



MEDIA VIABILITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A report on the status of the ability of community radio stations to produce quality journalism in a sustainable way

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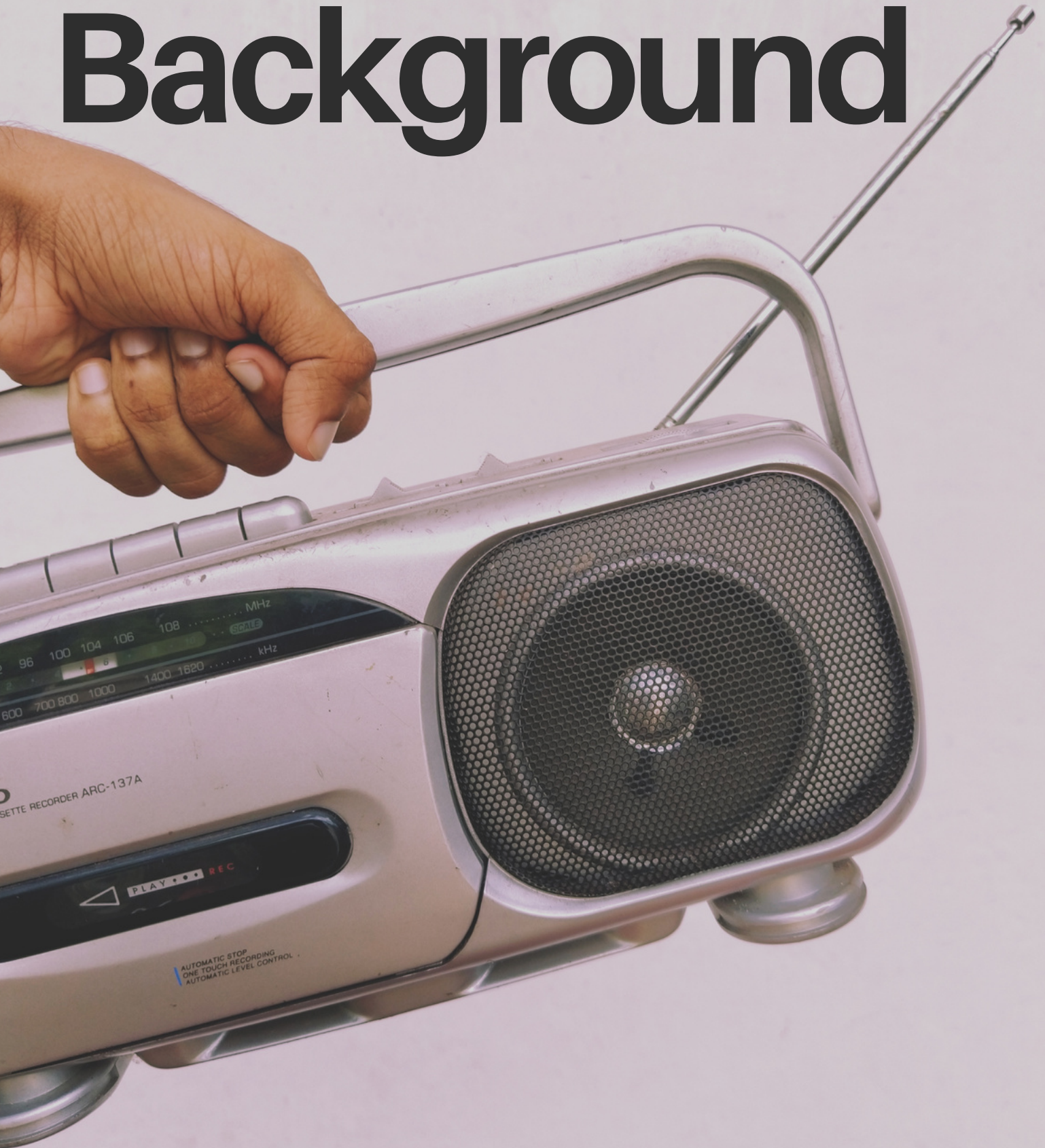
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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

CA:	Communications Authority
CRS:	Community Radio Station
IDPs:	Internally Displaced Persons
KCOMNET:	Kenya Community Media Network
LGBTQ:	Lesbians Gays Bisexuals Transsexuals Queer
MCK:	Media Council of Kenya
MCSK:	Music Copyright Society of Kenya
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PWDs:	Person with Disability
UR4P:	Umoja Radio for Peace

Introduction & Background



Context of the media viability needs assessment

KCOMNET through Umoja Radio for Peace (UR4P) project recently conducted a media viability needs assessment activity targeting 41 CRS.

In 2021, the Media Futures East Africa Project, jointly implemented by the Aga Khan University's Graduate School of Media & Communications and DW Akademie, investigated the state of innovation & media viability in Kenya.

However, from the report presented, community radio was conspicuously missing out from the media viability needs analysis. The focus of was purely on print & commercial radio & television. This informed the need to conduct a media viability needs assessment for community radio.

Cognizant of the fact that media viability needs assessment for community media is noticeably missing from recent studies, this assessment investigated the media viability needs of community radio.

