Executive Summary
Preliminary Study of Community Radio by the People's Sector
By the Northern People's Media Network
Northeastern Radio Federation
Eastern Community Radio Network
Southern Community Radio Network
Thai Volunteers Services Foundation
Heinrich Böll Foundation, Southeast Asia Regional Office
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1. Introduction

Community radio came into being in Thailand as a result of legal provisions upheld in the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Organization of Frequency Wave Allocation and Supervision of Radio Broadcasting, Television and Telecommunications Enterprises Act B.E. 2543 (2000).

Since the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand became effective, progressive mass communication NGOs and academics have been expanding efforts to provide education and training to raise awareness of freedom of expression and community radio operation among the Thai public. This has been done under the principle that "community radio is of the community, by the community and for the community". In addition, community radio must be operated on a voluntary, not-for-profit basis, free from political intervention and domination by the state, capital and politicians.

In 2004, the government allowed community radio stations to earn income from broadcasting commercials. This led to a sharp increase in the number of community stations, from about 500 to 2,000 stations within three months after the notification was made. Expansion became reckless, and there was no system in place to provide a clear understanding of community radio's functions. As a result, a "war of frequencies" began.

This study aims to explore and develop a database of people's sector community radio stations, including the origin and evolution of community radio and an analysis of problems and obstacles in community radio operation. It is hoped that this will help community radio networks to gain a better understanding of the overall situation of community radio in Thailand, thus enabling them to develop their plans in light of community radio history.

2. Methodology

This study has been made possible through cooperation from various sectors. Meetings of "concerned community radio networks" were called in different areas, and collective discussion and decision making was made. The first two meetings of community radio networks were conducted in partnership with regional community radio networks, Thai Volunteers Services Foundation (TVS), the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Southeast Asia Regional Office, and project researchers. The meeting was devoted to discussing and identifying issues of study, tools for compiling and recording data (questionnaires). Both before and after the meeting, advisory committee members were consulted on process and procedure. In addition, the research team divided up their work. Regional community radio networks and TVS were asked to identify sample groups, compile names and addresses of sample groups, plan data collection and conduct surveys among sample groups using questionnaires. The majority of the community radio stations recruited as sample groups were founded under the principle of community radio. Local operating communities had been given training and other preparation before the launch of the radio stations. They basically had no aims to generate profit, but focused on serving community's interests and keeping local people informed.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team based on issues raised in the meetings and questions that arose during the literature review and expert interviews. Due to time constraints, there was no chance to pilot test the draft questionnaire among the sample groups. A test was, however, conducted among representatives of the networks who would be directly involved with collecting the data and revising questionnaires. Both closed and open-ended questions were used, and the regional networks helped to dispatch the questionnaires among sample groups.

The third community radio network meeting was held to monitor progress and obstacles in data collection, and to discuss various observations as well as exchange and analyze the situation of community radio stations operating in each region. This helped researchers to compile quantitative information needed for further analysis. The fourth meeting focused on analyzing the data, proposing a draft study report, and exploring possible future cooperation.

3. Results

158 community radio stations participated as sample groups in this study, which covered six regions including the North (35 stations), the South (21 stations), the Northeast (53 stations), the West (16 stations), the East (21 stations), and the Central Plains and Bangkok (12 stations). The sample groups were divided into two major categories, including physically-based community radio (109 stations) and topically-based community radio (49 stations).

3.1 General characteristics of community radio: Basically, a community radio station is located in a place that is easily accessible to members and has the broadcasting range of 20 – 30 watts, covering a radius of 10 -15 kilometers. Broadcasting times vary depending on the needs of the community. Based on a study of 158 stations, the following conclusions were made.

1. Location: Most of the radio stations (83 stations, or 52.5%) were located on public premises, (23.4% in temples, mosques or chapels, 2.5% in a village's multipurpose building, and the remaining 26.6% in other public premises). In addition, 40 stations, or 25.3% of the total were located in government offices, with 6.3% in Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) offices, 1.3% in municipality offices, 5.7% in hospitals, 4.4% in schools, and the rest (7.6%) in other government offices.

