Evaluation Summaries

International Labour Office

Small Enterprise Media in Africa

Quick Facts

Countries: Uganda

Final Evaluation: 6 October 2009

Mode of Evaluation: independent

Technical Area: Small enterprise development, Media

Evaluation Management: Regional Office for Africa

Evaluation Team: David Sanders, Ailsa Buckley

Project Start: January 2006

Project End: June 2009

Project Code: UGA/03/01/SID

Donor: SIDA (1,491,312 USD)

Keywords: Small enterprise development, media, business services

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The ILO SEMA (Small Enterprise Media in Africa) project aimed to address a critical constraint to small enterprise development to provide access to timely and relevant business information to entrepreneurs in Uganda. The project partners worked with private sector service providers to increase the number and outreach of radio programmes specifically focused on the small business sector. The project attempted to support small enterprise development and business environment reform in order to foster the growth of small and micro enterprises and thus stimulate economic growth. The overall objective of the intervention was the elimination of poverty by contributing towards conducive and equitable environments for entrepreneurship, small business survival and growth using the media.

The initial phase of the project concentrated on business services delivery: and worked to maximize the potential of radio stations to enhance the flow of information to, from, and within the private sector in a sustainable manner for the benefit of small businesses. It sought to capacity build the commercial mass media to provide business information, platforms for debate on business issues, a voice to influence policy processes and a channel for the delivery of business advisory services. It did so by partnering with media trainers to capacitate the production and sales departments of a small number of radio stations. The project was designed to specifically address the issue of 'paid to air programming' that has traditionally been driven by content owners buying airtime and providing supply led content. The SEMA model aimed to capacitate stations to engage interactively with audiences and content owners to provide demand led programming that would attract listeners and therefore advertising revenue from advertisers and sponsors. The mission was to ensure the long term sustainability of business programming without continued project support to stakeholders.

The project built consequently upon its initial successes and took an evolutionary journey from a pilot exercise to an up-scaled programme during its second phase, working with numerous stations across Uganda. It engaged with other stakeholders in the industry and has sought replication of success initiatives both in the market and by other practitioners in other countries. Over the years the project evolved to respond to issues within the broader media industry and developed a systemic approach to ensure sustainability of both the radio programmes and of the media market itself.

In its final phase the project sought to maximize the potential of the project to influence the way private sector development integrates media into its work both in Uganda and internationally. It has sought to consolidate its successes and focus on exiting the market via a number of targeted activities. One of these key activities was the consolidating, documenting and disseminating of learning of the project. In response to this, the project has engaged in activities focused on the wider popularization and replication of the media programmes.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

Purpose:

- Undertake an independent end-of-project evaluation of the whole SIDA funded SEMA project for the purpose of informing on replicating a similar project in other countries.

- Develop a high quality resource document that offers practical information on how replicating SEMA can be successfully done.

- Within the resource document given insights into factors leading to success or failure, what makes up the ideal environment where such a radio project is likely to succeed and what adjustments need to be made. Include all the business development service concepts that can be used to address the various capacity building areas to be replicated within such a model.

- Successfully finalize the resource document after presentation to the end of the project review meeting.

Scope:
The evaluation covers the entire project duration (three years). Regarding geographical coverage, all the project focus areas are considered by the study.

Clients:

- The donor supporting the programme
- ILO offices in the region and world-wide
- Project partners

Methodology of evaluation
The evaluation applied the following methodology:

- Review of project documentation
- Detailed interviews with key informants and stakeholders
- Analysis of key elements in the implementation of the programme which may contribute to future replication
- Validation of findings in a stakeholder workshop

Main Findings & Conclusions

The evaluation took an innovative approach and focused to a large extent on key lessons learned to facilitate replication of the methodology (see section below). Overall, the evaluation found that:

- The project was successful in its delivery against log frame;
- The project was highly innovative both in its approach and in its ability to find solutions to some pretty tough market issues;
- The project contributed to the market adopting many of the project's piloted activities - increased radio programmes, methods/focus of production, skills development and revenue acquisition,

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Media is an important institution for private sector development: It acts as a platform for civil society to influence legal and regulatory frameworks, contributes to the building of human capital and can contribute to stimulating increased employment in the labour market. Media is part of the 'physical capital' or infrastructure, in the same way as telecommunications that stimulates and supports private sector growth. It is a channel through which direct information, advice and services can be provided to business women and men.

Policy impacts greatly on media related interventions*:* Without journalists and producers having the legislative space to be able to investigate and report effectively, the opportunity of programming to sufficiently reflect audience need is limited, and thus the opportunity of content to create real impact in restricted.

