Chapter 12

InterWorld Radio:
"The kind of thing that connects you to the world"[1]

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> *It's one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon. We're sitting in the makeshift studio of Radio Rhino, a small independent FM radio station in the northern Ugandan town of Lira. The studio, which is the entire radio station, is soundproofed with egg boxes. But three of us are keeping still and quiet, as the technician switches on the expensive-looking WorldSpace digital receiver and holds a microphone up to the speaker. The crystal clear voice of the BBC World Service newsreader fills the room, and Radio Rhino begins broadcasting its news, live, to a potential listenership of six million, in and around the town of Lira. It's obvious from the nonchalance and expertise that accompanies Radio Rhino's news broadcast, that this is something that happens every day.*

This brief description raises all sorts of questions. How do radio stations get international news? How do they use new technologies? What does it mean that local stations are able to so easily broadcast BBC news? Will new technologies make it easier for established international broadcasters such as the BBC to dominate the airwaves? Will it also be easy for foreign commercial broadcasters to dominate the global airwaves? How can a small, struggling, independent station such as Radio Rhino find an alternative source of news and information? Does it want to?

These and similar questions were central to the foundation of InterWorld Radio, an Internet-based radio news and features service run by the Panos Institute in partnership with OneWorld International. Equally important was an understanding of new challenges and opportunities confronting pro-development communication initiatives, and of the key role that radio continues to play.

Radio is increasingly acknowledged as one of the most important media for involving the public in development processes – not only for rural areas where TV and newspapers do not reach – but even for urban centres. Radio is in a growth period, especially in developing countries where liberalisation policies and low-cost FM broadcast technologies have enabled the emergence of thousands of new stations, both commercial and community-owned. There are now 38 FM radio stations in Uganda and 50 in Ghana. These are commercial, not community media since they are not owned or governed by a community, but they provide critical opportunities for public debate and, with imaginative programming, real opportunities for perspectives from different communities to be heard. While these stations tend to serve only small geographic areas, are urban focused and often driven by advertising and consumer values, they are also hugely popular, very significant in shaping public opinion and offer new and important opportunities for public interest programming and debate.

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[1] John Musuku, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation.

It is also clear that many from this new generation of popular urban FM stations do not have the resources, networks, skills or experience to gather international news or to offer their listeners interesting, high-quality news and features from other countries. Yet given the crucial role they play in development and democracy – it is vital that these stations gain access to such programming. InterWorld Radio was designed to fill the gap.

What is InterWorld Radio?

InterWorld Radio is a free, English language, daily news and audio feature service for radio stations. It is funded by the Ford Foundation, the UK Community Fund, and the UK Department for International Development. By commissioning and distributing short audio features from a pool of local journalists around the world, InterWorld Radio provides a regular service of topical features designed for broadcast within magazine programmes or as discussion pieces for phone-ins or studio debates. InterWorld Radio also publishes a daily international news bulletin of up to eight items and distributes it to radio stations by email, and from the website – the main interface for the service. InterWorld Radio sees the Internet as one way of offering radio stations content in different formats depending on the needs and limitations of the users. This can range from low-tech text-based email bulletins and newsletters, through to scripts stored as file attachments on the web site, low-quality audio files that can be streamed-on-demand or downloaded for broadcast, and all the way to FM broadcast-quality audio files.

Panos and Radio

Founded in 1986 the Panos Institute exists to stimulate debate on global environment and development issues and to promote the plurality and diversity of media. Panos has long recognised the role of radio in development. Panos' global radio strategy is still evolving, as is the broadcasting sector itself, but at its heart lies a commitment to radio as a key player in many of the processes that involve communities in public debates and lead to change. Panos London's regional centers in Kampala (Uganda), Lusaka (Zambia), and Kathmandu (Nepal) run regional or local radio projects using a range of innovative methodologies. The independent Panos Institute of West Africa's (PIWA) Banque de Programmes Online did on a regional level many of the things that InterWorld Radio does more globally.[2] While PIWA maintains its programme production and distribution systems (and is also exploring satellite distribution), it now focuses mainly on working directly with radio stations, providing technical assistance, and increasingly training in management and networking. Panos Paris, as well as looking at satellite distribution, is also providing analysis of and support to the Central African broadcast environment. As part of this stable of radio projects, InterWorld Radio, currently based in London, complements the regional projects.