Community radio stations located on government premises and in NGO offices (such as in TAOs, municipalities, village health posts, foundations, hospitals, etc.) are normally financially supported by government agencies. This financing includes utility expenses (electricity and phones) and maintenance of transmitters and equipment). But being located on government premises or in NGO offices may make people feel uncomfortable.

2. Broadcasting capacity and area coverage depend on various factors, including geographical setting, transmission capacity, and station location. Most community radio stations (121 stations or 76.6% of those surveyed) use transmitters with less than 30 watts of capacity. 12 stations, or 7.6% of those surveyed, had a transmission capacity of 31-60 watts, and the number of community radio stations with over 60 watts of transmission power stood at only at 25 stations, or 15.8%.

Most community radio covered the Tambon to district level. 62 community radio stations, or 44.3% of those surveyed, broadcasted in at least 4 Tambons. 50 community radio stations, or 35.7% of those surveyed, covered an area of 5 – 8 Tambons. 12 stations, or 8.6% of those surveyed, covered 9 – 12 Tambons, and the remaining 16 stations, or 11.4%, covered 13 Tambons.

3. Broadcasting days and times, Similar to conventional radio broadcasting, 136 community radio stations, or 86.6% of those surveyed, operated every day, 17 stations or 10.9% of those surveyed, operated 4 – 6 days per week, and four stations, or 2.5%, operated 1 – 3 days per week.

In terms of the number of broadcasting hours per day, 109 community radio stations, or 69.0% of those surveyed, broadcasted for nine hours per day, 33 stations, or 20.9% of those surveyed, broadcasted for four hours per day, and 16 stations, or 10.1%, broadcasted for less than one hour per day.

The fact that most community radio stations broadcasted every day and for longer than nine hours per day can be attributed to attempts by the radio operators to remind people of the station's existence, even though sometimes operators simply played music without making announcements.

3.2 Community radio belongs to the community: Diversity in the composition of community radio committees was explored including through analysis of funding sources for the establishment, operation and other infrastructure support of community radio stations.

1. Composition of community radio boards: Board membership varied greatly, with most board members coming from local community organizations. Most representation came from local groups or organizations (17.6%), followed by local government officers (15.0%) and respectable persons in the community (14.7%). Only 7.6% of the board members belonged to outside organizations or agencies.

2. Fundraising: Initial procurement of equipment for community radio stations, including the purchase of transmitters and other equipment, was mostly made possible through domestic fundraising, including *Phapa* ("Buddhist Monk Robe Ceremonies"), tea parties, and fundraising dinners. Some initial funds may come from outside, such as from the Social Investment Fund, the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI), and TVS.

To make the operation of community radio possible, one of the most common methods used (by 18.7% of radio stations surveyed) is to solicit local people to help support utility costs, i.e., water, electricity, and phone bills. Following that is fundraising through outside organizations (14.2%). The least popular method (3.4%) is selling products such as community-made handicrafts, *Jatukham* amulets, and shirts.

Analyzing the overall situation by region, it was found community radio stations in the South, Northeast, West, and Bangkok and Central Plain share typical characteristics, whereas those in the North and East often seek support from outside organizations. Nevertheless, most community radio stations (57.9%), rely on in-sourcing rather than out-sourcing for fundraising.

3. Sources of income for the purchase of transmitters and equipment: Most community radio stations are founded through an initial investment of 200,000 – 300,000 baht, with transmitter costs at 30,000 – 50,000 baht, antennas at 10,000 – 30,000 baht, and studio space and other equipment at 30,000 – 60,000 baht. Nevertheless, regular maintenance of transmitters and other equipment is necessary, and various methods of fundraising are used to raise money for the purchase of expensive such as computers and CD players.

