

# EXPANDING ACCESS TO INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

THE CASE FOR ESTABLISHING  
COMMUNITY RADIOS IN  
SOMALILAND



Series One of "*Spotlight  
on The Media*"

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*“Even in today’s world of digital communications, radio reaches more people than any other media platform, conveys vital information and raises awareness on important issues.”*

**Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, speaking on 13 February 2020, World Radio Day**

# Introduction



Radio remains Africa's most accessible form of media, particularly for those outside urban areas. According to a survey of 34 African countries published in 2019, radio is ahead of television, print media and the internet as the most widely used source of news.<sup>1</sup>

Why? Radio is inexpensive to operate, can reach a large number of people quickly, and all it requires is a cheap radio — making it accessible to the poor.

Somaliland, Eritrea and Equatorial Guinea are alone in Africa in having only state-run radio stations.<sup>2</sup> On 4 June 2002, a Ministerial Decree was passed by the Somaliland Minister of Information, banning the operation of any radio stations in Somaliland other than Radio Hargeisa, making it impossible to operate any privately owned/run commercial and community radios. Radio Hargeisa was left to enjoy a state-sanctioned, state-mandated monopoly on radio broadcasting. The decree also stated that anyone opposing this ruling would face justice. The decision was justified on the basis that legislation governing the press did not exist at the time, and that such a measure was necessary to pre-empt the problems that could arise from unregulated private radio stations.<sup>3</sup>

In 2004, the Somaliland Press Law was passed, with Press defined as “newspapers, journals, periodicals, news agencies, radio, television, film and video, pictures, cartoons, books, music, and any other means of mass communication.”<sup>4</sup> Under Article 3, which covers freedom of the press, the law states that “no restraints can be imposed on the Press.”<sup>5</sup> Article 32 of the Constitution, passed in 2001, also guarantees freedom of the press. According to Article 32, “The press and other media are part of the fundamental freedoms of expression and are independent. All acts to subjugate them are prohibited, and a law shall determine their regulation.” Nevertheless, the unequivocal prohibition has steadfastly remained in place since 2002, to the extent that even some of the most seasoned media owners, whose requests for radio licenses were turned down in the last decade,

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer. 2019. “Merged Round 7 Data (34 Countries) (2019).” Available at <https://afrobarometer.org/data/merged-round-7-data-34-countries-2019>

<sup>2</sup> Myers, M. 2008. “Radio and Development in Africa.” Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b3ce5274a31e0000a5c/Radio\\_and\\_Development\\_in\\_Africa\\_concept\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b3ce5274a31e0000a5c/Radio_and_Development_in_Africa_concept_paper.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Somaliland Law. 4 June 2002. “Ministerial Decree Banning the Importation & Operation of Privately Owned Radio Stations.” Available at [http://www.somalilandlaw.com/broadcasting\\_\\_law.html#Radiobandecree](http://www.somalilandlaw.com/broadcasting__law.html#Radiobandecree)

<sup>4</sup> Article 2, The Press Law (No. 27/2004)

<sup>5</sup> Article 3(b), The Press Law (No. 27/2004)

say they believed the decree had legal legitimacy. **But since 2004, there has been no valid legal reason for the continued refusal by successive governments to issue licenses for privately owned/run radios.** By definition, the 2004 Press Law supersedes the Ministerial decree since it explicitly lifts all restraints from the press and provides the necessary legislative framework that was cited as the key reason for the 2002 ban. It has long been recognized that the 2004 Press Law needs an overhaul, and there have been countless meetings and workshops to debate the proposed amendments. But as of now, no changes have been implemented and it remains the law governing all aspects of the press.

Whatever justifications might have been cited in 2002 to deny the people of Somaliland the right to establish and listen to independent radio stations belong in the past and have no relevance today. This is particularly true given the large number of newspapers and private television stations, all of which exist because of the 2004 Press Law. On 18 May 2021, Somaliland will mark thirty years since the momentous decision to go it alone. It would be a sad reflection if the lack of political confidence in the people of Somaliland, which prompted the Decree of 2002, continues to cast a shadow over the future of broadcasting and on the right of people to receive and exchange information and to make their own news.





# The Radio Vacuum: The Monopoly of Radio Hargeisa Excludes the Rural Population

The absolute monopoly enjoyed by Radio Hargeisa poses a severe disadvantage to a large part of the Somaliland public who live outside the cities. 47 percent of Somaliland's population are classified as either nomadic or semi-nomadic, and 53 percent are said to live in cities and rural towns.<sup>6</sup> Because it has an FM radio transmission, the reception distance for its stations is unlikely to exceed 50-60 kilometres, or 30-40 miles, and even less on a hilly terrain. Radio Hargeisa is therefore out of reach to at least half the population of Somaliland.

Radio Hargeisa focuses mainly on political news and most stories are centred on events in the capital. Occasionally, there are reports from the regions. But they are usually reactions to an event – such as a visit by a politician or because a natural disaster has occurred. There is a local news vacuum in the regions. The result is an overreliance on hearsay and gossip, leading to ignorance and confusion on critical issues of public concern, including health and food security.

Airtime for public service programs is prohibitively expensive, which results in paid programming only from organizations with large budgets. Even programs considered as public interest information, relating to legal issues, public health, including about COVID-19, and the environment, benefiting all citizens of Somaliland, must be purchased at exorbitant prices.

Between September-December 2020, *Horizon*, over the course of several weeks, analysed Radio Hargeisa's broadcasts. They focused on broad topics with little input from voices outside of the main cities. For instance, one program discussed the state of education in Somaliland. But there was no coverage of the different challenges faced by rural communities – from a leaky roof and the absence of clean toilets, to a lack of water or the high dropout rate of girls from school.

Given the gaps in the geographical, and topical, coverage of Radio Hargeisa, it should come as no surprise to learn that Radio Ergo, a Nairobi-based humanitarian radio that broadcasts via shortwave, has a sizeable audience in Somaliland outside of Hargeisa, particularly in the eastern regions of Togdheer, Sool and Sanaag which are the furthest from Hargeisa. Radio Ergo's efforts to work in partnership with Radio Hargeisa on humanitarian content have not come to fruition. This is

<sup>6</sup> According to figures published by the Ministry of Planning and National Development in December 2018, using data from the 2016 *Somaliland in Figures*, Edition 14, the urban population constitutes 53% of the population. (<https://www.slministryofplanning.org/images/Statistics/SomalilandInfigures2016.pdf>)

unfortunate because such a collaboration would have enabled Radio Hargeisa to reach more people in the eastern regions, of which a large percentage live in remote villages. Greater access to Sool and Sanaag, which have been plagued by insecurity and clashes between the armies of Somaliland and Puntland, would also have made communication with those communities much easier.

A cursory glance at *Horizon's* analysis of what Radio Hargeisa covers, and does not cover, makes it abundantly clear that community radios would be of particular benefit to those living nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles. Community radio, a third medium which complements public broadcasters and commercial radio, would allow them to join broader discussions underway in Somaliland, to receive targeted reports on the challenges they face daily, such as grazing grounds, watering holes and safety issues affecting their location as and when they move. Community radios would also bring them new ideas and approaches to life, such as promoting education for girls, registering the birth of new-borns, taking advantage of vaccination campaigns for people as well as livestock, helping farmers develop innovative farming techniques, such as rain harvesting, to increase their crop yields and improve their livelihoods and food security or helping someone through all the steps of starting and maintaining a small business. They can also, as is shown by experience elsewhere, encourage listeners to tackle sensitive or taboo subjects, for example mental health, the rise in sexual violence against women and children and the harmful consequences of qat. The global Covid-19 pandemic has shown just how critical a tool community radios have become in ensuring the free flow of vital information.

Community radio, would also improve civic participation in Somaliland, especially among those living in rural areas. The upcoming parliamentary elections have been well publicized in cities, with a recent push for voter registration. Many of those running for office have been campaigning by posting videos on social media, being interviewed on television, or by posting billboards and posters in urban areas. Many potential voters are excluded simply by virtue of not being able to receive these campaign materials.

Since radio remains one of the only ways for those living in rural areas to obtain news and information in Somaliland, community radio would provide a platform for those running for office to both reach potential voters, and to target their campaign messages to them directly. People living in rural areas have different needs to those living in cities, and those living a nomadic lifestyle face other concerns.

The shortcomings at Radio Hargeisa reflect the wider media landscape in Somaliland where the overwhelming focus remains on political developments, with little attention paid to the wider social and economic questions that affect people's daily lives as individuals, families and communities or to events unfolding outside Hargeisa and the regional capitals. With government institutions and services thin on the ground beyond urban centres, compounded by the absence of international and local NGOs and media houses, the opportunities for rural populations in Somaliland to speak for themselves and to be a visible presence are minimal.

## Reaching the Last Mile: Looking to Community Radios to Fill the Gaps

*“It is a station operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community.”*

Community radio has grown exponentially across the world, including in Africa where South Africa leads the way. In an analysis of 249 stations by the Wits Radio Academy,<sup>7</sup> Soweto's JoziFM's weekly audience was put at 571,000, giving it more listeners than both South Africa's Broadcasting Corporation and commercial radio. Fourteen other stations in South Africa have over 100,000 weekly listeners. Zimbabwe is the latest country in Africa to give the green light to community radios. In January 2021, the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS), a national advocacy platform, issued statements to applaud “the historic step taken by the Broadcasting Association of Zimbabwe (BAZ) to license the first three community radio stations in post-Independence Zimbabwe.”<sup>8</sup> The government's decision was announced on 17 December 2020.

The inexpensive cost of radio helps to explain the widespread popularity and impact of radio in Africa. Equipment costs for establishing a 100-watt community radio station, with a coverage area of approximately 45 kilometres based on surrounding terrain, is around \$7,000 or less. Community radios in Africa, as in other parts of the world, face difficulties, of course, because of government censorship and intimidation, including outright violence, in recruiting experienced staff, attracting funding and upgrading equipment. Despite these challenges, community radios have flourished, often relying on local donations and the help of volunteers.

<sup>7</sup> The SA Community Radio Landscape, Wits Radio Academy, cited in an article entitled “South Africa has a rich bag of big, small and eclectic community radio stations” published by *The Conversation*, 12 February 2020.

<sup>8</sup> ZACRAS statement on the licensing of the first community radio stations, <https://www.zacraszim.org/index.php/news>

Around the globe, community radio has been shown to have a profound effect on the listening audience because of its immediacy. By using a participatory and interactive approach, it actively encourages the involvement of listeners and public scrutiny in real time. By giving people at the grassroots level the opportunity to articulate what matters most to them, they empower communities to speak in their own voices to define their priorities and come up with feasible solutions. They also provide them with the knowledge to exchange information, seek collaboration from others, make informed decisions and become part of the dialogue and negotiations that are a fundamental part of nurturing the culture of democracy. Rajendra Singh Negi, head of Radio Henvalvani in India, which serves 600 villages and has a daily audience of 240,000, said “we don’t want to be preachy; the aim is to inspire, empower and engage.”<sup>9</sup> In welcoming the government’s decision to grant the first of three licenses in Zimbabwe, ZACRAS underlined the importance of ensuring that the new radios would be “people centred and community rooted.”<sup>10</sup>

From expanding environmental protection, increasing agricultural productivity, teaching better hygiene and sanitation practices, enhancing public awareness of COVID-19 to demanding greater accountability from local leaders, community radios have become a beacon for rural populations the world over. They are able to reach the last mile — places beyond the grasp of other forms of media.

Additionally, community radio provides an effective monitoring tool to gauge and ensure transparency of development projects. For example, if a new well is being built, a community radio station can do periodic reports on its progress, recording whether or not money and materials are being used appropriately. Once the well is dug, the radio station can produce programs that inform the public of the impact it is having on the community.

The most successful community-based radio stations are community-owned and offer everyone the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. They have a board of directors which represent “snapshots” of their communities with both men and women represented. They often include farmers, teachers, business owners, members of youth organizations, nurses and others. Having a diverse and representative board ensures that all voices are heard in the station’s programming.

Sometimes, seed funding is provided by an international organization. But in other instances, funds are raised locally or through local people’s contacts, making the future of the station more sustainable. Charles Rice, President and CEO of

<sup>9</sup> “In rural India, community radio leads fight against virus”, *Nikkei Asia*, 6 May 2020.

<sup>10</sup> ZACRAS statement on the licensing of the first community radio stations, <https://www.zacraszim.org/index.php/news>



*Developing Radio Partners* (DRP), a US-based media organization which has trained journalists in a number of different countries on how to produce local news programs on social issues, spoke about their approach to promote local ownership of the process.

We do not pay for the station to broadcast programs – and this is key. We make sure the station is invested in the project from the beginning. Once the station staff have shown they are interested in producing public-interest programs, we provide a small stipend to cover transport to cover stories, internet and phone and a small stipend to an assigned mentor at the station, who makes sure the program is produced and is broadcast.

We also help the station to identify sponsorships for these programs – in rural areas. It's often telecoms and other large companies. In some cases, listeners themselves contribute money each month to keep the station on the air – because they come to see the programs are so important, they cannot do without them. One of DRP's partner stations in Zambia, produced a weekly slot on innovative farming techniques. When the project ended, listeners, mostly farmers, continue to fund the program. Three years later, it's still on the air.<sup>11</sup>

## **Bringing About Change That Matters to People & Improving Lives**



Change cannot take place in a void. It can only come about when people are exposed to new ways of thinking about old problems, and are given the chance to test themselves and try different solutions. This is particularly true of rural communities where families have followed the same rhythms of life for generations. The unique advantages of community radios are the unusual combination of several factors which help to minimize fear of change. The first is that the radio belongs to, and is an integral part of, the community where the change is being encouraged. The idea is not being imposed by, or come from, a faraway government body, an NGO or any other external entity. Whether the change happens or not, and the pace, can only be decided upon by those with whom it originated, and those who are affected, working in concert. There are hundreds of examples from around the world of how community radios brought about unexpected, but necessary improvements, some of which are discussed below.

<sup>11</sup> Communication sent to *Horizon*, 3 February 2021.

In Zambia, which has a huge deforestation problem, community radio has helped bring awareness and action on the issue. Radio stations created tree-planting citizen committees leading to more than 200,000 trees being planted in 2017.

Penias Tembo, the station manager at Chongwe Community Radio in Chongwe, Zambia, says listeners formed a Radio Champions Group which not only contributed money to the radio station, but also purchased and planted trees – even after the international donor funded-project ended. Mr. Tembo says community radio is trusted because it is local and listeners see the station is a huge asset to the health of the community.<sup>12</sup>

If any country in the world had reason to take a cautious approach to commercial or community radio, that country would be Rwanda where the infamous role of Radio Mille Collines in the unfolding of the 1994 genocide has been extensively documented. Over the last 20 years, however, Rwanda has seen strong growth in community-based radio stations, with more than three dozen stations broadcasting from all corners of the country. Most of them have news departments that focus on local issues covering good public health practices, stronger environmental management and economic development among a wide range of topics.

Some of the topics tackled by community radio stations in Rwanda and making a positive impact include the following:

- After a changing climate caused an increase in the number of malaria cases in some rural areas, two community-based stations, Radio Ishingiro and Radio Huguka, produced a series of reports on the health problem. The Ministry of Health began distributing mosquito nets and screens to those villages.
- Radio Salus, in Huye, spoke about endangered medicinal plants. Afterward, a secondary school teacher, along with his students, sought to protect the plants and created a garden. They have now started a small business in their village – working with scientific institutions to extract ingredients from these plants to make soap, cosmetics and other products.
- USAID partnered with Radio Ishingiro, Rwanda's largest community radio station, to reframe the issue of land rights as one affecting both men and women, and not just women. Over the course of ten months, Radio Ishingiro hosted radio dramas, talk shows, poetry and dance competitions and quizzes. It carried out surveys, both at the beginning and at the end of the campaign. Initially, 70.9 percent of male respondents supported the equality of inheritance rights as being equal between a son and a daughter. By the end of the ten months, this had increased to 90.8 percent.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Communication Initiative Network. 3 August 2017. "Climate Change and Community Radio Project." Available at <https://www.comminet.com/media-development-africa/content/climate-change-and-community-radio-project>

<sup>13</sup> Chemonics. 11 March 2016. "From Policy to Practice: Exercising Gender-Equal Land Rights in Rwanda." Available at <https://chemonics.com/impact-story/policy-practice-exercising-gender-equal-land-rights-rwanda/>

- Radio Huguka, which reaches an estimated 4 million listeners, over 70% of whom work in the agriculture sector, tailors its productions to the interests and needs of its listeners. Working with Radio Huguka, the Rwanda Climate Services for Agriculture (RCSA) created 225 listeners' clubs, allowing farmers to exchange information, ask questions, and share knowledge. Through the listeners' clubs, farmers from the western province were able to share their local techniques for storing feed for their livestock with farmers from a club in Abahuje Tunza, impacting their livelihood directly.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the world, community radios are contributing significantly to the goal of nurturing healthier, more educated, productive, aware and self-reliant societies, reducing violence against women and promoting reconciliation and peace. A few examples show a range of initiatives.

- When reporters at Malawi's Nkhotakota Community Radio noticed Ministry of Health data showed significant drop in the number of pregnant teens coming in for HIV testing between March and May 2020, the station produced a story around it. Just two weeks later, the number of girls seeking an HIV test had increased three-fold. A local nurse, Chimwemwe Nyasulu, was impressed. "The program has brought a positive change on the number of teenage girls coming for HIV testing. This is what community radio is supposed to do," she added.<sup>15</sup>
- Nyanyi Ranet station in Kenya was set up by the Kenya Meteorological Service to target communities vulnerable to climatic change. The local dialect is used to deliver accurate and timely weather forecasts that helps farmers determine when to plant their crops, and to disseminate information about climate-related issues, market information, agriculture and emerging technologies. The station also invites traditional forecasters at least three times a week for a call-in session, so that listeners can ask questions about the prevailing weather conditions.

One of the most destructive and insidious consequences of war and conflict is to sow fear and mistrust among neighbours, friends and even relatives. Even after the guns have fallen silent, and peace has been formally recognized in official documents and ceremonies, hatred, prejudice and suspicions may persist, and will fester in silence. The people of Colombia, in South America, know conflict only too well. Alirio Gonzalez is one of them, the co-founder of

<sup>13</sup> Chemonics. 11 March 2016. "From Policy to Practice: Exercising Gender-Equal Land Rights in Rwanda." Available at <https://chemonics.com/impact-story/policy-practice-exercising-gender-equal-land-rights-rwanda/>

<sup>14</sup> Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security. 13 September 2019. "Raising Farmers' Awareness on Climate Risks and Adaptation with Radio Broadcasts." Available at <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/news/raising-farmers-awareness-climate-risks-and-adaptation-radio-broadcasts>

Radio Andaquí, set up in 1993 in the remote region of Belen de Los Andaquies, close to the Amazon Forest. He spoke about what inspired him to build a radio.

From the very beginning, we thought of it as a communication project. Radio was just the tool... Our agenda was not imposed on us by war. The actions of the community build our content. What we do is generate mechanisms that defeat fear. We want neighbors to talk to each other and relate to each other even if my son is in [the] FARC and the other's son is in the army. Today, community radio stations are spaces for reconciliation and a way for the distance regions to talk about peace and their reconstruction. [They] have a crucial role in strengthening democracy through civic participation.<sup>16</sup>

Violence against women is a daily occurrence in countries and regions throughout the world. Peru, in Latin America, is no exception. With this in mind, a community radio was launched in the capital, Lima, in January 2019 to let women know where they could seek protection and support against gender-driven violence and discrimination. Women Who Do Not Give Up (*Mujeres que no se dejan*), sponsored by the UNDP, targeted only one district, but was soon broadened to cover 8 other districts in southern Peru and is estimated to reach about 4 million people. The bi-monthly discussion brings together local people, government officials and practitioners to exchange ideas and suggestions with a view to eradicating violence and prejudice against women.<sup>17</sup>

## A Lifeline: Community Radio Stations During the Covid-19 Pandemic

As Covid-19 has swept the world, community radios have helped to keep communities informed with accurate and timely information to reduce the spread of the virus. These stations have also been on the front lines to assist in combatting the spread of misinformation and disinformation about the pandemic. In many parts of the world, radio is the only source of information, underlining the importance of radio in delivering credible evidence-based facts, analysis and advice. Trusted local reporters, often women, have played a large part in battling the spread of fake news by broadcasting the facts over the radio to their

<sup>15</sup> Health Policy Plus. July 2020. "Youth Journalists Prompt Increase in HIV Testing via Community Radio Program." Available at <http://www.healthpolicyplus.com/impacts.cfm?get=249>

<sup>16</sup> "Community radio station in the Colombian Amazon promotes peace amid conflict" by Laura Pulecio-Duarte, 4 December 2020, International Journalists Network, <https://ijnet.org/en/story/community-radio-station-colombian-amazon-promotes-peace-amid-conflict>

<sup>17</sup> "In Peru, a Community-Based Radio Program Brings Hope to Survivors of Gender-Based Violence, Citizens Press, 10 May 2019. <http://www.globalcitizenspress.com/womens-empowerment/in-peru-a-community-based-radio-program-brings-hope-to-survivors-of-gender-based-violence/>

communities.<sup>18</sup> In May 2020, the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics released a report stating that 82% of Kenyans received their information about Covid-19 from radio stations.<sup>19</sup>

India's 276 community radios have also been a huge asset in the fight against Covid-19.

Community radio networks are playing a pivotal role in disseminating authentic information about the COVID-19 pandemic. Radio is the only window to the outside world for many of these people, so community stations have emerged as a vital communication channel since the country went into lockdown on March 24. From dispelling fake news to reiterating the importance of frequent handwashing and social distancing – as well as issuing alerts about medicines and food distribution, the channels are educating and reassuring rural and semi-urban communities in the remotest corners of the country. Many are also joining hands with local administrations to distribute food to needy families.<sup>20</sup>

An article entitled “Bangladesh community radio brings life-saving COVID-19 information to rural communities” and published in April 2020, details how sixteen radio stations and two online radio stations were on hand to calm fears, provide answers to listeners’ queries and ensure they received the right information in order to save lives. The stations belong to the Bangladesh NGOS Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC). The questions went straight to the point.

What is COVID-19? How is it transmitted? What are the symptoms? How can you protect yourself against the coronavirus? What is quarantine? What services are available from the government? What can members of the community do?<sup>21</sup>

In Côte d'Ivoire, the WHO has been providing radio stations with equipment and training health journalists on how to deliver correct, useful information about the spread of the coronavirus. This was in direct response to a WHO survey which found that radio and television are the primary news source for 99% of the population, making correct radio broadcasting essential in curbing the spread of the disease.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Reuters. 27 May 2020. “Africa's female journalists use radio to dispel coronavirus fake news and sexism.” Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-africa-women/feature-africas-female-journalists-use-radio-to-dispel-coronavirus-fake-news-and-sexism-idINL8N2D33W1>

<sup>19</sup> The Elephant. May 20 2020. “Survey on Socio Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Households Report.” Available at <https://www.theelephant.info/documents/knbs-survey-on-socio-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-households-report/>

<sup>20</sup> “In rural India, community radio leads fight against virus”, *Nikkei Asia*, 6 May 2020.

<sup>21</sup> WACC, 20 April 2020.

