



CHILDREN'S RADIO  
FOUNDATION

Amplifying Youth Voices Across Africa

# Using WhatsApp for Radio

A TOOLKIT BY THE CHILDREN'S RADIO FOUNDATION

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# Using WhatsApp FOR RADIO

## A toolkit by the Children's Radio Foundation

### Using WhatsApp for radio Toolkit

The Children's Radio Foundation (CRF) uses radio to create opportunities for information sharing, access to public services, dialogue, leadership, advocacy and community building among youth. We train young people as radio reporters who broadcast about issues important to youth in their communities. As part of our package of support to our radio station partners, we provide them with a range of innovative tools to produce better radio, help them work smarter, and increase community participation and audience interaction.

We compiled this toolkit based on our experiences supporting eight radio stations across South Africa to integrate WhatsApp into their reporting and broadcasting environments. 108 youth reporters were trained in WhatsApp integration across the country. The year-long project was made possible with a grant from the Media Development Investment Fund's (MDIF) South Africa Media Innovation Program (SAMIP).

Over the past few years, we have seen some of our radio station partners use WhatsApp as an ad hoc companion to their reporting and broadcasting, and observed the considerable impact it has had on their efforts to grow audiences, build their brand, and respond to the needs of their communities. Inspired by their efforts, we wanted to explore its

potential more fully and at the same time offer a dedicated WhatsApp for Radio Integration Platform Toolkit to radio stations across the African continent.

This toolkit is structured around providing practical examples and tips for integrating the WhatsApp platform into four key areas of a radio station's life: listener engagement, community journalism, research and data collection, and extending or replacing the FM broadcast. It is geared towards radio station managers, reporters, presenters, and other station staff members. The toolkit is complemented by four short do-it-yourself videos recorded at radio stations that were part of the WhatsApp for radio integration platform.

As a representative of your radio station, what are you hoping to achieve? Do you want to...

- Increase the level and depth of your interactions with your listeners?
- Amplify the voices of community members?
- Move your radio station into the digital arena?

Then, this toolkit is for you!



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# Why WhatsApp AND RADIO?

Radio stations are some of the most influential community institutions in Africa. Radio stations are spaces where communities have the opportunity to share their views, form opinions, and mobilize audiences on the issues that affect them.

Despite radio being relatively cheap and easy to produce, financial challenges and capacity issues have threatened the ability of many radio stations across Africa to remain relevant and responsive to the needs of their listeners.

Community radio stations, in particular, are under-resourced and typically have limited capacity to invest in the latest technologies that have ushered so many commercial radio stations into the digital era. At the same time, commercial radio stations often lack a strategic approach to integrating digital media into their radio reporting and broadcasting, which means that they can equally benefit from the WhatsApp integration strategy explained in this guide.

While a range of digital platforms can play an important role in extending the reach of radio, we focus on WhatsApp due to its widespread use, easy access, and versatility. As a web-based messaging application, WhatsApp has features that are conducive to information sharing and enhancing audience participation, including voice notes, group messaging, calling functions, and multimedia sharing.

For radio stations that cannot broadcast due to power cuts, or those that are forced off air due to political instability and censorship, radio broadcast driven through WhatsApp can be a means of maintaining continuity with audiences in times of uncertainty. In weather-related emergencies or situations of conflict, radio stations can rely on WhatsApp to share a wide range of content and important information with audiences. This is, unfortunately, the reality for some radio stations across the continent, where FM transmission is not a given.

WhatsApp can enable these stations operating in challenging environments to leapfrog and to offer their listeners diverse and accessible content, as well as more opportunities to make their listeners' voices heard on air.

# Getting **STARTED**

Over the last few years, many radio stations have enlisted WhatsApp as a convenient tool to interact with their listeners, but often without a clear process around why and how to use it. Whether you are already using WhatsApp or are in the beginning stages, here are the main things you need to think about to be successful in your efforts.

## Basic requirements

### Dedicated Smartphone

First of all, you have to install the WhatsApp app on a compatible smartphone like a Samsung Galaxy J1 or a ZTE Blade L7. It is important that the phone is not a personal phone, but rather a phone that can remain at the station and be solely dedicated to radio station activities. In most stations, a phone is already used to collect text messages or receive calls from listeners. This phone can also be used for WhatsApp.

### Dedicated Computer

Your station should also have access to a computer or laptop that you can use to run WhatsApp for desktop in order to better manage broadcast lists, groups and content for those lists and groups.

### Internet Access

While WhatsApp requires data to operate, it is a much cheaper solution compared to standard text messages and call rates, both for listeners and the station. For effective use, it is crucial that your radio station has reliable access to the internet (either through fiber, ADSL, or 3G/4G). It would work in your favor if your station was in an area with 3G/LTE coverage. While some radio station users of WhatsApp do not need 24/7 internet access, in the case of radio broadcasts with live WhatsApp-driven listener interaction, it is essential that the phone is constantly connected to the internet.

### Radio station focal point for the WhatsApp platform

We have observed that many hosts and presenters at our partner radio stations have their own WhatsApp modus operandi, and even use their own phones to interact with listeners. They sometimes even advertise different phone numbers to listeners on different shows, and create confusing points of access for listener participation. **This is a key issue that often prevents stations from using WhatsApp in a consistent and impactful way.**

It is crucial that the station sets up only one WhatsApp number, and that one person is in a position to coordinate all of the WhatsApp activities at the station. This person needs to

have basic cell phone and computer literacy, and be able to train and monitor the rest of the team on how to use WhatsApp effectively in reporting and broadcast, and set protocols for its usage. This person could be the program manager, communication manager, or anyone else who is technology savvy and who has a daily presence at the radio station.

## Use these categories to gauge your station's existing capacity

On top of the WhatsApp basic requirements, the capacity areas listed below are useful to set up WhatsApp successfully and sustainably at your radio station. The following points are different resource areas to assess when drafting your WhatsApp integration strategy. Having these resources in place will ensure a smooth implementation of WhatsApp, but by no means do they all need to be present for you to use the platform effectively. Sometimes, starting to use WhatsApp can actually help you work through some of the capacity issues you encounter.

### Infrastructure and Equipment

- Does the station have at least one on-air studio, one production studio, and a control room, all fitted with functional equipment?

### Programming

- Does the station have programming that uses a variety of formats and matches audience interests?
- Are the presenters and producers able to host live interactive shows that include call-ins, pre-produced content, and a wide range of elements?
- Is the news team equipped with field recorders to gather local news and opinion?

### Community Involvement

- Does the radio station have a system in place to allow communities to provide feedback, and is the feedback used to improve programming?
- Does the station have working relationships with local organizations?

## WhatsApp for radio

### WhatsApp Features

Here is a list of WhatsApp features and how they might be used in a radio station context.

#### Status

- Update your status to promote the latest news and information.
- Share media and showcase enriched content to build audiences.
- Announce competitions, quizzes, and polls to drive listener interaction.

#### Calls

- Allow for no-cost listener call-ins to radio shows. This would require a direct audio patch from the phone with WhatsApp to the studio.

#### Camera

- Share photos and videos of real-time broadcasts with listeners.

#### Chat

- Allow for real-time listener participation.
- Get feedback from listeners.

### Voice notes

- Encourage citizen journalism to bring out new issues and ideas.

### Contacts

- Keep tabs on listeners and frequent contributors through updated contact lists.
- Share details of referrals, advertisers, and other partners through the share function.

### WhatsApp Desktop

- Manage all content and interactions easily from the broadcast studio computer, or a dedicated laptop/computer as suggested in Section 1.

### WhatsApp Broadcast list

- Share community announcements, information, and other content with listeners.
- Target specialized groups of listeners with polls or quizzes using different broadcast lists.
- Send weekly newsletters to share content and advertise opportunities.

### WhatsApp Group

- Keep the conversation going with listeners on an ongoing basis.
- Share radio shows and audio content with listeners.
- Receive messages, notifications, and feedback from listeners with a specific interest.



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## TIPS BOX:

### USING WhatsApp GROUPS OR BROADCAST LIST

WhatsApp groups and broadcast lists are two advanced WhatsApp features that can be very useful for radio, especially when it comes to sharing information with a large group of people or getting information from them. Both features allow for a maximum of 256 participants. The specificities of each make them adaptable to different radio activities. You can use either or both, but you cannot mix them.

| Group                                                                                                                                                                                         | Broadcast List                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| All group members can send messages to the group unless the "Admins Only" send function is enabled.                                                                                           | Only the administrator can send messages to the list and can see messages posted by other members.                                                                                                |
| More than one person can be a group administrator and can add or remove people.                                                                                                               | Only the person who created the list can be list administrator and add or remove people.                                                                                                          |
| The administrator needs to add the listeners' numbers to their contact list, but the listeners do not need to have added the administrator's number to theirs for them to get group messages. | The administrator needs to add the listeners' numbers to their contact list and the listeners need to add the administrator's number to theirs for them to receive the broadcast list's messages. |
| Participants can leave the group and the administrator will receive a notification message that this has happened.                                                                            | The only way to leave a broadcast list is for the participant to remove the administrator as a contact from their address book, which will then prevent any further messages from reaching them.  |
| Responses come to the group thread.                                                                                                                                                           | Answers come in a separate chat thread.                                                                                                                                                           |

## Benefits

Create a community of listeners around a topic or an event if you want them to interact and share ideas and content.

Send the same information to many listeners, such as a community newsletter or a poll, without getting feedback or having interaction.

## Potential Issues

Privacy is the main issue in WhatsApp groups as all participants can see the details of the others.

The group can be taken over by the participants and its focus can shift without the administrator being able to control it. The thread can get overcrowded and provoke participants to leave. However, the "Admins Only" send function can address this.

The administrator has no control over participants joining the list and no way to check when they leave.

Data collation can be cumbersome with the messages coming in separate chat threads, discouraging any level of feedback or interaction.



## Scenarios

The Bigger Than Life youth reporters at Alex FM in Alexandra, Gauteng know that their audience is excited about their upcoming show about entrepreneurship, as many requests for such a show were made on their show's WhatsApp group.

They were even able to source some of the interviewees through this forum and some listeners recorded their opinions and posted them on the group via voice notes. During the broadcast, they played some of the voice notes while encouraging people to comment within the WhatsApp group on the content they heard in the broadcast. They were able to integrate these real-time comments into their show, and use them to push the conversation with their guests in various directions. Long after the microphone shuts off for the day, the conversation continues. The youth in the WhatsApp group discuss the issues presented in the show, and identify further opportunities for each other, and ways of working together as young people to improve their communities. Their discussion fuels the production team's ideas for the next week's broadcast, and they as listeners see themselves as the drivers of community discussion.

The Breaking New Grounds youth reporters at Forte FM in Alice, in the Eastern Cape, use the WhatsApp broadcast list linked to their show on Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health on a daily basis.

At first, it was hard to get listeners to understand why they should sign up, but once the presenters explained on air that the list was going to be a place to access health information as well as a platform to influence the direction of the show, people registered in numbers. The youth reporters use the list every week to conduct a knowledge quiz with the members around key health facts shared during the show. By providing an incentive in the form of a data bundle, they ensure maximum participation. The results of the poll are made available later in the day in the show's wrap-up newsletter that is distributed in the group. In the newsletter they send out to listeners later in the day, the youth reporters are able to share all of the resources they mentioned, including web links, phone numbers, and other bits of information that can easily get lost while listening to a radio broadcast. They also share selected audio sound bites via voice notes, providing audience members who were not part of the discussion with the highlights from the broadcast.

# Etiquette for using WhatsApp For Radio

As a station, you need to be professional in all of your interactions with your audience, making sure to encourage a respectful level of dialogue among your listeners. WhatsApp integration is an extension of your communications, so

your radio station's broadcast ethos and values must equally apply to all WhatsApp uses. Set clear administration and moderation rules for the station staff in charge of the group and participation standards for your WhatsApp users.



