DW Akademie

Media development in rural areas: Supporting community radios and journalism education in Bangladesh

External Evaluation Report | Executive Summary   10/**2017**
Bangladesh

Background

Bangladesh is a politically torn country with a fragile democracy. The media suffer from political influence and restrictions on the freedom of the press. Nonetheless, the media sector is currently experiencing massive growth so that media outlets face great difficulties finding qualified new recruits. The academic education in journalism is seen as poor and lacking in practical relevance. The varied media landscape of Bangladesh is nearly exclusively concentrated in the capital, Dhaka. The rural population – approximately two thirds of the total population – has limited access to information relevant to their context and limited possibilities of articulating their views and interests through the media.

DW Akademie's project in Bangladesh has two independent objectives. Project objective 1 aligning to DW Akademie's strategic area 'Qualification' is: "Graduates of the journalism department of the University Rajshahi and the University Chittagong produce media products based on a syllabus oriented on practical needs and thereby strengthen the population in realizing their right to information." Project objective 2 in accordance with DW Akademie's strategic area

of 'Participation in Society' is: "The rural population uses information that is relevant and useful to them provided by the community radios of the Bangladesh Community Radio Association (BCRA) and participates in their programming."

The most important modes of implementation are training and advice given to the local project owners (lead partner institutions). The cooperation project has not dispatched expatriate staff to Bangladesh but is remotely managed from Germany and implemented by the local project owners. These are the departments of journalism of the universities Rajshahi and Chittagong, on the one hand, and BCRA as well as two pilot community radio stations which are geographically close to the universities.

The aim of this evaluation, which was carried out by an external consultant, is a constructive assessment of the project results after completion of the first funding phase (2015-2017). The evaluation is based on the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and uses a method mix, including document and literature analysis and interviews with project managers, project part-

ners, and target groups on site. The recommendations made at the end do not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of the project team. Nevertheless, all suggestions were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.

Conclusions of the project evaluation

All sources confirmed that the improved training of future journalists has a high relevance for the development of the media sector in Bangladesh. The project strategy is aimed solely at using universities as training institutions, and does not focus on encouraging media companies to also take responsibility for the training of their future recruits. This limited the relevance to a certain extent. The second project objective of improving the current lack of opportunities for information and articulation available to the rural population takes on a crucial development problem of the target groups. However, there are doubts whether the promotion of community radio broadcasters is the most relevant strategic approach to solving this problem as the community radio sector is still quite new. It is not clear whether the current community radio stations will indeed reach many listeners and produce content that is relevant and appealing to the target groups. Nevertheless, DW Akademie's approach is generally in line with all sector-relevant political strategies and policies. Overall, the criterion **relevance** is considered to have been "generally fulfilled."

Based on the evaluation, it is believed that neither of the two project objectives will be fully achieved by the end of the project phase. More progress was observed under project objective 1 (universities) than under project objective 2 (community radio stations). There are two reasons for the partial achievement of the objectives: On the one hand, the set goals and indicators were too ambitious or turned out to be not ideal for gauging the project success. On the other hand, the project management was faced with great challenges at the start of the project. A strategic realignment at the beginning of 2016 led to a change in project activities. One clear achievement of the project is, above all, the successful curriculum reform at both universities in which practice-oriented elements were made mandatory and are already being applied. The lecturers were trained in modern teaching methods and media production techniques and passed these skills onto the students. The key addition was the installation of multimedia campus-websites at both universities. Overall, the criterion **effectiveness** is seen to have been "partially fulfilled."

The project's theory of change is generally plausible and geared towards higher level development impacts, even though there are some questions on the formulation of some objectives, indicators, and risks. The project objectives and indicators are formulated in a results-oriented manner. However, a clear weakness of the project design is that there is no overall project objective and DW Akademie is working on two different and until now unconnected project lines. Since the two project lines are thematically so far apart, no natural synergies arise between them. Nevertheless, all interview partners would explicitly welcome a greater coordination between them (e.g. internships of university students at community radio stations). The activities, particularly those regarding the community radio stations, are not considered to have a broad-scale effect. The choice of a pilot approach to promote more intensely two community radio stations was not fully convincing because it was not connected to a strategy for scaling up the positive changes. Instead, the sector as a whole should be promoted at a more structural level. The monitoring system of the project is sound and results-oriented. There were no negative effects. Overall, the criterion of **impact** is considered to have been "partially fulfilled."