Media viability is the ability of media outlets to operate financially & editorially independently while still ensuring high-quality journalism.

A media viability needs assessment is a process of identifying & assessing the needs of media outlets in order to support their long-term financial sustainability & empower them to produce high quality journalism in an editorially independent manner.

Methodology



Objectives

This activity aimed at investigating the media viability needs of community radio that influence their ability to ensure high quality standards in journalism in the most sustainable way.

Specifically, the activity aimed:

To identify and understand media viability needs that influence the ability of community radio stations to produce high quality journalism in a sustainable way, while still ensuring their editorial independence.

Approach

The approach adopted in this media viability needs assessment entailed investigating specific thematic areas that influence the ability of CRS to ensure high quality standards in journalism in the most sustainable way without interfering with their editorial independence.

The specific thematic areas investigated were:

the operational structures of community radio; inclusivity; IDPs, refugees and host communities; collaboration and synergy; rule of law; business model; sources of revenue; financial stability; financial literacy; financial independence of news media organizations; access to information; digital expertise; audience access to technologies; audience demand & market; audience data; participation; quality journalism & ownership of news media organizations.

Data Collection

Took place between July & September 2023.

Information regarding media viability was obtained from radio data provided by the community radio station managers through Key informant interviews.

Sample Size

CRS managers from the 41 CRS under UR4P project participated in KIIs to inform the media viability needs assessment.

Response Rate

The response rate was 100% since all the targeted 41 CRS working under the UR4P project actively participated in this activity.

Data Analysis

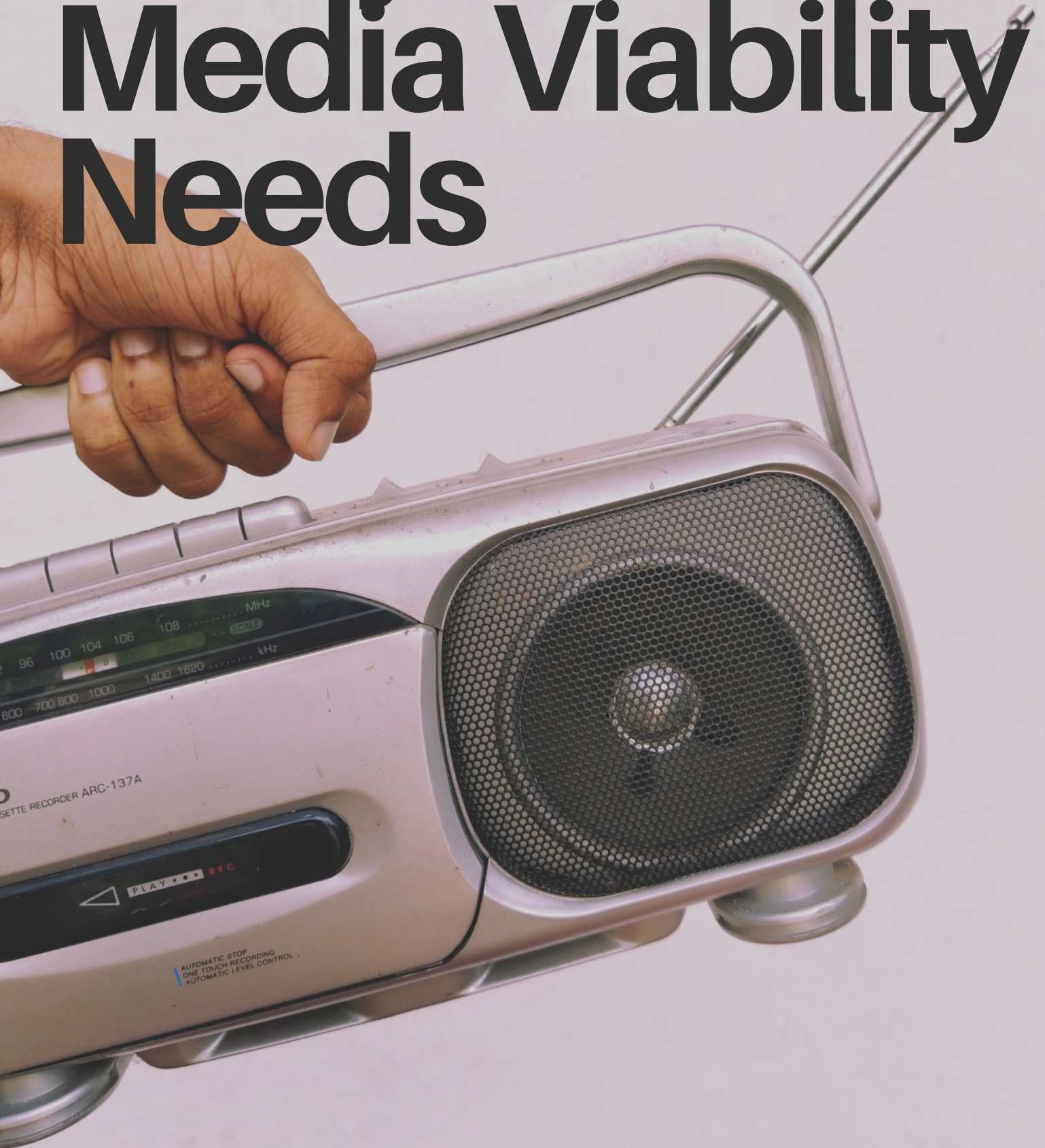
Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data in order to reveal patterns and themes in the data.

