

Radio and the Internet

Radio in the Age of the Internet

Radio has long been a powerful tool for reaching broad segments of the populations of developing countries with important messages, whether through news programs, public service messages or edutainment. New technologies such as computers, the internet and podcasting have expanded the range of technological options for disseminating information and for communicating across distances. While decreasing prices for computers and new wireless technologies such as WiFi are helping to extend the reach of computers and the Internet, much progress is still needed. At the same time, radio remains a very accessible tool, widely available throughout developing countries, including in rural areas.

The key is to better integrate older and newer technologies, where appropriate, to reach desired benefits, to extend the reach of the Internet through radio and to reinforce radio through the Internet. Instead of seeing the two technologies as competing, the two should be seen as complementary.

Extending the Reach of the Internet Through Radio

In many developing countries, including Mali and Paraguay, community radio stations are part of the rural landscape and a key source of information and entertainment for even the most isolated communities. Where computers have not yet reached and the Internet may not reach for a long time, radio has a strong foothold. To ensure widespread dissemination of information and to reach less literate segments of the population, radio remains the media of choice in many developing countries.

Reinforcing Community Radios Through the Internet

While radio can help the Internet by extending its reach, the Internet can also support radio by 1) Allowing radio programmers to access information on the Internet; 2) Downloading audio files from portals with radio content; 3) Accessing online training.

Lessons from Mali

In Mali, dot-ORG established thirteen telecenters within medium-size towns and rural communities. Two of these telecenters were hosted by community radio stations. For these, the linkages between radio and the Internet were clear. Radio programmers would access information on the Internet and use that information to develop some of their programs.



Photo: Rural Radio in Kadiolo, Mali.

The other eleven telecenters also developed connections to community radios. In particular, they made arrangements to exchange services. The community radio would advertise services provided by the telecenter and the radio programs would obtain access to the telecenters' services to access information on the Internet. In some instances, the telecenters worked with the radio stations to

develop and broadcast special programs on benefits of ICT for the community. In addition, the telecenters were equipped with WorldSpace radio receivers and were able to listen to WorldSpace programs.



Photo: Radio Jamana in Djenne, Mali

Moving Forward in Paraguay

Community radio stations have long played an important role in Paraguay. There are over 400 community radio stations, many of which have emerged after the end of the dictatorship in 1998. In a context of severely limited resources and human capacity, most of these community radio stations face serious

challenges when trying to develop meaningful and relevant content for their listeners.

The Last Mile Initiative project In Paraguay, launched in November 2005, will integrate community radio stations within its activities to ensure that they and - by extension – their listeners, benefit from the connectivity that is the core of the project.

By having access to connectivity, community radio will be able to access timely national and global information. Community radio programmers play a key role as information intermediaries, identifying relevant information and contextualizing it - and even translating it when necessary - for the local audience.

Some USAID partners in Paraguay have already taken a lead role in making radio programming available on the Internet. These existing efforts can be expanded upon. Options that are being considered include podcasting and the development of a web-based repository of radio programs that could be developed wherever the capacity exists and shared across a network of community radio stations.

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LINKS

DOT-COM web site
<http://www.dot-com-alliance.org>

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Mali CLIC Project Brief
- LMI Paraguay Project Brief



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