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## Best Practice For Station Team Members

- When you set-up a WhatsApp group, always ask people first if you can add them and explain the purpose of the group clearly.
- Make sure that the WhatsApp content is wrapped around the station's larger stream of broadcasting and fits your strategy. Do not share religious or political content that could alienate listeners.
- Always remember that you are an extension of your radio station. Never post when you're overtired, angry, or upset. If possible, get other radio station team members to approve your content.
- With WhatsApp groups, monitor content on an ongoing basis, and flag, delete, or report any offensive or problematic contributions.
- Thank people personally as much as possible.
- Never play a voice note without having listened to it in its entirety.
- Do not have one-on-one conversations in the WhatsApp group. Switch to private messages for that kind of engagement.
- Warn problematic listeners privately and give them a chance to improve their behaviour before removing them.
- Decide how regularly to share content with your listeners, but do not over communicate (5 posts a day maximum). Make sure you are responsive to any questions from the group members (within 24 hours max).
- Do not post in any group between 9pm and 7am unless it is an emergency.

## Best Practice For Listeners

- Develop a short, standard "Welcome to our station WhatsApp group" set of house rules that you will share every time you start a new group or broadcast list. For on-air interaction, the house rules can be turned into a Public Service Announcement.
- Encourage listeners not to share religious or political content that could alienate other members. Explain that if they do, their comments will not be shared on air or they will be removed from the group.
- Explain to listeners that they need to remain respectful and courteous at all times - of their fellow group members, the moderator, and the public in general - and that if they do not, their comments will not be shared on air (or they will be removed from the group).
- Explain to listeners that any post that does not fit with the intended goal of the group (different topics, spams, advertising, games, memes) will be removed.
- Explain that side chats and one-on-one conversations are not allowed in the group.
- Ask listeners to post their messages and voice notes in one single chunk of text, and not to post every word or sentence in a new message or voice note.



# Areas Of Innovation USING WhatsApp For Radio

Before starting to use a new tool like WhatsApp, it is key to determine what you are trying to achieve and how this tool fits within your broader station strategy. The Toolkit is structured around integrating WhatsApp into the four key areas of a radio station's life detailed in the graphic below.

You might, for example, decide that to achieve your goal of more community visibility, you need to focus on citizen journalism. Each one of these innovation areas is unpacked in the following sections using practical tips and examples.



# Listener **ENGAGEMENT**

For a radio station, having a wide range of regular listeners who participate in programming and broadcasts is an indicator of good health. It means that the station is well-followed and is perceived as an accessible and influential community platform. Getting there might seem like a daunting task, but WhatsApp can be an effective tool for growing listenership and boosting interactions with the community.

WhatsApp is not bound by the formal “top-down” approach of communication associated with traditional radio broadcasts, where listeners passively receive information from radio presenters. Even when traditional radio broadcasts have allowed for audience interaction, participation has generally been low, as listeners often assume that their text messages or calls will not make it into the broadcast space.

In resource-challenged settings, the situation of callers having to wait on hold for long periods of time (and thus pay for expensive call costs) has discouraged the ongoing integration of a wide range of voices into traditional radio broadcasts.

WhatsApp allows for a more spontaneous flow of information between the radio broadcast and listeners. Interactions are immediate, the cost is negligible, and the dialogue can carry on long after the show is over. Through using WhatsApp beyond the immediacy of the show, the station can provide additional information to listeners, including detailed information that is difficult to relay during radio broadcasts (contact information, phone numbers and emails, for example).

WhatsApp also takes the center of focus away from the radio station host, allowing listeners to debate and converse with each other. We have seen this additional layer of audience interaction growing listenership and significantly increasing listener participation, both on-air and off-air.

## Getting Ready

In order to determine how best to use WhatsApp to increase listenership and participation, it is important to define your listener engagement strategy. Here are some useful questions:

- Do you want more people to tune into the station?
- Do you want to increase the range of diversity among your listenership?
- Do you want to reach specific segments of the population?

It is useful to look at all the potential existing platforms of listener engagement that your station uses, such as text messages, calls, and messages sent via different social media platforms (including WhatsApp) and ask yourself what the main aim is in using them.

**Questions to consider in your evaluation include:**

- How active is the station or show on social media?

- How often are status updates or posts published?
- What is the level of audience engagement on social media?
- Does the station or show use social media interactions during broadcasts?

The following table lays out the benefits and trade-offs of the platforms most commonly used by radio stations in South Africa, and which platform could be used towards what aim.

| Facebook                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Twitter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | WhatsApp                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Social networking platform                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Short post platform                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Messaging application                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Main pros for radio</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases your station's visibility online</li> <li>• Increases your level of interaction with your listeners on air and off air</li> <li>• Creates an online community of listeners/forum</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases your station's visibility online</li> <li>• Connects with influencers in your community</li> <li>• Enables you to look for trending topics and build interest around them</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases your station's visibility online</li> <li>• Increases your level of interaction with your listeners both on air and off air</li> <li>• Enables you to collect anonymous data from listeners</li> </ul> |
| <b>Main cons for radio</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not easily allow listeners to interact with each other</li> <li>• Takes large amount of data, and this cost is often prohibitive for listeners</li> </ul>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not easily allow listeners to interact with each other</li> <li>• Not always demographically representative of your listener base</li> </ul>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WhatsApp groups and broadcast lists only reach a limited number of listeners</li> <li>• No facility to stream or broadcast live radio shows on the platform</li> </ul>                                           |

## Doing It

Once you have done an assessment on the breadth and depth of listener interaction you would like for your station, you can begin to select from the available WhatsApp features to achieve the listener interaction goals you have identified.

## Listeners driving the conversation

*WhatsApp features used: text and voice notes, videos, calls to general WhatsApp number or in WhatsApp broadcast list*

To increase listener participation, you can post an upcoming show topic on WhatsApp ahead of a show and collect text and voice notes from listeners about it. During the show, these responses can be used to further inform the on-air discussion and encourage more responses on WhatsApp. In this way, increased listener participation is encouraged.

### TIPS BOX:

#### OPINION POLL

An opinion poll is a collection of opinions on one particular subject. A poll allows you to ask one multiple choice question, and participants choose from among the answers that you define. Make sure there are no more than three multiple choice responses.

