Myanmar
Community Media Development Charter

Draft - January 2016

Acknowledging that Community Broadcasting in Myanmar is regulated by the Broadcasting Law and the by-laws and regulations developed by the Myanmar Broadcast Council;

Recalling that communication is an important right and that all should have access to information from a variety of independent sources, and access to express themselves and have a voice;

Recognizing that an important part of the population in Myanmar at present does not receive balanced and impartial information about issues of importance in their lives, and most have no voice or say in public;

Noting with satisfaction that Myanmar with the passage of the new Broadcast Legislation is planning to address and redress the documented information and communication gap;

Mindful that the opening of access to a liberalized broadcasting environment does not by default ensure that the information and communication gap is met, nor that the voiceless get a voice;

Realising that the traditional role division in communities and in the media rarely see women holding positions of decision making along with persons living with disabilities and marginalized groups;

We, the signatories of this Charter, intend to work together to support a healthy and strong development of community media in Myanmar, striving to advocate for and uphold the following principles and values:

- Community ownership is at the core of community media sustainability and decisive for a community radio/medium releasing its potential as a platform for dialogue and debate;

- Community-owned community media need to engage and involve 'all communities within the community' including minorities and marginalized such as persons living with disability;

- Women are decisive in community development and need to be engaged in the creation process of community media from the very beginning. Later engagement of women is much more difficult;

- Support development of community media through community participation and engagement. We know that community radios started from above and by outside forces have a weak sustainability;

- Support development of a code of conduct for community radios, integrating the national legal framework as well as ethical and moral principles to uphold. Based on this we will, where and as possible build self-regulatory regimes to avoid spurring conflict and to advance peaceful co-existence and constructive collaboration for development.

MANAGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING:

- We recognize that once the equipment is there, there will be little engagement with strategic planning and community mobilization. We therefore commit ourselves to advocate for having a good introduction phase where an installation committee ensures that all in the community know about the station and are invited to open, participatory fora, where the vision, mission and values are outlined, production groups formed (see below), programme schedule developed, etc.

- While working respectfully with local authorities and keeping them informed, it is important that a board elected by community members is responsible for the management of the community medium. It is important that the 'core leaders' do not also move into management here;

- The community media management – board and executive alike – need to be imbued in transparent management and clear accountability practices towards the community. They need to see themselves as managing the station – and funds – on behalf of the community;

- The community media will be managed by boards, elected by a general assembly of the community. The following principles should be observed:
  - o A board should in principle consist of people with different experience and capacity to support the management of the station (community mobilization, participatory practices, community development, management and leadership, financial management, fundraising, technical issues and the like)
  - o Leaders of political, religious, commercial movements and institutions are not eligible to be elected on to a community media boards
  - o Sitting on the board is a pro-bono contribution to the development of the community.

- For the long-term sustainability of community media it is important that the financial set-up is healthy. Financial sustainability begins with a modest budget and expense-level.

DONOR ENGAGEMENT AND FUNDING OF STATIONS

- If a donor engages in providing support to specific community media, it is important to resist the temptation to pay good salaries to the management. Once the direct funding engagement ends, it may be hard to maintain the level of funding and the risk that no-payment or a significant decrease will make staff leave. As a principle we, the signatories will strive to engage with individual stations in the following manner, if and when applicable:
  - o Focus on development of the station's own capacity to manage and maintain a balanced financial sustainability, including a healthy funding mix;
  - o Tap the enormous (and sustainable!) potential of community ownership of the station translating into considerable funding secured through a variety of channels from the community;
  - o Only consider payment of salaries to the four members of the management team: the Station Coordinator; Station Administrator; Mobiliser and Technician;
  - o Salary of station coordinator could be at the level of a secondary school teacher. The other staff 20% less, as a rule of thumb.
  - o Etc.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- We, the signatories, resolve to collaborate on the development of the capacity of communities to effectively get the community mobilization and organization going, engaging the many sub-communities, organizing and managing the stations and lead the community media towards their potential for empowerment and community development impact;

- Recognizing that (i) community media is a new phenomenon, (ii) little capacity is available in most (rural) communities to facilitate a participatory start-up process and (iii) that there is a high risk that those traditionally in power, or a clique of young men, or others hi-jack the process; we intend to collaborate on development of capacity of community-based coaches, who are from and live in the community starting a station. These coaches are identified by the community and its 'installation committee' according to some criteria (see the 'CM start-up strategy') and will lead the mobilization and organization process for the first year or so, and will coach the board and the executive in the creation process.

VOLUNTARISM

- We agree that the heart-blood of community media is the broad-based corps of volunteer broadcasters. It needs to represent the many 'communities in the community' and they will be managed and organized by the station 'mobiliser'.

- Basing the production of community programmes on volunteers, means to systematically and strategically plan for a certain turnover. Capacity as such needs to be built in an ongoing manner;

- Volunteers will give a lot to the station and they will get a lot from the station. Often community radios are recruitment grounds for not only commercial and public service stations (paying a salary), but also for NGOs and CSOs - and beyond. To avoid misunderstandings it is useful for volunteers to have a contract with the station stating how many hours/days the volunteer will contribute, as well as her/his rights to capacity development, take part in the station meetings etc.

PROGRAMME PRODUCTION

- Most stations will be found in culturally and ethnically diverse communities. It is important to advocate for having original (not translated) programming developed in the most important languages by volunteer broadcasters – women and men - from those groups.

- For maximum empowerment and development benefits we intend to organize the stations in thematic editorial groups, responsible for weekly programmes on the thematic areas identified by the community as most important.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

- For technical sustainability it is important to consider the following when supporting the establishment of a community radio station:
  - We, the signatories aim to develop a listing of desirable equipment with a good cost/quality balance;
  - If possible support with sturdy equipment that can withstand rainy seasons, the use by many different untrained hands;
  - It is important to limit the brands, so as to ensure that the technicians, training station technicians will know how to. This is especially important for the sensitive transmitters.

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