Unlike some other Internet-based radio news and features services, InterWorld Radio is available free-of-charge to all radio stations that want it. Worldwide, the community radio movement is succeeding to some extent in demonstrating why it is important that communities should own and run their own local radio stations. InterWorld Radio, on the other hand, is part of a complementary movement in which the ownership of the airwaves is less important than the public service role that radio stations play, a role that can be fulfilled by stations regardless of their ownership model. InterWorld Radio, therefore, is equally available to radio stations that are state-owned, public, community-owned or private and commercial.

InterWorld Radio is the only radio project within Panos designed to have a global reach and to work primarily in the English language. As such, the 'typical' radio station that InterWorld Radio targets to work with is an urban-based radio station that broadcasts some or all of its talk schedule in English. It could be either private, community or state-owned,

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[2] See chapter 4 by Attias and Deflander for more about Panos Institute of West Africa's projects.

broadcasting locally in FM or nationally on AM and will probably be taking advantage of the interactivity and participatory nature of radio by hosting studio debates and phone-ins. In short, a radio station much like Radio Rhino mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Radio Rhino's owner and former director, Andrew Ocero, prides himself on the editorial independence of the radio station and speaks with obvious pleasure about the shows where his broadcasters are able to challenge local politicians and public authorities by getting them in to the studio and grilling them, live.

There are many other examples of radio stations playing this role in their own community – from Radio Sagarmatha in Nepal, to Joy and Choice FM in Ghana, to Monitor FM, based in Kampala, Uganda. Angelo Izama, who has joined InterWorld Radio on behalf of Monitor FM, produces and presents the morning show, one of the most popular shows on the station. He describes Monitor FM as "an independent station that tries as impartially as possible to present news and issues to the Ugandan public", and to act as a "government watchdog". It promotes free speech, he says, and "isn't afraid to tell the other side of the story". Evidence of this, says Izama, is that their journalists are sometimes arrested as a result of their stories. When asked how the features carried by InterWorld Radio were of use to his programme, Izama said "there's no school here teaching people how to do this kind of radio, so I listened to IWR to get an idea of how to make features."

But the big challenge for Panos and InterWorld Radio was – and still is – to find out whether radio stations like these want or are able to use international English-language content in their programming schedule and whether they are able to use the Internet to get it.

Why put audio on the Internet?

As early as 1986 Panos Radio, in London, was producing radio documentaries and distributing them to radio stations in developing countries by cassette – a laborious and expensive way of distributing audio programmes. The main selling point of Panos Radio programmes was that the items were commissioned from local journalists and reflected unique perspectives on development issues. In their reports, journalists had to get out of the studio and into their own communities so that audiences all over the world could listen to the voices and views of ordinary people – so often ignored in the international media. Throughout the 90s, the cocktail of radio stations ordering Panos Radio programmes began to change from being predominantly state-owned or public broadcasting corporations, to include local radio, independent radio, FM radio and community radio.

But monitoring and evaluation to judge the impact of each series revealed that although the programmes were broadcast, they were often simply inserted in to a station's schedule without being adapted for local audiences, and thus did not realise their full potential for contributing to development initiatives. Panos decided to look for a way of producing a more rapid and regular service, one that would involve local broadcasters in the process of producing and adapting content. This began to seem even more vital given the changes that were taking place in the broadcasting sector as new stations went on air with new ideas about how to make radio. While the inclusion of hard information seemed to be prioritised less on the newer radio stations than on older public or state-owned stations, the early fears that FM radio would turn into a miasma of lowest common denominator music programming have often proved unfounded. Some of the most popular and compelling programming on the new stations has turned out to be talk-based radio, with phone-ins and studio discussion programmes often stretching formerly rigid boundaries of political expression. It became clear that for any international audio content to be relevant it would have to match the increasing vibrancy of the sector.