It was found that 32.4% of community radio stations fundraise within their own communities for the purchase of transmitters, and 35.8% rely on capital from the Social Investment Fund or CODI. The remainder of stations (29.8%) tapped into funds from TAOs and NGOs. Antennas were the first priority purchase. 39.0% of stations relied on funds from TAOs, personal donations and NGOs, for the purchase of antennas, and 37.7% relied on internal fundraising. For studio space and other equipment, 45.0% of the stations surveyed relied on internal fundraising and the remainder (37.6%) relied on funds from TAOs and NGOs.

3.3 Local involvement in community radio stations: Based upon research findings, the following conclusions can be made regarding management structures, community representation, radio announcers, meetings and broadcasting schedule planning, and utilization of local resource persons.

1. Community representation and radio announcers: Each community radio station may have from one to dozens of committee members. In most cases, the number of board members was higher than the actual number of active members. Each station had an average of seven active committee members. 65 stations, or 43.0% of those surveyed, had less than ten active committee members, 56 stations, or 37.1% of those surveyed, had from 11-20 active committee members, and 30 stations, or 19.9%, had more than 21 active committee members.

In terms of radio announcers, it was found that on average, each community radio station had 14 announcers, with an average of nine men and five women. 68 stations, or 43.4% of those surveyed, had 1 - 10 announcers, 66 stations, or 42.0%, had 11-22 announcers, and 23 stations, or 14.6%, had more than 21 announcers.

2. Meetings and revision of broadcasting schedules: Most community radio stations met every month for official consultations. 64 stations, or 41.6% of those surveyed, met once a month, and 42 stations, or 27.3%, met only periodically. However, special meetings were called for major decision making.

In terms of participation in formulating and adjusting contents to audience demand, most community radio stations encouraged their audience members to actively participate. Call-ins were the most common method of participation (29.9%), followed by participation through committee representatives (19.4%). Only 7.7% of community radio stations had ever conducted audience surveys.

In terms of adjusting broadcasting schedules, most community radio stations made decisions in joint meetings between the committee and radio announcers (71.7%), followed by radio announcers adjusting the schedule themselves (7.2%). Due to the high turnover in radio announcers, adjustment of broadcasting schedule was mostly done internally. In addition, radio announcers often got to hear comments from audience though the call-ins, and often got to meet listeners in person, For these reasons, they generally understand what the listeners want.

3.Utilization of local resource persons: Most community radio stations (95 stations, or 62.5%of those surveyed) hardly ever invited local resource persons to speak. Only 36 stations, or 23.7% of those surveyed, invited local people to speak once a week. 13 stations or 8.5% of those surveyed, invited local people to speak once a month, and 8 stations, or 5.3%, never invited local people to speak.

3.4 Local involvement in community radio: The following findings were made regarding community input in program content and the utilization of local speakers:

1. Program contents mostly respond to the need of both organizers and listeners. The most popular contents for community radio stations (13.5%) were local news and music, followed by local wisdom (12.4%). Compared by region, community radio stations in the West, Central Plains and South often broadcasted local news, whereas those in the Northeast preferred to focus on local wisdom.

Contents specifically catering to women mostly concerned health care (27.2%), followed by parenting (16.8%). About 15.2% of community radio stations had no special programs targeting women at all.

2. Issues raised by local speakers: Apart from broadcasting local news that could not be heard on mainstream radio stations, community radio stations also featured shows in local dialects, and local speakers were invited to share information with local audiences. They mostly shared wisdom on local culture and traditions (29.0%),

and issues concerning local livelihoods (26.6%). Therefore, it is clear that community radio stations primarily aim to respond to the needs of local people, rather than functioning as a conduit for information from outside, since local people can access outside news from other media.

3. Benefits to local people: The committees of community radio stations agreed that community radio benefit local communities in various ways. Firstly, local people get knowledge and entertainment from community radio (20.3%). Secondly (19.4%), they get to listen to news from the community, i.e., lost and found, missing persons, etc., and thirdly (16.7%), community radio programming helped people to better understand the importance of community radio (16.7%).