## Listeners answering questions

*WhatsApp features used: text and voice notes to general WhatsApp number or to WhatsApp broadcast list.*

You can use WhatsApp to get listeners to answer questions. Conducting an opinion poll allows you to take the pulse of your listeners on an issue that is topical in the community. A poll is best suited for a WhatsApp broadcast list since only the administrator can view responses from participants.

This allows for private responses from participants who are not influenced by other responses. Listeners can respond to a poll via a voice note or text message. Remember to inform your listeners about the results of the poll and continue the conversation with them on air.

## Community of listeners

*WhatsApp features used: text and voice notes to WhatsApp group*

WhatsApp is an equal playground for participation and building a community of listeners. Encourage listeners to use WhatsApp features to message each other on the station's WhatsApp group. Your role is to kickstart and moderate these WhatsApp conversations.

## Vital information from the station and audience

*WhatsApp features used: text and voice notes, status in WhatsApp group or broadcast list*

After the show ends, useful resources such as links to further information, helpline numbers and website details of organizations can be posted via WhatsApp to further inform your audience about resources in their community. In light of sensitive topics, such as HIV or gender-based violence, listeners can reach out to the radio station and get connected to the help they need.

WhatsApp can be used to mobilize communities in advocacy and awareness campaigns. These campaigns can be run on WhatsApp where they can gain traction through listeners being encouraged to share amongst their own networks.

WhatsApp also allows you to share vital information with communities, especially in the context where the station might be off-air. Show programming can continue with short podcasts shared as audio files, newsletters, and announcements shared on WhatsApp.



## Experiences from radio stations

[\(click on title for video interview\)](#)

*Hi, I am Busi Mbetshu and I work at Forte FM, in Alice, in the Eastern Cape.*

*We have been using WhatsApp in our shows for the past two years and it has really helped us better communicate with our listeners since it is a platform that they already use and know very well.*

*This is how we encourage our listeners to communicate with us via WhatsApp: At station events, such as an outside broadcast, the presenters share the station WhatsApp number with the crowd. Then, they tell them that on the station WhatsApp group we talk about show topics and get feedback from listeners on past shows and ideas for upcoming ones. They explain that the WhatsApp broadcast list is used to organize simple polls or station competitions, such as an advertising promotion where listeners can win a prize.*

*We do the same on air and we also play the "WhatsApp jingles" we have created. This helps to create awareness among our listeners about the station WhatsApp number, groups and broadcast lists*

*and how to use them. When we use WhatsApp, it means that our listeners have another channel through which to reach us quickly and without much fuss. Listeners are engaging with us more on this platform than when we only had SMS or calls as a way for them to reach us. Listeners are participating more when it comes to on-air discussions because WhatsApp makes it easy.*

*WhatsApp is a great friend to radio! Make sure to promote the station's WhatsApp details on air with pre-recorded jingles and also at station events. Also - and this is very important - make sure that you have someone at the station managing WhatsApp so that the station is responsive to listeners on the platform.*

# Using WhatsApp for **COMMUNITY** **JOURNALISM**

Community or citizen journalism has become a regular feature on mainstream and social media. Community journalism empowers ordinary citizens to tell their own stories in all of their own nuances.

WhatsApp is a great equalizer for these local stories to emerge. It allows community members without journalism training or expensive recording equipment to collect and share local stories that would otherwise not feature on the airwaves. The voice note function is ideal for community journalists to report from the location of a news event or to record a personal experience about a topical issue.

## Getting Ready

Before introducing community journalism to your listeners it is important to first assess if community journalism features in your shows. Once you have established this, you can select the relevant method for your context. Here are some guiding questions and considerations for your assessment and strategy development:

- Are local stories currently featured in show broadcasts? Whose voices are or are not represented?

- What kinds of local stories are showcased in station broadcasts? What kinds of stories would be good to have?

In your assessment, answer whether local stories are prioritized or sidelined for international news or celebrity gossip for example, and then decide on how much and in which programming areas you would like community voices to feature.

## Doing It

### Community Voices

*WhatsApp features used: voice notes*

The Community Voices segment is a radio show that showcases reports by community members.

This is how it works: A typical magazine radio show is made up of various segments. At many radio stations, these usually include a news bulletin, a sports update, interviews, a public service announcement, advertisements and calls and texts from listeners. The Community Voices segment is made up of WhatsApp voice notes sent by community members, relating to a specific topic. The aim of the Community Voices segment is to encourage listeners to share their opinions and experiences on an issue.



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## TIPS BOX:

### COMMUNITY VOICES

In order to guide listeners to produce the type of voice note that can go on air, be sure to promote the Community Voices segment and invite your listeners to participate. A catchy on-air promo is one way you can get your listeners to participate.

In your promo, provide guidelines for the kind of voice note that can be aired. Here are some guidelines to help listeners record a radio-ready voice note:

- Make sure that you are in a quiet room (turn off fans and televisions).
- Keep your phone close to your mouth, and listen back to make sure the sound quality is good.
- Contribute right away to the topic that is shared, rather than taking up time with greetings and introductions.
- Be clear, and think about what you are trying to communicate.
- Know what you want to say before you start recording. You might even want to write it out first, but avoid sounding like you're reading to keep it lively and engaging.
- Avoid repeating yourself.
- Keep the recording to a designated time limit (perhaps under 45 seconds).

The entire Community Voices program segment should be less than 5 minutes in total, including an intro, a selection of voice notes, an on-air promo, and an outro. This can be followed by a discussion.

## On Location

*WhatsApp features used: voice notes, videos*

Community journalism can also be included in news bulletins via “on location” voice notes where listeners describe a live event. Listeners can send in voice notes from a planned newsworthy event such as a community meeting or a sports tournament. Breaking news voice notes can also be included when community members report from an event that has just happened, such as an accident or an explosion.

## Whistleblowing and community accountability

*WhatsApp features used: voice notes and text*

Community journalism is not only about reporting on events or personal experiences. It can also drive accountability as a means of upholding integrity and trust in the community. Your show and radio station can become a place for speaking out and highlighting negative behaviors and exploitation. Listeners can send in text messages, voice notes

and videos on WhatsApp. Ensure that you seek out advice, both legal and ethical, before broadcasting sensitive material, and ensure its authenticity. In addition, make sure that any tip-offs are sent to the

general number or a WhatsApp broadcast list rather than to the WhatsApp group, as that would expose the personal information of the whistleblower.

## TIPS BOX:

### WHISTLE BLOWING AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

- Design an on-air promo to explain what whistleblowing and accountability are, why they are important to the community, and how community members can become whistleblowers in a responsible, safe, and ethical manner.
- Ensure anonymity of whistleblowers by training your staff to handle sensitive information.



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# Experiences From Radio Stations

[\(click on title for video interview\)](#)

*Hi, I am Sammy Ramodike and I am the Production Manager at Alex FM, in Alexandra, Gauteng.*

*To highlight our listeners' experiences we have included something called Community Voices, which is a segment in our weekly youth show. This is how Community Voices work: Before the show, we announce the topic of the Community Voices segment on air and on the show WhatsApp broadcast list. We invite listeners to send to the WhatsApp broadcast list their personal experiences about the topic in the form of a voice note. We also give very brief voice note recording guidelines to help listeners who want to contribute.*

*At the end of the week, during the Community Voice segment of our show, we play some*

*of the top voice notes and invite more discussion from our listeners. We have a new topic every week for Community Voices and then at the end of the month, we award a small prize to the best voice note. Usually, the prize is a small amount of cell phone or internet data. This is a nice way of encouraging your listeners to send their voice notes.*

*The Community Voices segment is a great way to showcase your listeners and what they have to say. Personal stories, told by the person involved, are a very powerful way of getting a message across. Give it a try!*

# Knowing and growing YOUR COMMUNITIES

A database of community stakeholder contacts (local authorities, police, civil society organizations, educational, and health institutions) or of regular listeners, is a key asset for a radio station. It allows the station to provide the people on the list with relevant information, but also to consult them about what they think or want to hear on air.

In that sense, it represents a free audience research tool for stations that cannot afford to conduct large-scale surveys with listeners. It also offers the stations another channel to reach their listeners with extra information.

For more efficient interaction, these listeners can be divided by age groups (for example, youth under 24, adults, or seniors over 65) according to the show they listen to on the radio, or by a community of interest (sport, health, education, women issues).

WhatsApp group or broadcast list features provide simple tools to organize these contacts, interact with them in an efficient way, and access and collate the information they provide. They allow for a customized engagement and for the provision of specific information and opportunities to each group. These tools can complement consultation structures like listening groups or stakeholders meetings.

Segmenting listeners into different groups also allows you to bypass the current restrictions on

the maximum number of people (256) who can be part of a WhatsApp group or broadcast list.

## Getting Ready

Ask yourself the following questions

- Do you have any existing databases of listeners at the station?
- If so, are they general or specialized (by economics, by age group, by radio show affiliation)?
- Where are they kept (physical records, phone numbers on phone)?
- What information do they include (name, age, sex, phone number, address)?

## Define your needs

*Why do you want feedback or input from your listeners?*

- To attract more advertising
- To better your programming
- To better your station's strategy
- To increase your community profile
- To grow your listenership (or a specific segment)
- To better understand your listeners (or a specific segment)



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*What kind of information would you like to provide to your listeners on WhatsApp?*

- Additional information related to the topics covered (website links, articles on related themes)
- Information related to the life of the station (announcing an annual general meeting, or a strike)
- Community-related information (community events, sports tournaments)

Once you have identified your needs and looked at your existing databases, define what group(s) you want to create and whose contacts they should include. There is no optimal size, but bigger groups can be taxing to manage. Remember that a person can be part of more than one list (for example, a nurse can be part of a general stakeholders list and part of a specific list of health professionals) but do not over-solicit people as they might be put off by too many requests.

## Recruitment Strategies

Recruiting for a WhatsApp group or broadcast list needs to be an activity conducted with intent. People recruited need to understand why you want them to be part of the group or list and how they will benefit from it so that they are responsive when you solicit them. Regardless of the platform through which you recruit, you need to explain to the participants that they will have a role as “advisors” to the radio station and that you will, in return, provide information to them about opportunities and advancement.

Show-specific groups are often the easiest way to get interest since the common interest is clear

and feedback can be used straight away, which creates a greater sense of ownership for the group members.

### Recruiting at community meetings or events

As you are looking for people representing certain communities of interest, community meetings and civil society/NGO meetings are strategic events to attend.

- Contact the organizer ahead of time and ask them if you can do a quick announcement at the meeting.
- Explain to the participants the purpose of the group or list and get them to sign up straight away by getting their numbers. Then add each one to the group or broadcast list and get them to add you to their contact list.

You could also call a special meeting at the radio station to recruit people interested in becoming involved as radio station advisors. Linking the recruitment to a campaign led by the station might also be a good way to foster interest. For example, start a database around gender issues around the time of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. If you are interested in the opinion of the youth, you can recruit in high schools by presenting the project at the school’s assembly.

### Recruiting Community Leaders and Representatives Of Specific Sectors

This method requires that you personally contact influential community members and experts to ask them to sign up to be part of one of the broadcast groups or lists. Some obvious stakeholders would be the head of local civil society organizations, representatives of the police, school principals or leaders of youth organizations.

## Promoting On Air And On Social Media

This might be the strategy that will gather the most interest, but it will be more difficult for you to control and monitor the demographics of who is signing up, especially with a broadcast list.

- Create a promotional ad that you will play on air to attract people to sign up by sending you a keyword on WhatsApp for you to add them to the broadcast group or list.
- Send them instructions to add the station WhatsApp number to their contacts. Make sure these instructions are simple and easy to digest for those with limited technological literacy.
- Once a person is signed up, send them a quick “screening” questionnaire to make sure they fit the group’s parameters (age, gender, interest

## Doing It

### Input or feedback request

*WhatsApp feature used: text message in a WhatsApp group or broadcast list (see table on pages 7-9 for differences between the two features)*

You can reach out to your community contacts to get their feedback about a show that just played, or input for an upcoming show, or even the station programming in general. In any case, make sure to build the activities related to the broadcast lists (drafting and sending your requests, analysing the responses) in the workflow of the person in charge of WhatsApp integration at the station.