The data was first prepared and organized by acquiring transcripts and all necessary notes.

The data was then reviewed and explored severally and initial codes created.

The codes were then reviewed to identify recurring themes/patterns and opinions that were presented in a coherent manner using graphs, tables and texts.

Analysis of Media Viability Needs



Mandate of Community Radio Stations (CRS)

All the 41 CRS stated that they clearly understood the mandate of community radio.

The common theme that emerged was that community radios are intended to provide a platform for local voices to be heard & provide information & programming that is relevant to their community.

It was unanimously reported by all the 41 CRS that they must serve the specific needs & interests of their communities, & that issues discussed on their programs should be those that affect the communities served.

The mandate of Community Radio Stations (CRS) were identified as:

Peacebuilding & conflict resolution

Promote dialogue, understanding, & reconciliation between different groups within the community that may be conflicting.

Empowerment & participation

Give a voice to the unheard in the community & provide a platform for marginalized groups to express their views, share their experiences, & participate in decision-making processes.

Education & Awareness

Providing equal access to information & education that is relevant to the needs & interests of the communities they serve. This includes raising awareness about important issues such as health, agriculture, environmental protection, insecurity, drug abuse, human rights, & governance among others that affect the daily lives of their audiences.

Cultural preservation & promotion

CRS have a collective responsibility to promote their local cultures, languages, traditions, & arts, as well as to preserve the heritage & identity of the communities they serve. Done by broadcasting programs in local languages & featuring content such as local music, dance & cultural programs.

Community development

Promote social cohesion, economic development, & sustainable development within the communities they serve. This involves supporting local businesses, promoting entrepreneurship, & encouraging community-based initiatives.

Holding leaders accountable

Provide local leaders with a platform to address developmental, governance & societal issues affecting their communities. In cases of emerging conflict, leaders are often invited to call for peace & urge their followers to maintain peace.

Providing information

Providing important information to the communities they serve, such as news, current affairs, weather forecasts, security threats, politics & emergency alerts among others because they believe that informed citizens are highly likely to make better decisions.

Legal Framework Regulations around the Operations of Community Radio

The legal framework regulations around the operations of community radio in Kenya are largely guided by the Communications Authority (CA).

The CA is responsible for regulating broadcasting in Kenya, including community radio.

The CA has issued a specific set of guidelines for CRS, which includes requirements for ownership, content, licensing, control & funding.

The CA regulates community radios through licensing, content regulation, technical standards, support and capacity building, & monitoring & enforcement.

The CA issues the community radio licenses & monitors compliance with license conditions, ensuring that stations operate within the allocated frequencies & power levels.

Guidelines for content broadcasting by community radios are set by the CA in order to promote responsible journalism & ensure that they serve the interests of their communities.

The CA establishes technical standards for the community radio broadcasting equipment & transmission facilities to ensure quality & minimize interference.

Training & support to the CRS to enhance their production capabilities, financial management, & governance practices is also part of the CA's mandate.

Other legal regulatory apparatus that were cited by the CRS that guide their operations in Kenya included the Constitution of Kenya 2010 which provides for freedom of the media, the right to access information etc.

Others include the Kenya Copyright Act, and The Data Protection Act.

The CA has issued a specific set of guidelines for CRS, which includes requirements for ownership, content, licensing, control & funding.

Media Council of Kenya (MCK) also guides the CRS in promoting ethical & professional standards among journalists & the CRS. It accredits journalists and conducts trainings to sensitize community radio journalists on their critical role in communities.

The Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK) also regulates some aspects of the operations of CRS such as requiring compliance with copyright laws when they play copyrighted music. MCSK has been enforcing this by offering a variety of licensing options for community radios, and providing training and education to help community radios understand their copyright obligations.

There was a general consensus amongst the CRS that Kenya's regulatory framework on community radio is well-intended but too stringent in some areas such as fines & fees.

The licensing fees that community radios are paying to the CA is generally too high compared to commercial radio considering that community radios are non-profit making entities.

Other community stations stated that business permits and other fees charged by County governments was also a challenge for them.

Generally, the Kenya's regulatory framework on community radio was reported to be unfriendly. For instance, the fees paid to the various regulatory bodies by community radios was found to be quite strenuous to community radio.

