Preface

Bruce Girard

In February 2001, the FAO organised an International Workshop on rural radio entitled *Information and Communication Technologies Servicing Rural Radio: New Contents, New Partnerships*. The fifty workshop participants exchanged experiences and developed ideas for how radio and ICTs could be used together to support rural communities. We were enthused by the idea of combining radio with the Internet and with its potential for breathing new life into radio and for making the Internet's information truly accessible to rural populations. As Carleen Gardner, FAO's Assistant Director General for Information, said at the conclusion of the workshop:

> *Sometimes looked down upon as the "poor relation" of television, and certainly considered old-fashioned compared to the Internet, radio today has become the one to watch. That may sound like a bad pun, but as our discussions here this week have proved, radio's stock is rising like never before. Still the most portable communication medium, the most widespread and the most economical, radio is now proving itself versatile enough to go hand-in-hand with the Web.*

This book grew out of that workshop. It focuses on the use of the Internet by radio stations in their efforts to support initiatives for democratic and sustainable development and it includes insights and experiences from all parts of the globe.

It was also inspired by two conferences organised by Comunica and sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The first, in Kuala Lumpur in 1999, was attended by broadcasters, Internet activists and policy makers from Asia and the second, held in Florida in 2000 focused on the convergence of independent and community radio and ICTs in Latin America and the Caribbean. Both of these conferences were attached to the annual gathering of the International Institute of Communications, an organisation founded thirty-four years ago with the then unique idea of bringing together people from broadcasting and telecommunications.

While Ms. Gardner's comment inspired the title of the book, reminding us of the versatility and potential of the radio ICT combination, the subtitle *Radio, New ICTs and Interactivity*, merits a few words here. This book is not concerned with how individuals or communities can interact with radio stations or the Internet via instant polling, "personalised" web interfaces, phone in radio programmes or remote broadcasts from the town market. Instead it focuses on interactivity as a social communication process – people and communities interacting with each other rather than with the media. It is about how radio, in combination with the Internet, can better inform people about themselves and the world, stimulating (interactive) communication within and between communities, and leading to a common understanding of problems and to common proposals for their resolution.

The chapters in this book are grouped into five sections. The five chapters in the first section introduce concepts and context important for understanding and analysing radio and Internet projects. The next three sections of the book each look at a number of cases of radio and ICT projects, organised into the broad categories described in chapter one – networking projects, community intermediary or gateway projects, and projects connecting migrants with their home communities. The final section includes three chapters with information that will

be particularly useful to readers unfamiliar with rural radio and the essential role it plays in people's lives. Jean-Pierre Ilboudo and Robert Hilliard situate rural radio in a historical perspective, considering the development of the medium in Africa over the past half century and over a span of almost 100 years in the USA. A chapter from Latin America illustrates how a "typical" rural radio station works to fulfil a community's day to day communication needs.

There are numerous people to thank for this book. Loy Van Crowder first conceived it when he was in the Research, Extension and Training Division of the FAO. The staff members of the Communication for Development Group provided support throughout the production process and Marianne Sinko designed the book. Claudia Rodríguez designed the cover. Scott Eavenson translated chapters four, thirteen and fourteen from their original French and Spanish. Amy Mahan provided insights, editing assistance and invaluable support. Reinhard Keune, who passed away a few months before the book was completed, deserves special recognition, both for his support of this project and for the vision and commitment that marked his career at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and his two terms as president of the UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication.