European Commission

# COMMUNITY RADIO VOLUME RAISED IN MOROCCO



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## Web-radio lets local interest groups speak out

Hidden away in Casablanca's old abattoirs there is a door that opens into the control room of a web-radio recording studio. Nadja Faress of the women's rights association Association Marocaine pour les Droits des Femmes (Moroccan Association for the Rights of Women) is talking animatedly into her microphone in the adjoining room in answer to questions from the show's young presenter. Their discussion, which touches on violence and discrimination against women, is just one recording that will be broadcast over the internet that week from this newly created studio, which forms the hub of the E-Joussour Community Radio web network.

The recording studio has a simple feel, but its origins are complicated. It is the final fruit of a two-year consultation process over Morocco's audio-visual sector by regional, national and international journalists, bloggers, and human rights organisations representatives. The process, which received more than €250 000 in funding from EuropeAid (the EU's Directorate General responsible which is responsible for designing development policy and delivering aid), highlighted gaps in the country's audio-visual communications legislation which, since 2005, permits public and private commercial radio, but still fails to recognise the existence of community radio.

A long-time state monopoly, Morocco's audio-visual communications sector has been slowly opening up since the early 2000s. In 2002, the green light was given to set up the independent audio-visual regulatory body, Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle (High Authority of Audiovisual Communication), and to allow the creation of both public and private radio stations.

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## BIRTH OF COMMUNITY RADIO

Community radio first started in South America during the 1950s, as a way of communicating about local social problems and unrest. A popular means of local news broadcasting in many countries around the world today, it is gradually being introduced, wherever possible, into those North African and Middle Eastern countries where freedom of expression is not a given. As a way of supporting this development, the web portal that hosts E-Joussour web-radio – www.ejoussour.net – publishes information on human rights and socio-political issues in North Africa and the Middle East too.

Headquartered at the Rabat-based NGO Forum des Alternatives Maroc (Forum of Moroccan Alternatives), the portal's coordinator, Mohamed Leghtas, explains that as part of the EuropeAid-funded scheme radio kits and training in radio broadcasting, podcasting, blogging and citizens' journalism were given to members of six community associations. The radio trainees have since set up their own outstations around the country and feed their recordings to E-Joussour web-radio in Casablanca.

But the scope of the sector remains limited. Though web community radio is tolerated, it is not yet possible to broadcast community radio programmes on FM airwaves. Says E-Joussour presenter Rajae Amerhoun: "This community web-radio network enables Moroccans to give another image of their society – one that's not always seen or heard at national level. We broadcast all the standard types of material like music and arts news, but we also address social and human rights issues."

Mustapha Moryno of the Casablanca-based community development organisation, Association El Miter Bouchentouf for social development, has made use of the E-Joussour web-radio initiative to raise awareness of social problems in his neighbourhood. "Our association deals with numerous community issues – like women's rights, harassment of street vendors, public authority corruption. E-Joussour is our space to talk about subjects that other radios don't want to hear about."



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Says Leghtas: "We wanted to popularise the web-radio concept as much as possible among communities. The web works particularly well in areas where the illiteracy rate is high. People there may not read much but they can always call into internet cafés, which are everywhere."

One association that received a radio kit and has started broadcasting is Azetta in Rabat. Its broadcasts are in Tamazight, the official language of the Amazigh – or Berber, which, as a derivative of the word 'barbarian', is a term dropping out of favour. The indigenous people of Morocco, the Amazigh, live across the country – around 60% of the population is estimated to be ethnically Amazigh – but their language only started to be taught in schools in 2003 when a scheme to introduce it into the classroom was launched.



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Steering the show at the Azetta outstation is Zahra Ouhssain, a national radio journalist who works to promote Amazigh culture in her spare time. "We cover both cultural and political news," she says. "It's important we do this in Tamazight because Arabic and French dominate Moroccan broadcasting. In our offices today, we have an Amazigh poet to record some of his verses for our audience. We will also be talking about women's issues in relation to Amazigh culture.

"Overall, ever since schools started offering teaching in Tamazight, there is increasing tolerance of Amazigh culture, but we still need to do this kind of work. After all, it wasn't so long ago that Amazigh people – including myself – were not allowed to use our Amazigh names in the classroom. We all had to adopt Arabic names instead."

## DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Since the EuropeAid-funded scheme ended in mid-2013, a further six outstations of the E-Joussour web-radio network have been set up around Morocco – all of them initiated by community associations keen to talk about their area of interest such as the environment, arts and culture, youth, or disability.

In tandem with the launch of the web-radio network, the scheme has also produced with the support of other alternative media broadcasting groups, both national and international, a study on Morocco's audio-visual landscape, particularly the role community radio could play in it, a suggested code of ethics to govern community media and a draft bill on community radio in Morocco.

Besides advocating for the integration of community radio into Morocco's audio-visual communications legislation, it has also, as an outcome of the consultation process, pushed for regulation of the country's digital media.

The development of digital media has been held back in Morocco due to a lack of a regulatory framework to govern it and a lack of training in how to prevent intellectual property and ethical violations from occurring. The approach adopted by the hundreds of participants in the consultation process on this issue is two-fold: on the one hand, they advocate safeguarding the freedom of individuals to undertake personal web initiatives like blogs, on the other, they advocate regulating the digital press to ensure its long-term sustainability and development. The advocacy and community web-radio work continues.



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