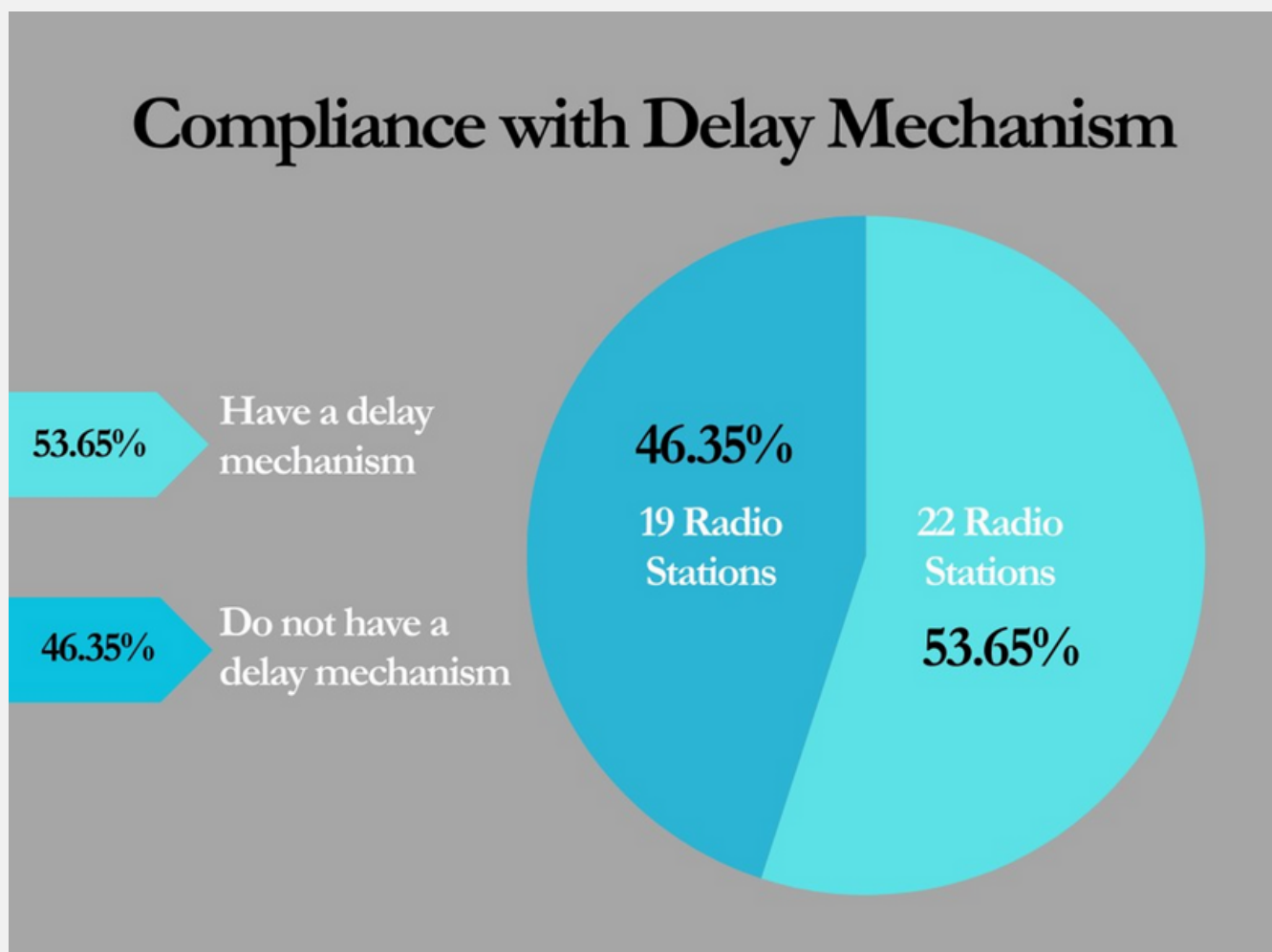
The fines charged for non-compliance, such as failure to file returns, were found to be too punitive.

Compliance with CAs broadcast delay/delayer mechanism requirement

A delay mechanism is a system that is used to delay the broadcast of live audio.

This is useful in preventing the broadcast of offensive or sensitive material, or allowing for time to edit the audio before it is broadcast.

In Kenya, CRS are required to have a delay mechanism in place in order to comply with CA regulations.



Programming for Marginalized & Special Groups (PWDs, Women, Youth)

PWDs

The programs dedicated to PWDs usually address the discrimination they face, physical & social barriers, lack of access to opportunities, education & employment.

Women

The programs that target women focus on ending SGBV, promoting economic inequality, stopping cultural practices that disadvantage women, supporting access to education & employment, & empowering women to make their own decisions.

Youth

Normally identify the challenges they face such as unemployment, radicalization, drug abuse, crime, lack of access to education and training, & limited participation in decision-making.

Focus on encouraging them to look for employment & training opportunities, encouraging them to fulfill their civic duties, addressing health & mental health issues such as alcohol & drug abuse & HIV/AIDS among others.

Programming Focused on Refugees, IDPs & their Host Communities

IDPs

Some areas reported no presence of refugees or IDPs, thus the CRS operating there reported that they do not have programming focused on refugees and IDPs because these were not issues affecting their communities directly. This was in a few areas such as Vihiga and Meru.

In other areas such as Nairobi, Kajiado, Siaya, Turkana, Marsabit, Murang'a, Kwale, Busia, Taita Taveta, Makueni, Laikipia, Embu, Trans Nzoia, Nakuru and Migori, there was the presence of IDPs.

In such areas, the community radio stations sampled had programs or segments within their programming that focused on the IDPs. These programs are intended to address the needs of the IDPs & also sensitize the host communities to welcome, support & peacefully co-exist with them.

Refugees

The geographical areas with refugees were Nakuru, Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Wajir, Makueni, Turkana, Siaya, Kwale, Taita Taveta, Marsabit, Murang'a, Narok, Nairobi and Kajiado.

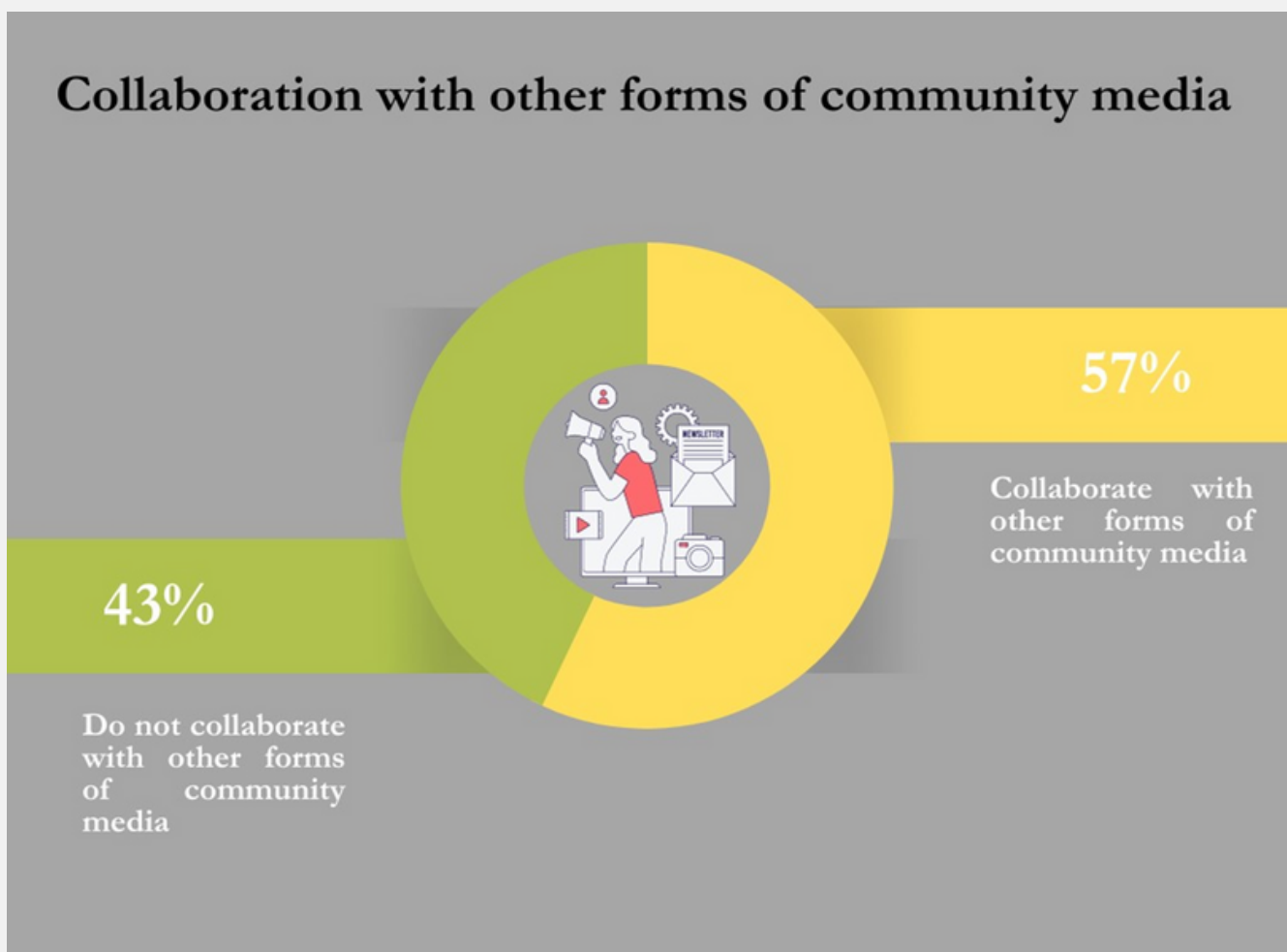
CRS in such areas noted that host communities may experience social & economic tensions as a result of the influx of refugees. They provide a platform for these parties to interact & benefit from each other.

Collaboration with other forms of community media

Examples of community media include community radio, community newsletters, theatre groups, resource centers, among other forms.

43% of the CRS sampled reported little or no collaboration with other forms of community media.