3.5 Non-profit community radio work: Community radio entails both operational and maintenance expenses. In this study, community radio stations' monthly expenses were explored, as well as their operation costs on a non-commercial basis. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Monthly expenses: A community radio station spends 2,807.00 baht per month on average. 46% of community radio stations surveyed operate on less than 1,000 baht per month. Community radio stations that employ staff (29 of the stations surveyed), including technicians to operate transmitters and computers, however, incurred monthly expenses of up to 5,100.00 baht per month. 37.9% of the stations surveyed paid their staff 3,000 – 5,000 baht per month. However, 31.0% of stations had their staff salaries paid by outside organizations. Their staff thus had to do other work as well. None of the stations surveyed disclosed the amount of their staff members' monthly salaries.

2. Whether or not to air commercials: Committees and audiences were often split on this issue. According to our survey of 32 community radio stations, 22 stations relied on income from broadcasting commercials, while the other ten stations had chosen to stop airing commercials.

The first and foremost reason for relying on income from commercials is the stations' need to cover regular expenses such as utilities (46.8%). Next to that, 20.0% had no other ways to generate income and had no idea how to fundraise. As for the reasons that radio stations chose to stop airing commercials, 29.7% considered that advertising conflicted with the philosophy and concept of community radio, and 18.5% had agreements with the community radio networks to refrain from airing commercials.

When asked about funding solutions in the absence of advertisements, most of the community radio stations surveyed (21.4%) responded that they had to seek funding from outside, 21.0% proposed raising more funding from the local community, and the other 15.6% suggested that committees contribule funding from their own coffers, or tap into funding from TAOs.

3.6 Community radio and intervention by state, capital and political groups: Periodically, the principle "of community, by community and for community" is challenged in various manners. For example, there have been orders to close down community radio stations, both temporarily and permanently, orders to ban certain programs, encouragement for radio stations to air commercials, orders against participation and cooperation from government officials, instances of running programs for political or business interests, dispatching officers to inspect stations, etc. The results of the survey can be summarized as follows.

1. Intervention by the state: Common state interventions include orders to close down stations (21.9% of stations surveyed), dispatching officers to inspect stations (21.4%), and other forms of intervention (11.2%) such as sending warning letters, visits to stations by military or police officers, and summoning the announcer to report to the

army. However, 45.5% of community radio operators said that they had never faced state intervention. This is because many community radio stations have learned from past experiences and prefer to self-censor rather than let the state intervene.

2. Intervention by political groups: Common forms of interference by political groups include encouraging community radio stations to air advertisements (6.9%). One of the radio stations surveyed received a threatening phone call. In addition, 75.3% of the sample group said that they had never faced intervention by political groups since political groups and community radio stations mostly maintain complimentary relationships, and there is no need for the use of force or threats. But local political groups often sponsor community radio stations by helping them with the purchase of equipment, as a way to sustain patron-client relationships for long-term political gain.

3. Intervention by the business sector: Common interference by the business sector includes encouraging community radio stations to air advertisements and agreeing to sponsor the stations (22.4% of the stations surveyed), followed by attempts to convince local communities, station committee members, and radio operators to agree to air advertisement (15.8%). However, 29.4% of surveyed community radio stations said that they had faced no intervention by the business sector. They tended to regard representatives of the business sector as donors who were interested in supporting community radio financially.

3.7 Problems and obstacles: Since 2002, community radio stations have faced multi-faceted problems. Major problems include frequency overlapping and interference, personnel, ladk of broadcasting equipment, and challenges in networking and community empowerment.

1. Frequency overlappig and interference is a common issue among most community radio stations. 35.5% of stations surveyed reported problems with frequency overlapping, 28.6% operated on very close frequencies, which gives rise to frequency interference. 21.2% faced frequency interference problems due to the fact that their stations were too close to other stations, whereas 14.7% said they did not have this problem. Only 38.3% of the community radio stations surveyed were able to solve the issue of frequency overlapping and interference, whereas 61.7% could not.

2. Personnel: Common personnel issues included a lack of technical knowhow to operate transmitters, and use CD players and computers (19.7% of stations surveyed), followed by radio announcers' lack of skills in providing effective, diverse and interesting content (16.6%). However, 5.7% of stations surveyed said they had no personnel problems.

Considered by region, community radio stations in the North, South, Central Plains, and Northeast suffered from a lack of technical knowhow among their personnel, which is a common problem countrywide. In the East, stations reported problems due to a lack of volunteers, and in the West, they suffered from a lack of radio announcers with sufficient skills.

3. Funding problems: Across the country, a lack of funding for personnel development and repairmen seemed to be most serious problem (52.5% of stations surveyed). As a result of this problem, a number of stations have had to stop operating, as they had no money to fix their transmitters. However, 24.2% of community radio stations reported no problems with funding. Considered by region, community radio stations in the West seemed to suffer the least from a lack of funding because they are able to raise funds from organizations in the private and governmental sectors to support their monthly expenses and maintenance of transmitters and equipment.

4. Broadcasting room equipment: A lack of broadcasting gear was mentioned as the most common problem among surveyed stations (28.7%), followed by insufficient equipment (24.8%). Considered by region, community

radio stations in the North suffered the most from a lack of broadcasting gear, whereas the West suffered from insufficient equipment.

5. Networking and community empowerment: Most community radio stations had no problem with networking and strengthening their own communities (72.5% of those surveyed). Common problems found among them included having no one to turn to when faced with problems (8.4%). Other problems (12.6%) included difficulty in keeping abreast of new information, inconsistent coordination at the regional level, and a lack of participation from local government agencies.

3.8 The future of community radio: The community radio stations surveyed generally expressed a need for various kinds of support from organizations, and they made policy demands to the government as follows:

1. Support from networks or organizations working to promote community radio Among the community radio stations surveyed, 21.2% cited personnel development budgets as their most important need, which is in line with their need for capacity building among their personnel. Following that, 20.1% wanted to have experts to provide training on various issues related to community radio. Considered by region, stations in the Northeast and East cited personnel development as their most urgent need, which is similar to the countrywide situation. But those in the North, West and South seemed to prefer to have experts to provide training on various issues related to community radio.

2. Operation with a lack of sound legal foundation: Although they lacked legal foundation status, 49.6% of community radio stations deemed that they still had to continue operating their broadcasting. 41.6% of them proposed cooperation with networks to demand the enactment of laws to legalize their status, whereas the remainder opted for dissociating from politics and stopping broadcasting (1.5% and 3.5% of those surveyed, respectively.)

3. Registration: As a result of a present lack of legal foundation status for community radio stations, 74 stations or 52.2% deemed that a joint committee between private and government sector as well as civil society should be set up to handle registration of community radio. 20.4% deemed that the registration can be done among themselves, whereas 23 stations or 16.2% had no interest in the registration issue.

4. Recommendations for community radio policy: Among the community radio stations surveyed, 27.6% wanted the government to carry out a survey to differentiate between community radio and business radio. Aside from that, 24.54% demanded efforts to promote community radio to operate under the principle "of the community, by the community and for the community". 22.3% demanded that the government set up an organization to allocate frequencies and manage radio broadcasting as soon as possible, whereas 19.5% wanted the government to promote and raise awareness of the genuine principle of community radio in society. Their other demands included the enactment of community radio laws and allocation of funds for community radio.