For example, if you need general feedback on the station’s performance in the eyes of the listeners, make sure to send your questions to the relevant groups at least one week before the

station’s board meeting so that you give time to the members to answer and you also have time to make sense of the data and organize it in a way that is useful for you.

If you are asking for input for a weekly show, mention the need for input in the show the week before and then follow up straight away with a message in the group or broadcast list, giving 2-3 days for the members to provide their input.

You can also use the group or broadcast list to run quizzes to assess the level of knowledge on a specific issue or topic. For example, if you are preparing a show on climate change, you might want to find out the listeners’ understanding of basic concepts like global warming and greenhouse gases. This will allow you to build adequate information into the following shows. In the same manner, you can send a quiz to gauge the understanding of the listeners after the show to see what they have learned through listening.

Make sure you keep the requests regular so that the members do not forget about the group, while making sure you do not overwhelm them with requests (1 request a week is reasonable).

## Information Provision

Tuning into a community radio station is often the best way to figure out what is going on in the community, but this information is rarely compiled or accessible in one place. WhatsApp provides a visual reference for information that is often difficult to capture live on air (like website links or phone numbers).

Adding the segmentation element (i.e. creating groups that are tailored to a specific age group

or interest) helps to direct the most relevant information to a specific group. Information packaging on WhatsApp for specific audiences helps locate the community radio station as a reliable source of information and opportunities, as well as a space for local organizations to be represented and promoted.

### Community notice board

*WhatsApp feature used: text, voice note, photo or video in a WhatsApp group or broadcast list*

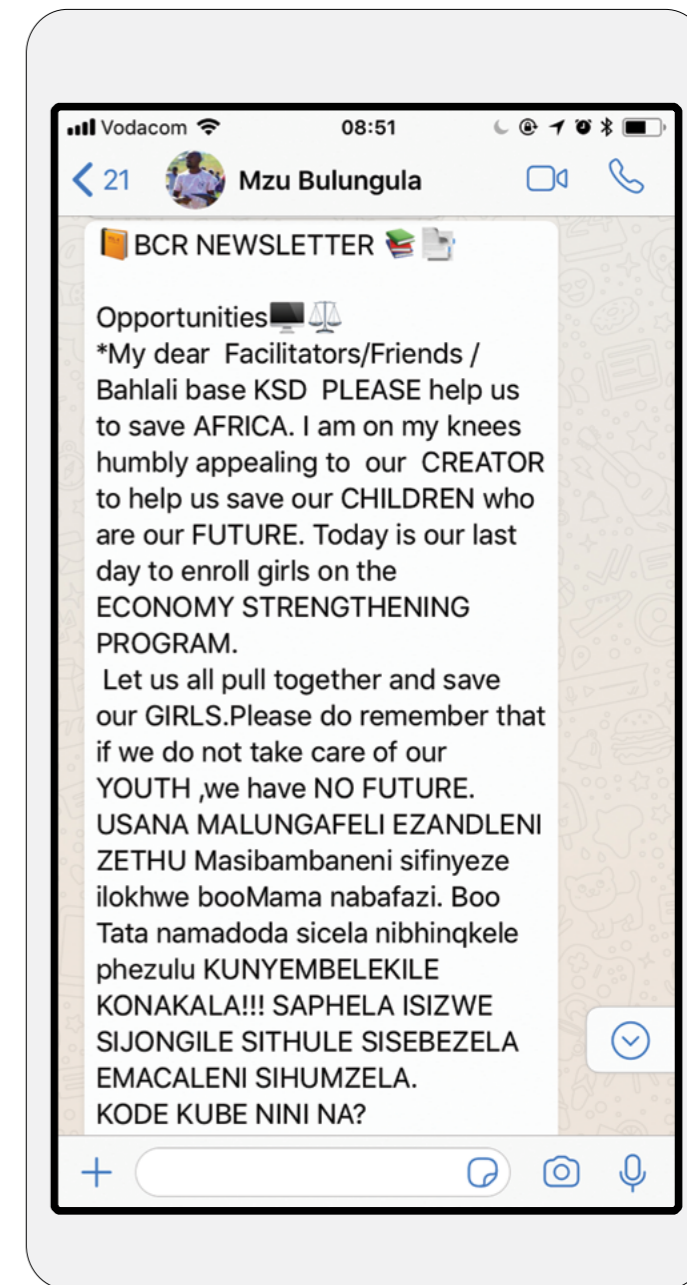
A community notice board is a space where both the station and the participants can regularly post information about what is happening in the community in general, or around a specific theme. It provides a useful visual extension to the community announcements that local radio stations regularly broadcast, covering, for example, community meetings or local health campaigns.

For example, in a WhatsApp group for young people under the age of 24, the notice board could list opportunities and upcoming events for young people, from sports tournaments to career expos.

### Newsletter

*WhatsApp feature used: text, voice note, photo or video in a WhatsApp group or broadcast list*

One step up from the notice board is a newsletter that regularly compiles community information. The information in a newsletter can be general to the station or specific to a show or a topic, like a sports newsletter.





WhatsApp allows for diverse media to be used in a newsletter. It can include snippets from radio shows broadcast over the last week or month on a chosen topic, but also text, videos or web links. A WhatsApp newsletter serves as a way for a radio station to engage with its listeners, or a segment of them, beyond the confines of the broadcast, while providing them with compiled, curated information.

For example, Bulungula FM decided to create a sports newsletter on a WhatsApp group to keep the community informed about upcoming soccer games and past match results. The WhatsApp group is a vibrant community, with more than 500 posts on the group over a three-month period, where general information, community events and other related opportunities are shared.

Community radio stations that have community advancement as part of their core mandate, can use this concept to create a newsletter that focuses on opportunities and resources available to community members. In that way, the newsletter can become a space for local organizations to be featured and promoted.

When creating a newsletter, think about its visual identity and how it matches the identity of the station, including the station logo, tone, use of images, and style of language. You need to make it an attractive and interesting place for listeners to “hang out”.