57% of the CRS collaborate with other forms of community media. Community art and theatre group were the most common form of community media in these collaborations, followed by community newsletters, and other community radio stations

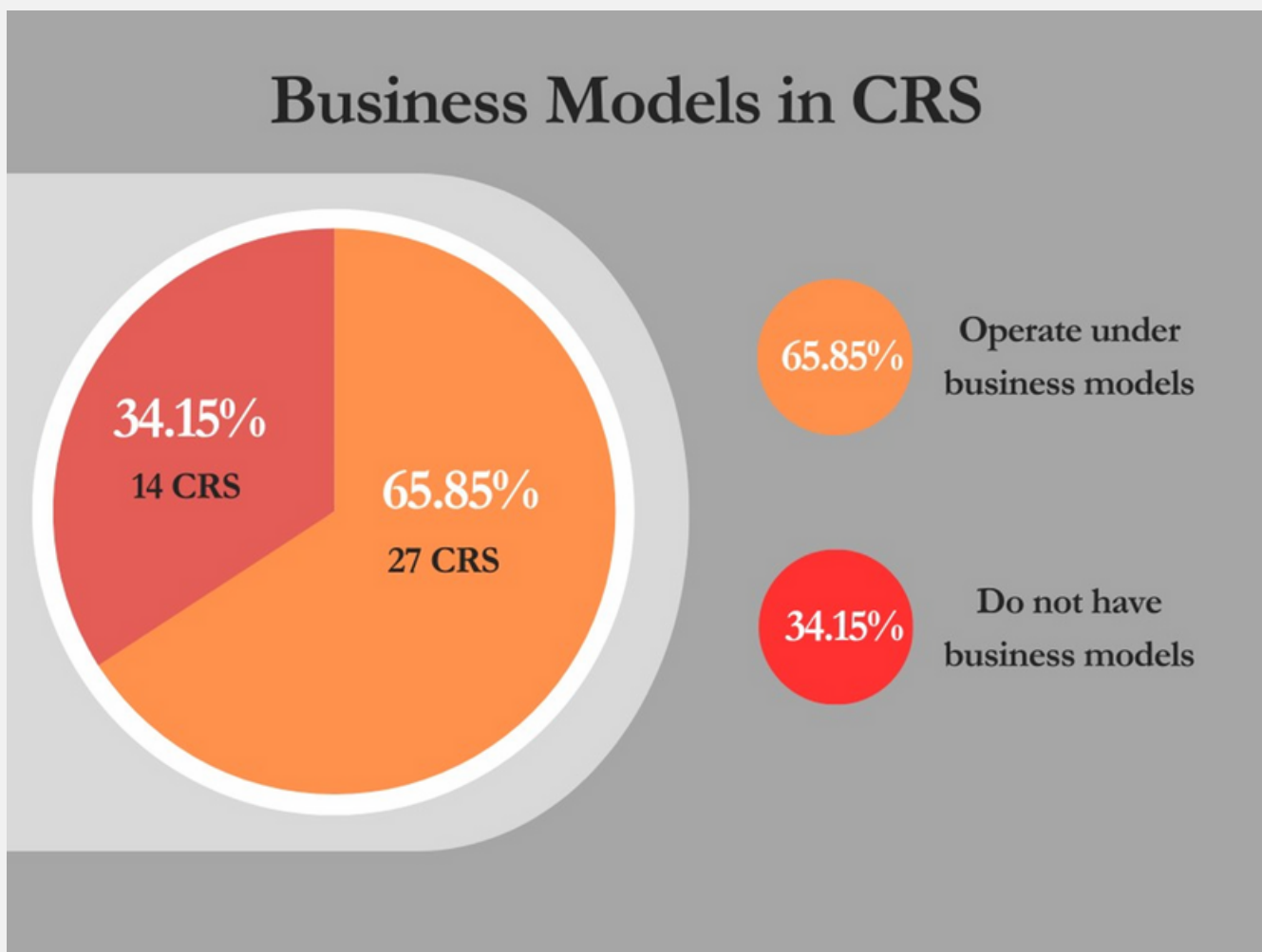


Business Models, Sources of Revenue and Viability for CRS

CRS often face financial challenges that threaten their sustainability. To overcome these challenges, CRS need to develop diversified business models that can generate income from a variety of sources.

From the findings, there was a general lack of adequate sustainable business models under which the participating CRS operate under.

Those that had some form of business model mostly relied on collaborating with like-minded partners who had the interests of their communities at heart.



Sources of Revenue CRS

Community radios, being non-commercial entities, are disallowed by law to participate in profit making ventures, but only focus on how they can sustain their operations and serve the interests of their communities. For this reason, their sources of revenue greatly differ from commercial radio stations.

Some CRS receive project-based funding from international and local donor organizations to support specific initiatives. Parent organizations of some of the community radio stations such as churches support some of them through various projects and obligations such as paying salaries. Some community radios have also been selling some advertising space to local businesses and organizations.

Sponsorships for specific programs or events have also been sought by community radio stations to raise funds. Audience support has been a source of revenue for community radios where listeners support stations through volunteering, memberships and donations.

Salaam cards, obituaries and announcements have also been a source of revenue for some of the CRS, though meagerly.

Income & viability for CRS

The current economic situation in Kenya is characterized by high inflation, rising interest rates, & a weak shilling. This has made it more difficult for CRS to generate revenue & cover their operating costs.

There was a general consensus that the current economic situation in Kenya does not make it viable for community radios to thrive, especially since the change of government, where the high cost of living & inflation have affected the economy.

The community radios located in rural & remote areas where there is less access to technology, electricity & fewer opportunities for revenue generation also felt disadvantaged.

