Chapter 6:
**Good Morning, You Are Listening to Community Radio: A Collection of Stories about Listeners in Their Communities**

(Excerpt from Part Two: Stories of Learning)

Joke van Kampen’s chapter (6) takes readers for a ride on airwaves of local FM stations into the villages of Malawi. Through a series of micro-stories, community media are shown to be megaphones for storytelling about real problems faced by ordinary people and role models and actual solutions gained across the different stages of behavioural and social change. The stories featured on community learning programmes airing on local broadcasters could be listeners’ own. These are stories that are real, inspiring and empowering, with key messages that are understandable and doable.

More information: [www.col.org/LearningWithCM](http://www.col.org/LearningWithCM)
COL's Healthy Communities programme: [www.col.org/HealthyCommunities](http://www.col.org/HealthyCommunities)
GOOD MORNING, NKOTAKOTA.
Meet Dalitso.

Dalitso is washing the dishes while she is listening to the community radio channel. Dalitso is worried.

This morning she looked at her stock of maize, which is supposed to feed her family until the next harvest. But there were little black spots all over the maize. That means that her maize is infected by some sort of pest. The programme on the radio features a farmer who has built a storage hut for the maize in a way that protects the maize from pests. Dalitso listens to how the storage hut was built and decides to talk to her husband as soon as he is back from the field to see whether they can do the same.

*People learn from role modelling, notably based on stories that could have been their own and that involve solutions that can be easily copied.*

IT IS 12 O’CLOCK IN MANGOCHI. YOU ARE LISTENING TO DZIMWE COMMUNITY RADIO.
Meet Grace.

Grace is sitting on her *kondwe*, the veranda. She is biting her lip and feeling at her black eye, which hurts.

She is listening to a radio drama in which a woman tries to end her suffering from beatings by her husband. Grace sighs. Like the woman in the story, she has gone to her *ankoswe*, her marriage counsellor, many times. It helps, but only for a short time. As soon as there is a little money in the household, her husband starts drinking and beating her when he comes home.
The woman in the radio programme finally gets help from the victim support unit of the police, people who are trained to support victims of domestic violence. Grace listens attentively. She knows she has to do something as well. The final message of the programme is: Walk out while you still can walk. Grace sighs again. She does not want her husband in jail; she wants the beatings to stop. But she needs to talk to someone, anyone. Maybe she, too, should go and talk to that lady she knows at the victim support unit.

Grace is somewhere between Intention and Action on the behaviour change ladder, pictured below. Learning in itself is not necessarily or automatically empowering. On the contrary, many learning processes enhance negative values, including notions of the inferiority of women. If you have no agency over your own life, you will not be able to respond to an invitation to change and to become an agent of change. Storytelling provides an empowering way of learning.

WELCOME TO THE WEEKLY CHILD RIGHTS PROGRAMME AT MSIMBA COMMUNITY RADIO.

Meet Joyce.

Joyce is sitting on the floor of the classroom with her friends. They have established a child rights club and they listen to the child rights radio programme together on Wednesday afternoons. The programme contains a drama on child rights, followed by a discussion among children on the same topic.

Some weeks ago, the producer of the programme came to their club to record a discussion. It was nice for the club to hear themselves on the radio the next week. Joyce and her friends are now preparing a child
rights day in the area. They have invited all the important people, the chief and the social welfare department. They have written poems and developed a theatre play. The issue they are going to address is that Joyce and her friends are supposed to assist their parents in making wine from sugar cane in the season. They know now that that is child labour. The girls are supposed to get the sugar cane and to pound it into something that turns into alcohol after brewing. The boys are supposed to go and sell the wine, which is even worse because they do not go to school in that period and they drink the wine themselves. The club is proposing that whoever sees a girl carrying sugar cane should report it to the chief, who will then fine the parents (they will have to give a goat to the chief).

It is a general understanding that community media have a special role in providing a voice for the voiceless. We are your megaphone. Strictly speaking, this is not entirely correct since the radio needs not only to make the message louder, but also to get relevant parties to listen. Giving a voice to the voiceless is usually interpreted as a set of techniques to get the needs, desires and concerns of the community into the mainstream. Communities are also mini societies, with rich and poor people, people who are discriminated against, and people who are not listened to. Integrating their stories into the mainstream debate in the community is important.

IT IS 3 O’CLOCK. YOU ARE LISTENING TO MUDZI WATHU COMMUNITY RADIO STATION.

Meet Hilda.

Hilda and 12 other women are sitting around the radio under a baobab tree. They are listening together to a radio programme on maternal health. Two years ago, Hilda’s sister died while giving birth because she had no professional support and did not make it to the hospital in time. Hilda got a group of women together who wanted to do something about the high level of maternal mortality in the area. They go door to door to inform women on issues related to pregnancy and delivery. The radio programme provides them with information on these issues. Today the programme is talking about healthy food for a pregnant woman and the need to rest. Hilda smiles when, in the middle of the programme, songs on pregnancy and childbirth are aired. Hilda’s group wrote and performed these songs; they are listening to their own voices, their own stories and ideas.

A line one hears too often: Education is here to eradicate ignorance. However, the real point is that people are not ignorant. They may be disempowered and disenfranchised, but they are not ignorant. And if you approach them as being ignorant, your message will not get far.

If learning is empowering, it helps people to take action.
THIS IS MIJ RADIO. IT IS TIME FOR MWANA ALIRENJI, OUR WEEKLY FARMERS RADIO PROGRAMME.

Meet Andrew.

In the hills near Zomba, Andrew is listening to the radio. He listens to this programme all the time because it helps him to diversify his business. The staff from the radio station visited his community some time ago and he received a series of instructional materials that come with the radio programme.

Today’s programme is about starting up beekeeping. The so-called “low-literacy” sheet shows how to build a beehive and how to maintain it. Andrew thinks that this should be possible in the nearby forest. However, he needs to find out first whether he is allowed to put beehives in the forest. Who owns the forest? He will need to visit the District Forest Office tomorrow. The programme tells the story of a community that managed to get permission from the forest office to use the forest in a sustainable way — no small achievement since the forest office is infamous for its corrupt practices. Maybe, Andrew thinks, I should get together a group of farmers here first, and then go there together.

No community radio station will be able to avoid getting involved in governance/political issues. The key is to be rooted in the community and to use storytelling to get the message ahead.
HELLO, EVERYBODY. WE ARE BACK ON AIR. WELCOME TO PASCO RADIO STATION.

Meet Patrick.

Patrick is sitting in the open-air radio studio of Pasco Radio. It is a small operation. Mister Chata, a former teacher, built the whole thing himself even though he is blind. Pasco is on air every afternoon for four hours to a coverage area of about ten kilometres. It is a small area, but within those ten kilometres are many dedicated listeners.

Patrick is a member of a support group for people living with HIV/AIDS. He is interviewed by Mister Chata about their activities. He is telling the story of their community *dimbo* (vegetable garden) and kitchen where the group members grow vegetables together and cook once a week for the orphans and the sick people in the neighbourhood. They learn about healthy food and they practise community care for the vulnerable. Last week they made a stew from sweet potatoes and avocado. Who says that men cannot cook?

After the interview, Patrick cycles through the township. When he passes the bottle store, the men sitting outside call out to him: “Hey Patrick, we heard you in the radio, man! Come have a drink with us.”

*Stigma and discrimination can be fought by openness and raising the visibility of vulnerable groups. Role models can change the status of disadvantaged groups in the community.*

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**Story Workshop Educational Trust** (est. 1998) is a Malawian organisation with a mission to bring together social change communication and entertainment to help Malawians improve their everyday lives.

For further reference, see:

- [www.storyworkshop.org](http://www.storyworkshop.org)