Meanwhile, there was a growing interest in the implications of new information and communication technologies (ICT) for radio. The international development community already recognised that there was some potential for new ICTs to play a part in tackling

poverty – but several important initiatives began to stress the importance of linking "traditional" and new technologies in order to reach wider audiences. For example, the Global Knowledge Action Plan, a statement from the Global Knowledge Action Summit that brought together major multilateral and bilateral organisations (including the World Bank and several UN organisations) in Kuala Lumpur in 2000, placed priority on "integrating existing with new technologies for access to content" and on the importance of "distributing broadcast quality audio over the Internet, thereby making use of existing and new convergent technologies".[3]

The idea for InterWorld Radio was born out of a spirit of convergence, not simply between old and new technology, but between the ideas of Panos and OneWorld Online – two respected organisations working with information and communications in developing countries. Panos wanted to find a way to modernise its editorial service for radio stations, and at the same time, OneWorld Online was experimenting with ways to encourage radio stations to join in the information revolution that was already successfully transforming other parts of civil society. OneWorld Online had already run a pilot project called OneWorld Radio News Service, which was conceived as a database for radio stations to exchange locally-produced content. Although this service failed to reach a wide audience some of the lessons learnt from this early pilot project, such as the importance of file size and the need for quality editorial content, were instructive for InterWorld Radio.

Connectivity

In theory, InterWorld Radio was putting quality editorial content on the web at the same time as many different organisations – including Panos and OneWorld Online – were planning to work in the realm of connecting radio stations to the Internet at the other end.

Except of course in practice it has not yet happened. Internet access for radio stations in developing countries remains a challenge, especially in Africa. Kumah Dra at Radio Ghana says that he joined InterWorld and "tried to download once, but it took 30 minutes and broke off. It's a very old computer. I do have a laptop that I could connect at an Internet café, but it's expensive." Projects that have tried to put audio content on the Internet in Africa have largely failed so far. The last few years have witnessed a major puncturing of the inflated expectations invested in the Internet. The dot-com crash in the North coincided with a more realistic assessment by development organisations of the potential of the Internet. It is not likely to become a mass medium in Africa where even now less than one percent of the population has access.

Yet Panos is more committed than ever to the InterWorld Radio *brand* that it has established, and believes that the level of interest in the content and format of the news and features that InterWorld produces, justifies attempts to take forward the technology side of the project, within a much wider strategy. Radio stations still need access to email and the World Wide Web, still need to be able to broadcast high quality international content and journalists still need to be able to report on their local stories with local voices for an international audience.

What has InterWorld Radio achieved?

Since the launch of InterWorld Radio in August 2000, 125 radio stations in 59 different countries have joined the network – over half of them in developing countries. Figure 1 shows the geographical spread of current members.

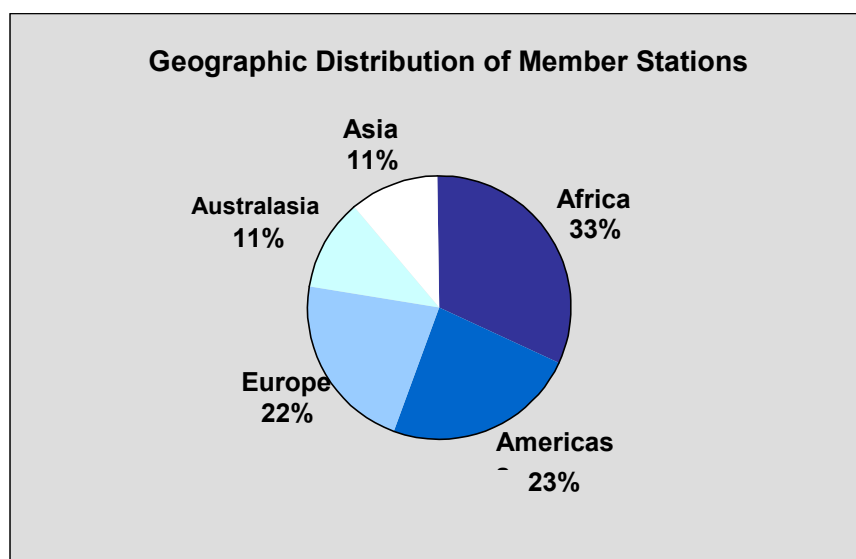[3] Global Knowledge Action Plan, Page 10, Item Access (4), Global Knowledge Partnership, 2000.

Figure 1

There are clear geographical differences between the type of radio stations that join: in Africa and Asia most members classify themselves as either independent or commercial, whereas in Europe and the Americas most of the stations are community-owned. While there are quite active relationships with some African community radio stations, they are not are "target" members, since many of them broadcast primarily in local languages.

News Bulletin

Sometimes the bulletin is read out in its entirety, but more often than not, it is incorporated in to other pieces. It gives perspectives not covered by other media, including the BBC. We use up to three of the bulletin pieces throughout the day, in English and translated into other languages.