### Database management

Once your groups or lists are up and running, the hard work of maintaining them starts. Just like a radio station must continue broadcasting to keep its listeners, you must continue creating new

content for your groups and lists to keep their members interested.

A recommended frequency for a newsletter is a monthly edition, but WhatsApp gives you the flexibility to update your audience regularly, so do not hesitate to add information more often, if relevant. The WhatsApp Desktop function can be really useful here as it is much more adapted to creating multimedia newsletters than a phone screen and keyboard. The bulk of the workload is more likely to come from the information sent to you by the different group members, especially in large groups. It is therefore important for you to be very clear about what information exactly you are seeking from your listeners.

If your team capacity is limited, asking one closed question with a yes or no answer or a question with a multi-choice answer is the best way to operate. Once the time allocated for answering is up, compile the answers by exporting your chat as a text file.

As WhatsApp becomes more ubiquitous, new software is being created to help analyze and visualize the data contained in the group and list chats. For now, collate the answers, preferably in an Excel document. You can now use the data to inform the need you had originally identified. Do not forget to feed back the results to the members of the group themselves. This will give them a sense of ownership over the process.

## TIPS BOX: NEWSLETTERS

As visual extensions of the broadcast, community notice boards and newsletters also represent potential spaces for advertising. These platforms can be very attractive for local advertisers, especially if you have created large groups with demographics that fall under their target audiences, or stakeholder groups that they are interested in reaching. For example, a stationary company could be interested in reaching out to school teachers, principals, or parents.



# Experiences from radio stations

(click on title for video interview)

*Hi, I'm Sammy Ramodike and I am the Production Manager at Alex FM, in Alexandra, Gauteng.*

*Any community is made of many smaller groups who share similar interests. It can be sports groups, religious groups, or people interested in a specific social issue. What we have done at Alex FM is create a WhatsApp group for some of the communities in Alex that are also listeners to the station.*

*For example, there are many community-based organizations in our community and many people in those CBOs are listeners. We set up a WhatsApp group for them and ask them to send messages about events or opportunities. They are also aware of new issues that might be plaguing the community and often give us tip-offs about important things that are happening. We have a soccer WhatsApp group made up of the local soccer clubs in our community and the surrounds. Soccer is a big deal here! This WhatsApp group is where we get our notifications about upcoming tournaments and the results. This information we announce on air and it can also be used by our sports reporter. Having different WhatsApp groups for listeners with*

*different interests helps you get to know your community better. If you haven't created one yet, what are you waiting for?*

*What we have also done apart from using the information from these separate WhatsApp groups on air, is that we publish it in our monthly WhatsApp newsletter. A WhatsApp newsletter is so easy to create, guys! It's basically a digital community noticeboard, which has events, like soccer tournaments, and other community announcements, like when we are hosting the next outreach. Most importantly, it can list job opportunities or bursaries. These listings of opportunities can inspire hope for the many unemployed out there in our communities.*

*Keep the newsletter short and sharp, guys, and get creative. Add videos or voice notes to keep it fresh! But remember we are all data sensitive so don't include long videos and other links that people have to take time to download. A WhatsApp newsletter is one of the ways to keep your listeners informed and entertained even when they are not listening to the show. It also means the newsletter can be shared with others and can further help promote your show.*



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# WhatsApp as RADIO

The arrival of the internet has influenced the way people consume radio. Listeners do not have to tune in at a specific time to listen to their favorite program. More and more radio stations provide streaming and podcast services. Across Africa, however, FM radio remains the norm because the high cost of data, as well as spotty internet access and 3G/4G coverage, still slows down the internet revolution. WhatsApp provides listeners with an affordable alternative, and for radio stations, it represents a nimble tool for audio sharing with the potential to extend the radio station broadcast.

For example, a station might want to share a selection of already broadcast content or “bonus” audio that never made it on air. This could include additional interviews that were not broadcast. Both solutions allow the station to keep listeners engaged after a specific show is over.

In challenging settings, where the continuity of the FM broadcast cannot be guaranteed, such as in the cases of unreliable energy supply, political censorship or even in emergency situations like a natural disaster or a conflict, WhatsApp can replace the radio transmitter.

The focus here is on providing key information but also on keeping the listeners of the station engaged while it is not broadcasting. In all cases, WhatsApp radio programs need to be made out of short clips so that they can be easily downloaded in environments where easy access to the internet is not a given. They can be made available “on demand” on the WhatsApp groups

or lists that the stations use. This means that the listener can access this curated content on his phone at any point in time. This WhatsApp innovation is appropriate for stations with solid staff and programming resources, that either want to further the reach of their existing broadcast or have broadcast challenges.

## Getting Ready

### Determine your audience

- You need to create groups or broadcast lists of listeners (See p. 20, ‘Knowing and growing your communities’) that are going to become the audience for your WhatsApp “radio station.”
- You must, therefore, decide who you want to broadcast to, keeping in mind that you will not match the numbers of listeners reached via FM radio, but can reach specific audiences with specific audio content.
- This might be achieved by setting up a large number of groups that you share the same content with.

### Radio Posts Using Whatsapp

- Are you trying to reach audiences with bonus content on a specific topic, or just to provide audio highlights of the week?

## Determine the nature, frequency and focus of audio clips posted on WhatsApp

- Do you want to mimic the radio station program schedule by providing small pieces of every show throughout the day?
- Are you aiming to provide key information in an emergency situation while your station is off air?
- Whatever you decide, remember that similar to an FM radio station, listener loyalty depends on whether or not they are provided with regular content.

## Doing It

### Using WhatsApp audio packages or podcasts as an extension of the broadcast

*WhatsApp feature used: Voice notes on a group or broadcast list*

First, a distinction has to be made between audio packages and podcasts. The former is when existing audio content, like a radio show, is packaged so that listeners can revisit it, or those who missed it have the chance to listen. Podcasting is original content on a specific topic which is packaged and contains many different formats and styles.

WhatsApp podcasting can be used as a way for

some of the radio station’s journalists to go more in-depth into topics they care about or feel are important. It could also be used to cover live events in the community. This second approach requires more content production while the first one is based on compiling pre-existing content.