The policy agenda is a long term and consistent issue for developing media markets: In the case of Uganda the political environment impacts on radio through a combination of local government monitoring and exercise of control at District level. This is coupled with distortion through the profile of ownership within the radio industry, most notably in the proportion of stations owned directly or indirectly through political interests.

Media surveys are for the whole market: The wider media industry, including advertisers, needs to see that the media survey is not something simply offered by the researcher but one to which they have a stake. It is important that the industry feel they should be more involved in the preparation of the survey. Given its importance, there ought to be separation between ownership and the logistics of compiling the survey. Perhaps ownership should be transferred to an independent body such as a trust which would contain representation of all stakeholders – media, advertisers and advertising agencies alike?

Whole markets and their players must benefit **–** Each function and player exists in an interdependent market. As such sustainability is ramped on the basis that each player is clearly cognitive of their benefit. Without this there is a risk of a detrimental effect on the wider market.

Implement a full market scan - Due to the evolutionary nature of the SEMA project it is only with hindsight that one can realise that scanning of the entire media market is required in order to adopt a systemic approach to project design. This involves looking at the broader market picture, identifying market players and their functions and exploring the influences - while also shaping a future vision of the desired market change. The sources of understanding can be varied and not just focused on formal research and studies. A scan could be done before a project is designed or implemented or can be undertaken during implementation. The SEMA project took a very responsive and incremental approach and undertook various assessments during the life of the project rather than at the onset. Such an approach is a testament to SEMA's success that allowed activities to be re informed from continuous learning.

Station 'buy in' is imperative: SEMA approached stations directly to sell the project concept and was the driver of the intervention, rather than ensuring adequate buy in and station ownership. In the case of Mega FM in Gulu, it was felt that the initial presentations over sold the potential for commercial revenues, although audience impact proved strong. This also runs the risk of the radio stations becoming over dependant on SEMA and its core activities, especially training and therefore risks long term sustainability after project close out.

Management commitment is important: Weaknesses within the management of a commercial radio station can potentially undermine business programming in terms of both their quality and continuation. Poor management structures and an unwillingness to invest in programming and staff are a threat to quality developmental programming; particularly programming that involves journalists undertaking research and investigative journalism.

Openness to change is essential: Radio owners and managers often model rural stations on urban, English-language format stations. Stations must acknowledge the demand for locally relevant, informative and developmental content and be prepared to experiment and innovate. A station must also recognize the opportunity for its own development and the need to embrace change throughout its organization.

Map the market: As regards the opportunity for private consultancy - no market mapping was undertaken in terms of preparedness of stations to pay for services, how often and at what rate. This increased the risk on the part of consultants, many of whom were employed during the course of this project. The result was that a number of project consultants were employed by the project rather than remaining independent.

Be inclusive: By adopting an inclusive relationship with consultants the project was capable of involving consultants in the drafting of activities and populating of Terms of Reference – this provided stakeholders the opportunity of owning the process.

Embed components in the market: The project document specified that the project would seek to embed the 'Making Development Newsworthy' (MDN) curriculum through educational institutions. This was found to be difficult within the project period since it had not qualified value to those institutions. Instead the activity was amended to demonstrate value through content provider – radio station linkages. Subsequently this process was then documented and disseminated to a broader audience for later adoption.

Evolve and take stock: The project evolved over a period of nine years. At the outset it was a business services delivery project that evolved into a market development project but without a reworking of the core deliverables.

Enlist champions: An element of SEMA's success may be attributed to the champions that have pushed its agenda and, to some extent, the strategies and technical support afforded it by the ILO and is donors. Such projects that adopt a low profile and lead to slower immediate results require 'champions'.

Contract external technical missions – SEMA involved their champions and project manager from the first phase to offer continuous guidance and support during the extension ensuring project continuity.

Establish baseline information: Scope out case studies and information at different levels of the market system prior to project start. This makes it easier to extrapolate potential positive economic impact at business level and demonstrate impact at other levels of the market.

Standardise rates: It is difficult to qualify level of value associated with individual consultants, since there was no standardisation of rates until 2008.

Accept the costs of learning: This type of project tries out new concepts and pilots activities. So there must be acceptance on the part of the donor that some contracts may not deliver their expected value

Benefits are delivered after completion: It is fundamental that there are a large number of intangible benefits associated with the choice of working to develop the market system. Many of these benefits will be observable in the long term as the market seeks to adopt those elements which work for them. Hence, a large proportion of value will be generated beyond the end of the project period.