– Peter Gomez, Gambia Radio and Television Services

The InterWorld News Bulletin is uploaded to the web site at 13:00 GMT every weekday, and emailed directly to the 93 radio stations that requested this when they joined. Next to the home page, the news is the most popular page on the web site, with the news bulletin being downloaded on average by 100 visitors a day. The bulletin is produced in the London office through a process of scouring many sources of news and information, primarily on the Internet, and packaging a selection in a radio script format, ready to read out on air. The editorial strategy aims at covering mainstream news as well as unreported or difficult-to-report items about global issues that affect development. There is no reason for the news writer to be based in London, so the aim is to move the news production to one of Panos' southern offices.

By collecting feedback from members, it is clear that the news bulletin is used in a variety of ways – with some stations using only one or two items and others reading the entire bulletin.

Features

Although our [local, African] journalists are fine with news, when it comes to doing features, it's a different ballgame. What you're doing is a whole new approach, the transfer of knowledge, the move away from current affairs into going deeper, it's very good.

– Ludger Schadomsky, producer of African Kaleidoscope on DW

In the 18 months it has been operating, InterWorld Radio has commissioned and produced 80 features from 37 countries – the vast majority from local journalists working in their own country. Nearly three-quarters of the features so far have come from developing countries, and as efforts to identify and recruit journalists bear fruit, this proportion is set to rise.

Only members with a password can download a broadcast-quality file and this makes it easy to monitor the download history of each feature, and of each member.[4] Two of the most popular features have been from Brazil, about residents of a favela learning to use the computer, and from East Africa, where pastoralists from different tribes talk about their experience of leaving home to settle in a big city. Although stations in Africa that can download choose predominantly features from Africa, they also download features from outside the continent. For example, Joy FM in Ghana downloaded a feature from Porto Alegre in Brazil about an innovative participatory budget. The international broadcasters, such as Deutsche Welle[5], and many of the stations in the North, download almost everything. Many of the members that regularly download broadcast the features as part of a magazine programme or as an introductory piece to spark a discussion.

Lessons Learned

Technology

Radio ZNBC had its phone lines cut off for non-payment of bills. It paid half but still got cut off, so we've been using friends' accounts to check emails. We need technical advice. I'm not sure what kind of computer we've got, whether it's got a sound card. I think we'd be willing to pay a small fee to be able to use a reliable access centre.

– Reuben Kajokoto, Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (state-owned)

Since launching the service, Panos has carried out feedback surveys with members who join but are unable to download programmes. The panoply of reasons only serves to confirm what is already well documented – that access is not simply about connectivity, but also about basic PC equipment not being audio compatible, about skills and training, about who has access to the PC with the Internet connection, which is often in the manager's office, and about cost.

InterWorld Radio needs to be part of a much wider strategy for enabling radio stations and programme makers to access the Internet and it is in the early stages of a long term collaboration with other partners interested in working with access for radio stations, particularly in Africa. In the meantime, the range of options InterWorld Radio offers, including text based services, and lower quality audio features, needs to be promoted more clearly on literature and in our correspondence with radio stations. In particular InterWorld Radio's website, which is currently being totally restructured, needs to show much more clearly the range of options available, and signing up for IWR's services should also be possible via e-mail, rather than just through the site.

Furthermore, IWR needs to look beyond the Internet as the only solution for delivering a rapid, regular audio feature service to radio stations. It is possible that in countries where connectivity will remain a problem for many years to come, delivery by satellite feeds should be explored (as Panos West and Central Africa are doing).

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[4] Any visitor can download lower quality files from the site. Evidence indicates that some stations that are unable to download the large broadcast quality files, do download and use the smaller lower quality audio. However, IWR is not able to monitor this use.
[5] Germany's official international radio service.

At the time of writing, InterWorld Radio is in the process of re-designing its website. The new site will incorporate a large amount of information about how to organise and structure news and audio features for distribution over the Internet. It will also offer new functions – such as a facility for adding text-based scripts for each feature, *sound bites* that producers can download to remix, features in languages other than English, and the ability for users, including broadcasters, to send an email to contributing journalists.

Downloading Audio

Downloading can take as long as 10 minutes, with interruptions. I've used features in my 1-hour variety programme – Kingdom Today – though never a feature in its entirety. I've always supplemented it with studio discussions and interviews.