The disbursement of project funds has gone according to plan. Taking into account the moderate degree of objective achievement, the cost-benefit-ratio had been below average. However, following the change of management, the project is now generally back on track. Considering the project's relatively low budget and rather short implementation period, it would be strategically clever from an efficiency point-of-view (cost-benefit ratio) to concentrate the efforts. From this perspective, the original decision to engage in two distinct and unconnected project lines is not convincing. The choice of cooperation instruments is overall plausible. It was economical not to have dispatched an international expert but to have managed the project remotely from Germany. From an efficiency standpoint, however, employing relatively expensive international trainers for very grassroots trainings for journalist volunteers of the community radios is not a decision that is well justifiable. With the project – at least under the current project management – a concerted effort was made to seek complementarities and synergies as well as to actively engage in exchanges with other actors in the field of media development. Overall, the criterion of **efficiency** has been evaluated to have been "generally fulfilled."

With project line 1 it can be predicted that most of the results achieved at the university level will be long-lasting. The new curricula for the study of journalism adopted at both universities are now being implemented. The departments of journalism at both universities have shown ownership in running and further developing the multimedia campus websites, which are at the core of the universities' practice-based training program. The greatest risk for sustainability here is the precarious and under-equipped media labs, where the practice-based training is held. The sustainability forecast is less clear for project line 2 because it is not yet evident whether the BCRA will develop into a functioning umbrella association for community radios. A measure geared towards sustainability is the project's advice to BCRA and to individual radios to generate their own sources of income and thereby achieve the community radios' greater financial independence from their parent NGOs. Overall, the criterion **sustainability** is considered to have been "partially fulfilled."

Key recommendations

1. In a future implementation phase with a similar budget, it would be better only to pursue one of the project lines in more depth. If the continuation of both project lines is desired, then the project budget must be significantly increased in order to be able to achieve significant results.

2. Incorporate media companies more intensely in the project, both as trainers for the community radios and for university lecturers, and also in the professional training of the next generation of journalists.

3. Focus more on the structural level. Systematize the lessons learned at the pilot universities and pilot community radios, disseminate them, and feed them into structural processes.

4. Promote learning and innovation at the organizational and network level. Use the project more intensely as a catalyst to initiate cooperation, and as a link and mediator between local actors.

5. Carry out further training courses for lecturers in 2017 to consolidate and deepen the newly acquired skills and capabilities, particularly with regard to the teaching methods and didactics.

6. Address the problem of the media labs being insufficiently equipped: e.g., facilitating sponsorships and approaching businesses, media companies, and production firms to find out whether discarded material can be obtained or whether maintenance sponsorships can be concluded; possibly also consider making more investments into the equipment via the project.

7. In the next phase: move on from the pilot approach focusing only on two universities. Facilitate the transfer of experience from the universities Rajshahi and Chittagong with the integration of practice-oriented elements in the curriculum to other regional universities. Systematize, document, and disseminate the reform approach. Build and strengthen the network of the departments of journalism of all universities.

8. Get the university departments in touch with the world of journalism in practice, e.g., organizing trips for the lecturers of both universities to Dhaka to visit various capital city media corporations, so that they can witness journalists and media representatives at work, and reflect on what they have learned. Facilitate that media representatives hold lectures, seminars, or training sessions at the regional universities. Clarify how the additional costs are to be covered: out of the universities' own funds, through the media companies, the Ministry of Education, the regional governments, or a combination of these possibilities?

9. Place more emphasis on the transfer of graduates into the journalism job market as one of the central objectives of the next phase. Embrace a vocational training perspective; perhaps seek an exchange with experts in vocational education and training.

10. On the part of the universities: Strengthen the strategic work with alumni and the career service at the universities (e.g., career fairs, traineeship platform, invite alumni to hold lectures, ask alumni to grant traineeships to students, etc.).

11. Build and strengthen other support structures for community radio stations; ideally also mobilize additional sources of funding for the community radio stations. This should include involving more the government and perhaps other partners.

12. Ensure that the offers for training and advice for community radio cover in equal measure (journalistic and technical) radio methods and also strategy and management themes so that they become less NGO mouthpieces and more stand-alone radio stations.

13. Conduct a more in-depth analysis of the community radio sector, for instance, through the systematic studies on the use of media and the needs of the rural population as well as the listening behavior of community radio listeners.

14. Develop standards for community radios, both with regard to the quality of the program and for the management. Especially develop quality standards for the production of commissioned programs (e.g., in the context of social campaigns), which are a significant source of funding for community radios.

15. Appoint a local expert on site as a project coordinator/ senior advisor in order to drive forward the processes, link up local players, and make use of opportunities that arise spontaneously as well as to increase the presence and visibility of the project and relieve the project manager of operational tasks. Employ an individual and not an institution (such as MRDI at the beginning) who is only accountable to the DW Akademie and who does not pursue institutional agendas.

16. Position DW Akademie in a more assertive and visible manner as the sector experts for community radio in Bangladesh also vis-à-vis other donors. Investigate possibilities of co-financing through other donors e.g., in the context of social campaigns, which other donors might want to launch via community radio.

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