The community radios located in rural & remote areas where there is less access to technology, electricity, poor infrastructure & fewer opportunities for revenue generation also felt disadvantaged.

The stations working with volunteers and interns decried the high rate of their turnover when they get jobs that pay them way better, while others fail to take their jobs seriously due to demotivation.

Financial literacy and fund raising skills amongst the community radio personnel was also found to be wanting. Generally, the CRS revealed that they are not well equipped in financial literacy & fund raising skills, while others with such skills do not receive support from the management of their stations.

Some of the CRS have small marketing teams to handle fundraisings but they are still not as sustainable. In others, the managers and journalists reported that they have a fair level of financial literacy and fundraising skills on an individual level but receive little or no support from their radio station's boards of management.

Impact of Sources of Funds on Editorial Independence

Ensuring editorial independence while maintaining financial viability is a delicate balance for community radios.

Editorial independence dictates that community radios should be free to broadcast without fear of censorship or interference from government, corporates, or their sources of funds.

Donor funding sometimes comes with conditions or expectations, potentially influencing editorial decisions.

Though many of the participating CRS did not complain of their editorial independence being constrained, some CRS, especially the faith-based ones, have to broadcast in compliance with the values, principles, doctrines and teachings of their parent churches.

As such they usually practice self-censorship in order to avoid discussing controversial issues such as LGBTQ, alcohol, betting and contraceptives that go against the principles of their parent churches.

Access to Public Information

Access to public information is a fundamental right enshrined in the Kenyan Constitution.

Article 35 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to access information held by the State and other public entities.

This right is essential for enabling citizens to hold the government accountable, to participate in public decision-making, & to inform themselves about issues that affect their lives.

Community radios play a vital role in promoting access to public information in Kenya.

Some reported facing resistance, especially from local leaders with vested interest in certain governance issues who are unwilling to provide crucial information.

Getting information from government, especially about sensitive and controversial issues such as corruption, insecurity, politics, banditry, and displacements has been difficult for some CRS.

In some instances, community members are also reluctant and afraid to divulge information for fear of being discriminated against or victimized.

Capacity of CRS to Use Digital Spaces & Audience Access to Digital Technologies

Digital spaces have enabled community radios to transcend geographical boundaries, connect with a wider audience, & play a more significant role in informing, educating, & empowering their communities.

The issue of inadequate and obsolete equipment was a common theme among the CRS. For instance, a CRS reported that it is not well equipped since it uses very old computers which cannot support current digital devices such as USB.

The ability to use & manage digital spaces was considerably good because most CRS have staff who are tech-savvy. However, there was a general lack of adequate equipment in a number of CRS & personnel to ensure effective utilization of digital spaces by CRS.

Social media was lauded for giving audience an alternative means of interacting & engaging with the CRS. Where CRS are using social media, receipt of instantaneous feedback from their audiences has been made possible thanks to their ability to access to digital technologies.

Audience Participation Levels and Access to Reliable Audience Data

Audience participation is a key aspect of community radio, as it allows communities to actively engage with the station, share their voices, and contribute to the development of the content.

Audience levels of participation was quite satisfactory because of their access to digital technologies that enable them to call, text and participate online.

Digital technologies have made it easier for audience of most of the CRS to be part and parcel of the radio programs and shows. They easily give feedback instantaneously and receive immediate responses in most cases.

Understanding audience preferences is crucial for CRS to tailor their programming, content, and engagement strategies to effectively serve their listeners. It can provide valuable insights into their preferences, interests, listening habits, and demographic characteristics.

This information can guide decisions on programming schedules, content selection, and promotional activities, ensuring that the station remains relevant, engaging, and responsive to the needs of its audience.

Conclusion

CRS play a vital role in providing information, education, entertainment & promoting development within their communities.

However, many of these stations are grappling with inadequacy of funding, resources, equipment, facilities and expertise, but are still expected to produce high quality journalism, sustain themselves, and comply with legal requirements.

Many CRS in Kenya are operating on shoestring budgets and are struggling to cover their basic operating costs such as paying their staff well, catering for bills such as power, internet & complying with regulatory requirements.

CRS often struggle to find and retain adequate qualified personnel such as professional journalists & technicians due to financial constraints & a limited pool of trained individuals in their communities.

Many often have just a few professional journalists and technician and heavily rely on volunteers to fill up this gap.

Volunteers often leave the stations whenever they find greener pastures in form of well-paying jobs & some are not motivated enough to take their work seriously. This lack of technical expertise in radio production can compromise the quality of broadcasting services.

Many community radio stations often lack access to essential equipment & infrastructure to adequately fulfill their mandate.

Recommendations

Develop and implement business models business plans

These tools can provide CRS with a framework to operate sustainably & provide value to their audience. CRS can identify their target audience, develop a programming strategy, & set financial goals.

Business models can be developed with the help of professionals who can tailor-make them to suit the unique objectives & needs of each CRS.

These tools can help in assessing financial needs, developing realistic & sustainable budgets, improving financial management, tracking expenses & seeking funding/fund raising opportunities.

Diversify revenue streams by seeking alternative funding & income generating opportunities

CRS should seek & explore a variety of funding sources, including government grants, donor funding, partnerships, listener donations, advertising & sponsorships, endorsements etc.