– Mohammed Saqqa, Radio Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Using the Internet is expensive and access is limited – we'd prefer emailed communications. Radio Phoenix still uses the InterWorld Bulletin but not the audio features.

– Dave Kumwenda, Radio Phoenix, Zambia

Although InterWorld Radio set out to produce finished features that could be slotted in to existing programmes, the features are being used much more creatively than this. Programme makers want to be able to use parts of interviews, *vox pops*, and actuality to mix in to their own programmes, or to translate into local languages. We are therefore restructuring how we upload audio to the web site, so that members can download unmixed pieces of the feature, rather than the whole feature.

The North

InterWorld: Simply information that no one else covers.

– Cory Joseph, C101.5 Mohawk College Radio, Canada

Without any strategic marketing drive so far, InterWorld Radio has succeeded in reaching radio stations in the north, most of whom have no problems downloading the large broadcast-quality files. Some of these members download and broadcast most of the features we upload and northern audiences should become more of a strategic priority for InterWorld Radio, with the aim of enabling voices and perspectives from the south to reach audiences in the north.

Networking

InterWorld Radio has so far failed to take advantage of the potential offered by existing networks that distribute content to radio stations. Originally the project was designed to work with – or even create – "download centres" or hubs that would copy audio on to cassettes for local or regional distribution. In practice it is apparent that it may often be better to reinforce the work of existing networks set up to distribute content. An example of this is Democracy Radio, based in Cape Town, South Africa. Run by the Institute of Democracy, this project produces a weekly programme dealing with issues around democracy, such as how Parliament works, or a new policy on education. Every two weeks the programmes are put on a CD and mailed to a network of 30 stations that have no other way of receiving them. Brett Davidson, a journalist there, says he hopes to be able to use their CD distribution to provide some InterWorld Radio packages to the South African stations in the Democracy Radio network.

In a similar way, InterWorld Radio's news bulletin is often redistributed by existing networks, including the MISANET news exchange, run from Namibia by the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

> *I think it's great to be able to give isolated South Africans a better connection with some issues in other parts of the world.*

– Brett Davidson, journalist at Democracy Radio.

Local content needs closer collaboration with radio stations and broadcasters

To date commissioning and production for the InterWorld Radio news and feature service is centred in London. Yet InterWorld has quickly learnt that it needs to have closer ties with radio stations, and in particular, with programme makers or broadcasters working on popular programmes. It cannot do this with its team based in London, and, technically, there is no reason why the heart of the editorial team needs to be based there. As a result, InterWorld Radio has kick-started a strategy for establishing radio units in two of Panos' regional offices in Africa. The radio units will be equipped with digital editing facilities and a producer to commission and upload features every week.

These radio units will also play a vital role in identifying the key most popular and influential radio programmes broadcast in urban centres throughout the region. In this way, InterWorld Radio can, through its regional offices, support local programme production that incorporates the news and features from InterWorld and other sources in to a magazine-style format for national and regional distribution. Communication Corner in Nepal, for example, uses InterWorld Radio features in the two magazine programmes it produces for airing on a network of FM radio stations in the Kathmandu valley. It is this level of programme production support that will enable InterWorld Radio to become sustainable in one sense of the word: once local programme-makers are generating locally relevant content using international news and features, they won't need to depend on a service such as InterWorld Radio.

Conclusion

InterWorld Radio is a content-focused project, having invested a large proportion of its budget in the first two years in establishing a strong independent editorial service and commissioning high quality reports that broadcasters can use in existing radio segments. It remains a unique service for radio stations in developing countries. In the context of the rapidly changing radio environment, InterWorld Radio aims to work with the expanding urban FM independent sector, and has managed to carry out its aim of helping radio stations fulfil a public service role. The process of liberalisation continues, the entry costs of establishing radio stations are decreasing and the regulatory environment in most countries is becoming more flexible. Consequently, the explosion in radio stations that has occurred over the last half decade continues and the number of radio stations that want or are likely to want to use InterWorld Radio is rising rapidly.

That said, however, InterWorld Radio is also a technology project that relies heavily for its success in finding a way to ensure that radio stations in developing countries can gather international content from the Internet. As such, a core part of InterWorld Radio's activities in the next stage of the project will be to become part of a wider strategy to improve radio stations access to new technologies and to support their use of those technologies to produce high quality content.

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