenting things effectively; they become important community movers – sometimes even famous; they take part in training courses and visits to other communities.

It is important to register and document this in volunteer contracts, highlighting duties and rights.

Prepare for constant change!

5. Don't think capacity building, coaching and training ever ends!

It is important to plan for and maintain a continuous process of capacity building and volunteer introduction activities: volunteers by nature move on after some years – especially the many young people.

This can only be seen as a wonderful resource being created by the radio – but needs to be planned for, to ensure that the radio always has the required number of community broadcasters and the required representativeness and diversity, and for the radio to be able to produce its community programmes.



A radio for all must be owned by all!

6. Don't let the community radio become owned by a small clique in the community.

This could be religious, political, geographical, social, or ethnic groupings “taking over” the radio either on purpose, or as a sliding development (maybe even without ill intent) that no one notices.

Whichever way, it is detrimental to community ownership and all the strength and empowerment that come from it.
A community radio for development needs to belong to all.



A power tool can cause harm!

7. Don't forget to maintain a high ethical profile and clear inclusive editorial line and style.

Community radios – and other radios – have been the channels and thus promoters of terrible acts of violence through hate speech. And some radios promote hate speech and bring on air other kinds of destructive opinions and programmes on an on-going basis.

A radio in itself is just a channel – and as it can generate powerful social and other community development impact, it can do harm.



It is important to build into the DNA of your radio, ways of regularly carrying out a check on such developments.

Modesty and cleverness can get you far!

8. Don't push up your expenses – be wise, like you are in your home!

For financial sustainability, the basics is to limit costs right from the start. Some examples:

- do not to commit to salaries that cannot be met in the medium to long run – few salaried people, low salaries – try to find other ways to make working for the radio attractive for volunteers;
- find ways of limiting energy costs: limited or no air-conditioning, is – is it really necessary with an air-con, or could the studio have natural ventilation or fans; avoid waste through clear rules and routines, and by making bills for electricity transparent to all staff. Can you get a mutually interesting sponsorship with the electricity supplier; or is solar power a (partly) reliable option?
- pursue wise equipment and studio configuration decisions: what are the purchasing costs and the running costs in use? Often the cheaper purchases bring increased running expenses – but not always?
- try to receive free mobile phone subscriptions and sets from providers against mentioning their sponsorship;
- engage in wise partnerships for important expense items, e.g. between the community radio and the nearby (provincial or national) public radio: the latter can provide technical servicing of the former, and the former can provide recordings of stories told by elders, local music, local news or other areas, which are often outside of the reach of public – and often cash strained – stations.

Know – and show – what you can do!

9. Don't think that everybody knows – or believes that your community radio is really worth their while, support and effort!

You must be able to show how your work is perceived, and if it is in fact helping the community to develop in the way it wants.

You also have to be able to document to the outside how the community radio not only involves the entire community - and the communities within it - but also how it brings about important social change. Make sure that you record the situation as it is - and as it is perceived - at the beginning, during the community mapping. And make sure to collect data and opinions that can show the developments the community is undergoing.

Documenting the community radio's important community development function and the positive impacts it generates can be done in very expensive and elaborate ways, but it can also be done by yourselves – using adequate methods and only depending on some limited initial support.

You are not alone!!!

10. Don't think you need to manage on your own, only! You are an attractive partner!

While a community radio needs to follow its principles and values – and political neutrality – it can be a powerful partner for many different organisations and businesses!

With its high level of community credibility, many partners will want to work with the community radio, be it:

- * on effective programmes in specific areas like health, agriculture, children & youth etc.,
- * providing good, up to date information and documentation for the programme;
- * funding some of the airtime, or
- * contributing to core funds or
- * providing technical and other support to the radio.