Owners and staff should work together to identify the potential areas that can be explored to generate more sustainable revenue such as membership drives, social entrepreneurship & fundraising events among others.

New income generating services can also be explored such as audience research, workshops, event production, music & video production, merchandizing, consultancy etc.

Recommendations

Capacity building for staff

CRS should train their staff in radio production and quality journalism. Staff also need to be provided with training in management, marketing and promotion, & financial literacy in order to contribute to the sustainability of CRS.

Staff can be empowered through workshops, seminars & conferences covering topics that can help build their professional capacities. Consultants can also be invited to assess training needs of staff & provide the required training.

This can help to improve the quality of their content, reach a wider audience & provide staff with opportunities to network & participate in intensive income generation.

Enhance digital/online presence and engagement

CRS should take advantage & fully exploit the advances in technology by utilizing digital platforms such as social media, websites, mobile applications, blogs, analytics, optimized search engines & online streaming to connect with audiences online & provide more interactive content, experience & platforms for feedback. They can also use online platforms to showcase programming schedules.

Digital technologies such as the internet & mobile devices are considerably more accessible today than before, with different options & payment plans, hence more people are available online. This can improve audience reach, reduce costs & improve efficiency.

Recommendations

Build stronger and meaningful partnerships and collaborations

CRS should build & maintain partnerships with other like-minded organizations, such as other CRS, businesses, NGOs, educational institutions, religious organizations, government agencies, regulatory bodies, media outlets, technology providers, & other forms of community media to share resources, challenges, successes, opportunities & expertise, as well as achieve strengthened advocacy & unity of purpose.

Such partnerships can lead to financial assistance to the CRS, reducing costs & improving their impact & efficiency.

CRS should not compete against each other, but complement each other.

Improve creativity & innovation in their programming

CRS should take advantage of the increasing demand for local content and be more creative in their programs.

Audience needs assessments can be conducted regularly to identify the unique & changing needs of different audiences so that programs can be tailored to satisfy those needs. This will help to attract and retain listeners, widen audience reach and make stations more appealing to advertisers and partners.

Live streaming videos through social media, promoting local businesses & events, & partnering with local artists & musicians are just some examples.

Recommendations

Invest in infrastructure & technology

CRS should invest in the necessary infrastructure to effectively produce & distribute their content. This includes reliable electricity/solar energy, internet access, telecommunications equipment, production & editing software, power backup systems, & transportation such as motorcycles & cars to gather news, reach their target audience when the need arises, & market their brand.

Though expensive, investing in infrastructure is essential for the sustainability and growth of community radio.

Policy and regulatory reform

The regulatory bodies should appreciate the unique role of community radio in society & review their policies and regulations affecting community radio to ensure that they are supportive of the sector's development.

Many of the CRS raised concerns about the stringent regulatory framework surrounding their operations & the challenges they face in remaining sustainable.

The CA can consider reviewing & reforming the legal & regulatory frameworks of community radios to make them friendlier such as simplifying licensing procedures, reducing fees & fines, negotiating flexible payment terms, alternative licensing models, tax incentives & waivers etc.

List of Participating Radio Stations

No.	Name	Area of coverage
1	Pamoja FM	Nairobi/Kibra
2	Koch FM	Nairobi/Korogocho
3	Ruben FM	Nairobi/Mukuru
4	Mtaani Radio	Nairobi/Dagoretti
5	Ghetto FM	Nairobi/Mukuru
6	Domus FM	Kajiado North
7	BUS radio	Kajiado Central
8	Ol-Toilo Le Maa FM	Narok/Suswa
9	Radio Waumini	Nairobi
10	Radio Maria Nairobi	Nairobi
11	Osootua FM	Narok
12	Kangema Ranet	Murang'a
13	Radio Maria Nyeri	Nyeri/Mt. Kenya
14	Lwasi FM	Siaya
15	Radio Shahidi	Isiolo
16	Echami FM	Isiolo
17	Radio Maria Murang'a	Murang'a
18	Radio Mchungaji/Serian	Samburu/Maralal
19	Radio Jangwani	Marsabit
20	Mwanedu FM	Taita Taveta/Voi
21	Kwale Ranet	Kwale
22	Bulala Ranet	Busia
23	Nganyi Ranet	Vihiga/Luanda
24	Radio Mikayi	Siaya
25	Radio Rameny	Migori
26	Radio Ratego	Siaya
27	Wega FM	Meru
28	Ata Naveche FM/Echami	Turkana/Kakuma
29	REF FM	Turkana/Kalobeyei
30	Radio Mangelete	Makueni
31	Wajir CR	Wajir

List of Participating Radio Stations

31	Wajir CR	Wajir
32	SAWANGA FM	Laikipia
33	Nagaa Radio	Isiolo
34	VOX Radio	Tana River/Garsen
35	Amani FM Nakuru	Nakuru
36	Kimuri FM	Embu
37	Ekialo Kiona	Homa Bay
38	Mitume FM	Kitale
39	Radio Upendo	Eldoret
40	Sogoot FM	Rift Valley/Mau
41	Radio Thome	Kitui