4. Recommendations
4.1 Joint meetings among agencies and organizations supporting community radio: At present, a number of state and private organizations work to promote and empower community radio. Therefore, lessons should be learned from their experiences to set out future action plans and to avoid repeating working in the same target areas. This will also help to address issues regarding expansion and replication of efforts. In addition, supporting organizations should work in response to the needs of community radio stations, including personnel development in terms of

technical knowledge and skills in the control and maintenance of the transmitters and equipment, production of quality contents.

4.2 Strengthening community: Radio operators and listeners should hold meetings together to share common issues, and operators from various stations should also hold regular meetings. This will give impetus to sharing and learning from each other, promoting community participation and mutual learning regarding how to make community radio belong to communities, so that work is done for communities and by communities. In addition, there should efforts to learn from experiences among stations regarding promoting participation, production of quality programs, fundraising, etc. A few case studies may be chosen as models for further in-depth analysis on various issues. This will help to generate a body of knowledge which can then be disseminated among community radio stations to help to enhance their work.

4.3 Mutual support between community radio networks: Based on the experiences of leaders and actors in networks at the regional and national levels, a body of knowledge has been generated on technicalities and maintenance of transmitters, production of quality contents, and promotion of community participation. Meetings among knowledgeable persons should be held and the knowledge should be compiled, published and distributed among the network of community radio stations. This will make possible a mutually supported network of community radio stations. In other words, a network of knowledge sharing will be created.

In addition, networks at the regional and national levels should develop ways to support the work of each community radio station. They should be able to help if their member stations are facing problems. The networks can provide support in the area of technical knowledge, training of radio announcers, training on management, and helping to identify experts in various fields to help stations to solve their problems in a timely matter. In other words, this would be a "network of human resources".

4.4 Set up a joint committee between the government sector, community radio and civil society: This committee would be tasked with overseeing and supervising the operation of community radio on a temporary basis while awaiting the establishment of an independent organization for frequency wave allocation and supervision of radio and television broadcasting. There are a number of small radio stations that are used either for commercial purposes, public interests or not-for-profit purposes. This has led to competition for frequencies at the local level.

Many local broadcasters express the need for a committee to oversee, supervise and manage community radio operation temporarily. This will help community radio stations to continue serving the public interest, in particular promoting learning processes among the population. This would adhere to the spirit of the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the 2007 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Section 26 of the 2000 Organization of Frequency Wave Allocation and Supervision of Radio Broadcasting, Television and Telecommunications Enterprises Act, which states that at least 20% of frequencies must be set aside for use by the people's sector, and that communities must be encouraged to use them.

An ad hoc joint committee to oversee, supervise and manage community radio operation can be set up multilaterally to include representatives from the state sector, community radio operators, and civil society. It can be organized on three levels, i.e., on the national, regional and provincial levels. The national committee should be authorized to set out policy and a master plan for the use of frequencies, and guidelines which are appropriate and serve the needs of community radio stations in areas such as licensing and registration. The provincial and regional

committees should be asked to compile information and participate in setting out policies in collaboration with the national committee. In addition, the regional committee serve to coordinate between the provincial and regional committees. The provincial committee can function as a registrar to verify the licensing process, and along with the regional committee, help to cope with problems arising at the operational level in the province and region, such as the overlapping of frequencies.

Once the independent organization to oversee broadcasting has been set up, the provincial and regional committees can continue with their tasks as assigned by the independent organization.

The above proposals were made during the study, at a time when there was still no solution to solve the probles facing small radio operators. Later, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) endorsed the Act on the Operation of Broadcasting and Television Enterprises with a provisional clause for the National Telecommunication Commission (NTC) and the Subcommittee on Radio and Television Broadcasting as a national mechanism to give temporary licenses to community radio stations that serve the interests of the community.

To ensure efficient oversight of community radio operation and the allocation of frequencies and to promote people's participation and serve their needs, the study team would like to propose that committees be set up at the regional and provincial levels as well. They should function as joint committees to handle the allocation of frequencies and to provide for transparency in the allocation of frequencies and licensing, and to allow the people's sector to have direct participation.