Recognise staff expertise: Agencies tend to record staff time under management budget headings and assess efficiency by measuring the proportion of management costs to overall expenditure. When staffs are to be harnessed as expertise on human-resource intensive project, and not just as administrators or managers, then labour costs must be accurately presented and explained to better reflect the requirements of the project approach.

Processes are important: Under the tenure of the original Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), there was no processed approach to managing activities. The project's activities were informed by groupings of activities which, although were subject to assessment and appropriacy depending on the stakeholder, activities were largely standardized, notably training. The project during 2006 – 2007 became overly media centric. This was in line with the objective of maximizing the number of radio stations being crowded into the project. By adopting the process, the project was able to reassess available resources and focus on delivery to the key beneficiaries the audiences.

Audiences are the key: It is notable that audience research demands resource commitment on the part of the station. Whilst it is critical in regards to both maintaining and improving the quality of programming, it does demand that senior station management recognize their audiences as the only way of sustaining their business. The implementation of continued internal audience research is often leveraged within existing staff capacity and seen as a 'burden' cost, especially if the station did not perceive the programming as being profitable.

Audience research is critical: Radio stations who understood the critical need for planned audience research accepted that this was the only way to 'own' their audiences. In the case of Mega FM, Gulu, it was considered that small business programmes as drivers of audience, were more important than the programmes themselves being commercially profitable.

Content monitoring is an important tool: It helps in the assessment of station performance and indicates areas of strength and weakness. However, the level of sustainability of this service is an issue. SEMA paid for the compilation of this information, and no evidence exists that stations were either paying or were prepared to pay to continue the service.

Be cognisant of training costs: Asking existing core consultants to facilitate training of new consultants was seen by some as a conflict of interest. In addition, there was no understanding of the capability of rural stations to meet independent consultant costs and as a result few of the radio partners had engaged the services of consultants within the project period. Consultants were seen as too expensive for a number of independent stations.

Do not offer training for free: By SEMA offering extensive 'free' consulting and training during the project period, partner stations had no need of incurring additional consulting costs. It remains to be seen as to whether the expansion to the consulting market is sustainable.

Allow partners to design the training regime: Although training needs were assessed, stations were usually offered consultant designed training programmes. Consultants were also limited in their time to follow up with trainees Noting factors such as staff turnover, it is imperative that the training architecture be such that the training period allows for refresher training programmes and remedial action where required. It is important to note that even within the length of the SEMA intervention; most partner radio stations maintain their own training regime.

Build awareness among advertisers: Advertisers continue to be largely unaware of the opportunities offered by rural radio. They buy on the basis of time slot (peak) and price because of a lack of differentiation on the part of stations. Key advertisers remain unaware of the value of content and the potential for commercial opportunities within these programmes. This is attributable to a number of factors; radio sales staff turnover, the quality of radio sales staff, remuneration structures, communication issues between sales teams in Kampala and head office, poor customer service on the part of the radio station, continued price discounting of business programmes limited understanding of radio by advertisers and advertising agencies.

Mainstream and package programmes: Those programmes which are sustainably profitable have been mainstreamed by the radio station. The station has marketed the programme and placed it on the schedule at a time attractive to advertisers. In addition, profitable programmes tend to also be 'package' sold meaning that the station has expanded the programme beyond its initial once per week slot, and either repeated the show, or increased the amount of small business programming. This is subsequently sold as a more sustainable package to advertisers.

Commercial research partners and services are an important tool: They assist in the assessment of station and programme performance and an indicator of both strengths and weaknesses. However, these services must be sustainable. SEMA paid for the compilation of audience research, but the challenge is to ensure that stations understand the value and benefit from such research and are prepared to pay to continue independently purchasing these services. Taken in tandem with the work undertaken to encourage the creation of internal research panels, the project correctly identified that a robust research partner is critical to alleviating risks to long term sustainability.

How research is financed is an issue: Currently, the benchmark audience survey is run entirely as a commercial operation. The researcher shoulders the whole risk. This is hampering the ability of the industry to further develop the sample size, sampling area or the frequency of the survey, which most industry users feel should be monthly. In addition, buyers, and in particularly, advertising agencies, will purchase survey findings and subsequently pass them on to their clients, thereby limiting the ability of the researcher to broaden sales. The survey must find a different financing method. This must include everyone along the advertising chain, starting with clients, incorporating other stakeholders including media but also the development community and government.

Behavioural change needs to be station wide: There was sporadic performance between the partner radio stations. This is largely attributable to issues surrounding ownership and resultant commitment on the part of senior management. This implies a need for stronger qualification at the outset of the project. Some stations did not necessarily alter their systems and processes to respond to the business practices propounded by the facilitated programmes. For example, sales people did not alter their methods of selling in favour of just these programmes.