<sup>22</sup> WHO. 24 August 2020. “Côte d'Ivoire: WHO fights misinformation through radio.” Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-who-fights-misinformation-through-radio>



Other examples of the help community radio stations are providing to their listeners during the pandemic are:

- Community Green Radio in Uganda is run by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE). NAPE ran talk shows about health, safety and disease prevention as help its listeners learn more about Covid-19. In response to the sometimes violent enforcement of lockdown rules by the government, NAPE partnered with the Ugandan Human Rights Commission (UHRC) to air programs on civic responsibility, informing listeners on their rights and obligations, and inviting community members to report infractions.
- To help meet the educational needs of refugee children, the Kenyan Ministry of Education, together with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partners, broadcast lessons on Radio Gargaar to support over 100,000 students attending the Dadaab Refugee Camp's 22 primary schools and 9 secondary schools.<sup>23</sup>
- Radio Ergo is working to provide Covid-19 information to listeners across the Somali speaking region in East Africa. The radio uses creative means, including drama sketches, to convey information so that it is well-understood. Using their toll-free number, the station has been gathering listeners' views on Covid-19 and any questions they may have, and sharing these messages with the Somali Ministry of Health, UN agencies and NGOs. The questions addressed to the Radio Doctor are answered on air by Somali medical and public health experts. Radio Ergo also collaborates with Camp Coordination and Camp Cluster Management teams working with IDPs in Somalia in their Covid-19 risk communication and awareness raising activities. This is done by airing Covid-19 messages to the IDPs and engaging them in discussions around the challenges they face in confronting this pandemic, and other diseases, and how they can start to find solutions.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR. 24 April 2020. "Refugee students get lessons over radio during Kenya school shutdown." Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/4/5ea28f144/refugee-students-lessons-radio-during-kenya-school-shutdown.html>

<sup>24</sup> IMS. 2 April 2020. "Covid-19 in Somalia: Avoiding a new crisis." Available at <https://www.mediasupport.org/somalia-radio-is-reaching-even-the-most-remote-parts-of-the-country/>

# Towards a Plurality of Voices & Concerted Action in Somaliland

The need for more information about the risks of Covid-19 in Somaliland was highlighted during a recent program on Radio Hargeisa itself. A member of the public was asked about his thoughts on the pandemic. He expressed his belief that Covid-19 was no longer a threat in Somaliland. When asked why he had come to this conclusion, he responded by saying that he did not hear about the pandemic affecting Somaliland nearly as much as he used to when Covid-19 first started.<sup>25</sup>

The strong conviction that Covid-19 does not pose a threat is widespread even in the most densely populated towns, such as Hargeisa. If people are relying on Radio Hargeisa as their principal source of information for developments in Somaliland, they will have heard little about Covid-19 over the past few months. This alone presents a powerful argument for the introduction of community radios. The approach taken by others, including stations like Ergo Radio working with Somali-speaking people, is to seek out what people are thinking about the pandemic. This is because after listening to what they are saying, misunderstandings, gaps in information and rumours may be addressed through further interactive programming.

But as this paper has shown, the case for establishing community radios is much broader, offering new avenues not just for information and practical action, but also for education.

One of the first licenses granted in Zimbabwe in January 2021 was a campus radio, the Great Zimbabwe Campus Radio. Nasir M. Ali, Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Hargeisa spoke in favour of setting up a campus community radio.

The University of Hargeisa is the largest public university. Close to half the population has no, or little, access to information which affects their lives and livelihoods, in one way or another. Through a campus radio, we can help to change that. A university radio would work on education, but also on social issues, including health, sanitation, garbage/waste management, traffic and road safety and how to help the vulnerable in our society – women, children and elderly people.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Radio Hargeisa. 23 December 2020. “Barnaamijka Hagaha Noloshu.” Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvIRx9DBukw>

<sup>26</sup> Communication sent to *Horizon*, 9 February 2021.

We would welcome suggestions from readers about how the subject matter of this report can be more widely disseminated to different audiences.

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