These approaches could use either a group or broadcast list as their means of dissemination, depending on how much audience interaction is desired.

## Using WhatsApp for radio

*WhatsApp feature used: Voice notes on a group or broadcast list*

There can be many reasons why a radio station is not broadcasting. Sometimes the interruption is very temporary, and sometimes it can last for months. Regardless of the cause of the interruption, it is important for the radio station to find an alternative way to share its information, as silence might equal death for the station. At the same time, the radio station can be the only means of reaching people with vital information.

It is therefore important to first define what is the key information that you want to keep sharing and why, and then focus on collecting it. If the interruption is long-lasting, you might want to consider mimicking the programming schedule of the station on WhatsApp and actually send one or more clips for each show you would have had on air. This would provide the listeners with a sense of familiarity and continuity.

Basically, your production workflow would carry on, with the formats produced and reduced in

size to fit the WhatsApp requirements. The only real change would be in terms of the broadcast platform.

WhatsApp radio can only reach the number of members of the group or broadcast list you post the content on. In that sense, it won't replace broadcasting for all your listeners.

## TIPS BOX:

### WHATSAPP AS RADIO

The recommended maximum length of WhatsApp audio clips is 2-3 minutes on an MP3 format to allow for easy upload and download. Clips can be stand-alone formats, like interviews or public service announcements, or pre-edited features like a package containing a presenter introducing an audio segment. In the case of stand-alone formats, a short piece of text can precede it to give context to the audio. This text will contribute to shaping the identity of the WhatsApp radio thread.



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# Experiences from radio stations using the WhatsApp for Radio Platform

[\(click on title for video interview\)](#)

*Hi, I'm Mzuzile Mhlola the station manager of Bulungula Community Radio based in Bulungula in the Eastern Cape.*

*I'm going to tell you how WhatsApp helped us keep on broadcasting when we went off air for a couple of months this year.*

*We are in a rural area where our community radio station is the main place for people to get information. That's why it was important for us to keep communicating with our listeners even when we went off air. We created a WhatsApp group where we post show topics and get a discussion going among our listeners. We also post newsletters on WhatsApp, which have all kinds of information such as job opportunities and other community announcements such as local events. But in our unique situation of being off air, posting short audio packages was the most valuable for our listeners. We posted very short interviews on show topics or vox pops. And this is how we created our WhatsApp radio! But you don't have to be off air to try it out, WhatsApp radio can just be an addition to your regular broadcast.*

*For it to work, make sure the audio you share is short. Two to three minutes long because downloading big files eats data. What is nice about WhatsApp radio is that everyone on the WhatsApp group can comment in real-time about the topic of the recording and does not have to wait for the show presenter to announce listener reflections. Remember to keep to the same broadcasting ethics that you would normally do if you were on air!*

*You can get creative with WhatsApp radio. Think of it as a whole new interaction with listeners. For example, perhaps there is a spontaneous march in the community against crime. Station reporters can compile short interviews with the community leader of the march and with participants and post it directly to the WhatsApp group.*

*WhatsApp radio is well worth the effort, guys. It does not require much more than what you are already doing for radio. So, go for it!*



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Clémence Petit-Perrot is the Children's Radio Foundation's Learning and Innovation Director. She oversees the development all new initiatives within the organisation. Part of her portfolio includes piloting technological solutions like WhatsApp to increase listeners engagement and measure the radio shows' impact. Before joining CRF, she was the Southern Africa correspondent for Radio France Internationale (RFI). She also worked for the South African production company DOXA, producing social documentary films and leading a digitisation project of anti-Apartheid audiovisual archives.



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Linda Daniels is a journalist by training and has worked in print, digital and broadcast media. She has reported on a range of issues, which include climate change, Intellectual Property and South African politics. Her work has appeared in local and international publications. Between 2013 and 2018, she worked at the Children's Radio Foundation as the Radio Capacity Building Associate and managed the WhatsApp Integration project.

## SAMIP

The South Africa Media Innovation Program (SAMIP) is an initiative that seeks to accelerate digital media innovation among independent media outlets in South Africa. SAMIP is run by Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) – a New York-based not-for-profit investment fund that invests in independent media around the world – with funding support from Luminate (formerly known as Omidyar Network) and the Open Society Foundation of South Africa (OSF-SA).

The South Africa Media Innovation Program has six key focus areas, namely digital native products, reaching rural communities, engaging people in official languages that are underserved, technology innovation for distribution, new revenue opportunities and transition to digital.

The core components of the program include grant financing, capacity building and equity financing. The objective of the program is to provide funding, mentorship and other opportunities needed for the independent media sector to deploy new solutions and reach new audiences.

Since its inception, the South Africa Media Innovation Program has on-boarded and supported 12 organisations, namely Children's Radio Foundation, Collective Media Cooperative, Daily Maverick, Daily Vox, Digest, Hashtag Our Stories, Igunundu Press, Media Factory, Pocket Reporter, Soul City's Not Yet Uhuru, The New Era and Volume.

## CRF

The Children's Radio Foundation (CRF) uses radio to create opportunities for youth dialogue, participation, leadership, and active citizenship. Through giving youth the tools and skills to produce radio, young people are mobilized to engage in productive dialogue about the issues they face, and work together to improve their lives and communities.

With 72 youth radio projects across five African countries, CRF works with radio stations, community-based organizations, health clinics, and youth centres to create local platforms for discussion, information sharing, social engagement, and citizen action. Our reporters take on issues that resonate with youth in their community, including community safety and child protection, HIV/AIDS and ASRHR, education and opportunities, environment and climate change, human rights and LGBTI advocacy.

CRF's methodology uses media training and production as a means of building life skills among youth. CRF reporters exhibit increased confidence, communication skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. They take on important leadership roles in their communities, serving as peer educators of the airwaves. CRF actively supports all projects with curricular materials and hands-on support and training. We have designed our youth radio projects to be low cost and community-driven, adapting to the needs and constraints of targeted youth. All projects follow a cycle of development to encourage sustainability and local ownership.



**CHILDREN'S RADIO  
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