Pursue institutionalised practice: In order for a station to truly benefit they must alter their systems and processes appropriately. Innovative new radio practices stimulated by the SEMA project were adopted widely within the stations and influenced other programmes. This was actively pursued by the project as the SEMA supported programmes were often too different and diverse in their nature to sit comfortably on some schedules. Where stations institutionalized training systems and changes in practice from SEMA training they reported significant improvements in audience impact and on their overall level of commercial revenue.

Compare and contrast experiences: The extending of the project's work in the North provided the project with an opportunity to compare experiences with existing stations elsewhere. The project followed a similar model to that elsewhere, although given more limited station resources, the success of the project in this area was more inconsistent. Nevertheless there was clear evidence in stations that were committed to the process of innovative programming. Without directly being led by SEMA, some stations had mainstreamed their programming, and extended their radio brands to areas such as supporting farm days and linking farmers to buyers.

Time is essential: Given the project management issues in 2006, this component suffered start up delays. As a result the project had limited time to embed programmes. Implementation was sporadic and was subject to substantial risk, particularly given station ownership and commitment issues. Many of the northern Ugandan stations are currently developing and their financial and resource capacity to meet their obligations was more limited than stations elsewhere. In addition the concept of public debates did have the opportunity of providing communities with a strong voice. However, this concept was largely new and would have benefited from broader support such as formally linking NUWCO to radio stations and potential sponsors for both on and off air.

Offer choice: There was a desire on the part of the project to suggest the magazine format as a desired format. This, for many low revenue earning stations, represents significant commitment to investment. This places greater pressure on the need to acquire revenues quickly and threats to audience participation levels. It is suggested that the stations be given a broader range of format options, which may be, more palatable for senior station management, especially in the absence of commercial revenues.

Embed cross cutting issues: The gender component was assumed to be with specific regard to women's empowerment rather than understanding gender issues. This has relevance across all content, and there is validity in ensuring that gender is considered at all stages of programme preparation, from concept to scripting. In terms of better embedding, this could have been mainstreamed by including it within the other training components. By running it separately it risked alienating men especially in central and north where there are cultural factors which affect the role of women. Although cross cutting issues do have broad appropriacy to business programming, by not specifying in detail the relevance to purpose, it took time to find an appropriate application. These activities should be thought about at project start up. In addition, bringing cross cutting issues in earlier in the project may have served to better change business practices amongst radio stations, reflective of a weakness in the original project design.

Keep repeating the offer: There continue to be expectations beyond the financial element. Development agencies continue to expect ownership of content and want their branding on the content, particularly if they pay airtime costs. This can lead to brand dependence thus militating the opportunities for replacing airtime costs with commercial revenues.

Extend the offer: There remain risks to sustainability of content by applying MDN to only the development community. Although there is evidence that some radio station continue to use project facilitated experts such as local government offices, the project did not crowd in additional content providers such as commercial businesses and their extension workers. There remains a question of what happens when a development agency exits. This is particularly the case in Northern Uganda. The review team found that all the development agencies within the project had a positive reaction to their involvement. In the case of ACF they are repeating the initiative independently of SEMA later in 2009.

Embed the offer: Moving the working of MDN away from institutions to specific projects was a reflection that the MDN as a model is not yet established. The intention of driving the process through identified content partners aimed to not necessarily alter the way these organizations managed media, but rather was intended to demonstrate to radio stations that they could achieve more from content provision partnerships. This was successful although it remains to be seen whether those content providers who paid for airtime are able to partner long term without this airtime payment.

Replicate the offer: Even despite the well publicized work of SEMA, there is evidence that development agencies continue to support radio stations with financial contributions. Beyond paying for airtime, there is evidence that some agencies continue to donate equipment, and pay station staff to attend training. This represents a continued risk to station commitment to the SEMA model. As such it is imperative that the SEMA experience be picked up beyond agency project level such that donors encourage adoption.

Capture and disseminate learning on an ongoing basis: This element, targeted specifically at the ability to replicate elsewhere, suffered as a result of the management issues at the start of the project. Consequently, a number of the documents underpinning the training elements, such as the 'How to run a radio station manual' have not yet been published. It would have added greater value had the manual been compiled earlier in the project.

Institutionalise learning: There are a number of avenues for institutionalizing project learning within the donor community. Both within SIDA and ILO there appear to be a commitment to publishing and distributing. Both organizations have strong linkages, and there is an opportunity for broadening awareness and dissemination by further driving it through the Joint Donor Committee. In addition, there is the potential for aggregating the experiences globally and strategically positioning the project learning within other internal institutions by including it within the ILO training infrastructure.