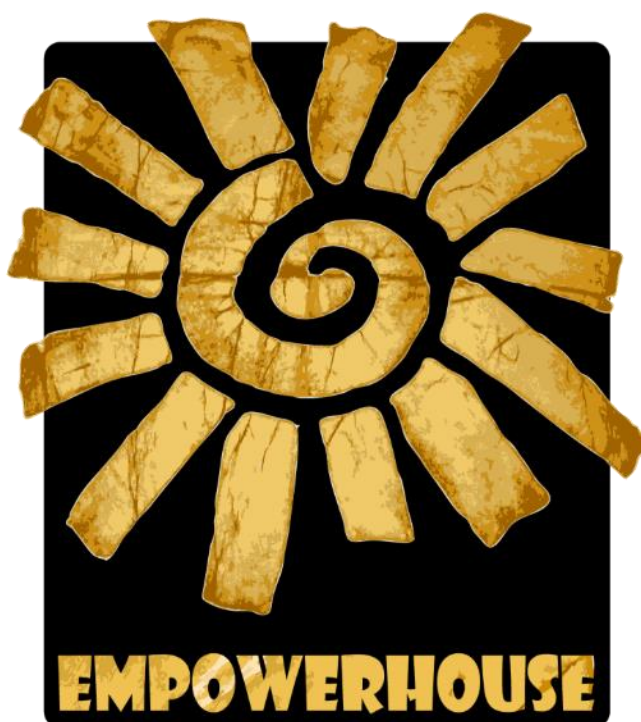
This all, because the community radio is an extremely valuable asset for the development of the community.

EMPOWERHOUSE is a created to support empowerment-oriented development of communities and community radio.

EMPOWERHOUSE published the book 'EMPOWERMENT RADIO – Voices building a community', presented below. It unfolds all the many aspects around the '10 traps to avoid when you want sustainable community radio'. It can be ordered here:

www.empowerhouse.dk or here: mail@empowerhouse.dk.

EMPOWERHOUSE is owned and managed by Birgitte Jallov (see more next page).



EMPOWERHOUSE offers online and onsite courses among others based on the 'EMPOWERMENT RADIO' book, which will further deepen the core aspects of what it takes to create, maintain and sustain an empowerment radio.

To follow EMPOWERHOUSE developments, sign up for the regular EMPOWERNEWS at the website: www.empowerhouse.dk



Birgitte Jallov was among the drivers behind Denmark's first community radio in the early 1980s, was on the steering committee of the founding conference of the international community radio association, AMARC in Montreal in 1983, saw 8 community radios become 50 during her time as UNESCO project manager 1998-2004 in Mozambique, and was the lead adviser in the creation of the first community-run radio in Lao PDR.

During this time Birgitte has been involved as adviser, coach, evaluator – and midwife - of community radios and their networks in many of the 60 countries where she has worked, and has presented the lessons learnt as core concepts, tools and processes in manuals, articles and documentaries.

'EMPOWERMENT RADIO – Voices building a community' is Birgitte's step-by-step presentation of all the central practical and conceptual aspects to consider when wanting support Empowerment Radio: A sustainable, community-run, well managed, simple and effective space for the community's voice, with space for debate on issues of importance ranging from urgent ad hoc problems over continued debate on community development and on to celebration of the local culture.

www.empowerhouse.dk

This book has been written by Birgitte Jallov, EMPOWERHOUSE, who has worked with community radio since 1980 in many parts of the world. The issues presented in this '10 traps to avoid' are all unfolded with much more detail in her book:

'EMPOWERMENT RADIO – Voices building a community', which sets out to demonstrate why community radio during the past decades has repeatedly been recommended as a powerful catalyst for development – 'the missing link' between development support being provided and change actually taking place.

This book has been written with a desire to share powerful insights and experiences that can help **get a genuine community radio off the ground – and keep it on air**. With a systematic approach, starting from the beginning, the book takes its reader by the hand through the early feasibility **assessment** over a detailed **preparation**, mapping, mobilising and coaching the community, to the **establishment** with management issues, capacity building, all issues relating to programming and content of the radio, along with the technical issues. All elements needed for **a sustainable, powerful EMPOWERMENT RADIO**.

