

# Community Radio: The Public Area of Communication

The necessity for media reform towards the principles of community radio stations

‘We can no longer stay under the ruin and chaos of a communications system which lacks common policies and planning. We have no time to waste. Communication is becoming the tool of threat rather than the tool of understanding. From now on, we must solve these problems?’.

(from ‘Communication Policy: Trend and Modern Concept, 1984)

In the past 20 years, intellectuals and people in the field of mass media have called for the freedom of radio and television media against the control and domination of the state and capitalism. However, the official media reformation only began in recent years. It seems only to be fighting on the discourse of media reform rather than leading to a real policy shift. In addition, such reform couldn’t catch up the time which continuously brought new and bigger problems. From the past until the present, radio and television media have been criticized as a tool used for tempting, creating an illusion, stimulating consumption, and not as the responsible and informative media it should be. According to its *raison d’être*, mass communication should function as the web of human society which helps to reduce the social gap and create an understanding between the various groups in society.

Broadcast media commenced in the authoritative period (radio in 1930, television in 1955), following the time of demand for social rights, freedom, and democracy (1973-1979). Despite being used mainly by the state as a tool to direct people’s thoughts, broadcast media was changed during a *détente* period where there was a growth in the overall communication business (1979-1992). Apart from the overall economic growth, another factor exclusively affecting the adaptation of radio was the growth of the Thai music recording business since 1979. The popularity of Thai folk songs and international songs enabled music programs to be major revenue earners for radio stations. What happened is a phenomenon called ‘a thousand for a queue, one song per day’ by which cassette recorder companies bought a queue position to play their songs in order to boost their cassette sales.

It could be said that since the late of 1970’s radio media gradually shifted its role from being a political tool of the authoritarian/conservative clique, to being a part of capitalism. But, while they gained some freedom, if only to a slight degree, instead of reflecting the rights and freedom of the people, radio and television media pursued the commercial freedom for businesses as their major mission. At that time, radio station networks were owned by the army and other government agencies, propagating for the state as well as commercial advertising to expand the economy and industry. This left no choice of information and entertainment for people in rural areas. They had to listen to programs full of advertisements for pain-killing drugs, cosmetics and lucky draw programs. Generally, instead of motivating a political participation, the mass media maintained a consistent and political sluggishness as well as existing as one of the mechanisms of commercial capital.

Nevertheless, the demand for the state to stop dominating and using media for political propaganda took place along with the development of the fight for people’s rights and freedom since 14 October 1973 and 6 October 1976. The Black May of 1992 was considered as a key turning point that made the state’s media reformation more prevalent. Obstructed from real information by the state, people united together as a force to drive out government by military dictatorship. After that incident ended, on 28 May 1992, a large discussing forum entitled ‘The Crisis of Mass Communication’ was convened by the mass communication academic institutions throughout the country at the main auditorium of Chulalongkorn University. In that forum, Prof. Dr. Prawase Wasi proposed concrete recommendations as: 1) the ownership of media must be reformed, e.g. take some areas of the media back from the army or the government Public Relations Department; 2) a law should be enacted to acknowledge the people’s fundamental

right to receive truthful information from the media and; 3) an independent organization should be established to handle matters relating to media communication.

Following this period of political crisis the trend for media liberalization (1992-1997) increased as a result of the struggle for democracy in May 1992. This trend reflected the political power of the middle class who believed that media liberalization is the essential foundation for the development of democracy and posed a direct threat to the dictatorship. As a result, the middle class took this opportunity to explicitly express that their rights and the freedom of information were the basis for the development of their economic, political and social power.

Such demands led to the establishment of a government task force by Mr. Anan Panyarachun's administration for media improvement. This task force made a suggestion on the guidelines for the government's media improvement based on the principles of liberty and equality of information access, and radio and television frequency reform.

At that time academics and public lawyers, led by Assoc. Prof., Dr. Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, Assoc. Prof., Dr. Vorapod Visarutpich, Assoc. Prof., Dr. Visunu Varunyu and Mookmetin Klannurak, jointly did a research on *The Role of the State in Mass Communication* (1996) in order to present some guidelines in mass media reform. The key concept of the research was:

It is important to change the fundamental concept of radio and television re-regulation in Thailand. Such regulation must be reformed to function as supervisor rather than controller; meanwhile, there must be another reform for a re-regulation on the economic side, together with a de-regulation on the political side. This is to create diversity in various aspects, whether for entrepreneurs, in style, or content, in order to create a more widespread participation. Consequently, mass media would become more creative as it has to serve the public interest.

The major concrete result of the demand for an independent media was the emergence of a new and the first private television station. Its intention was to have a managerial structure free from political influence and was the background of the ITV television station or, as earlier named, Independent Television. Today there is no trace of such intention.

Moreover, the suggestions on the concept of reforming all the government's media were developed into the will of the Members of Parliament in drafting the Constitution. Articles 39, 40 and 41 of the Constitution include the guarantee of the rights and freedom of mass media for the people, as well as the principle of returning radio, television and telecommunications frequencies to be national resources, used for national and local public interest, within the concept of fair and free competition.

It could be said that after promulgating the present Constitution in October 1997, broadcast media was forced into a period of media and political reform (1997-2001). This period was considered as a political honeymoon because democracy in Thailand had reached its peak again after the 14 October 1973 incident. Additionally, the principle of the public's mass media rights, as provided by Article 40 of the Constitution, had awakened people throughout the country to pursue and push forward media reform, which was in accordance with the concept of political reform, the establishment of a participatory democracy, and the government decentralization, etc.

The main discourse raised by scholars and the people's organizations during the time of advancing constitutional reform, supplemented other mechanisms, such as organic laws, focused that media reform must lead to the promotion of the people's communication rights for which the international community had already campaigned for a long time.

Notwithstanding the recognition of such principles by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2540 (1997), its guarantee of communication rights is merely a preliminary agreement on setting up a relationship and allocating power between individuals, communities, and the state.

Therefore, some provisions within the law, including the reform of the organizational culture of the media relating to personnel, and the culture of exercising the power of the state, must be implemented in order to balance the common ownership of sovereignty between the state, individuals and communities.

Besides being under the political mandate, the problem of the Thai broadcasting media was a commercial dominance resulting from allowing radio and television media to be directed by a market mechanism and driven by commercial profit. Consequently, the content of broadcasting media became soft, lacked variety, and was not in line with the interests of local people, who had economic and cultural differences, because broadcasting media mainly emphasized entertainment programs. This structural problem was so manifest that the culture of Thai radio and television was deeply dominated by, according to Associate Professor Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, the "Authoritarian Patronage-Privileged Capitalism". The support for media reform as the intention of the Constitution, was thus obstructed by various problems, difficulties, limitations and impediments.

Such phenomena led certainly to the stagnation of radio and television media reform. The reforms didn't move in a progressive direction and even receded to a crisis again. Being entirely under the mandate of the state that used broadcasting media as a tool for propaganda, together with the privatization of mass communication without good governance, interrupted media reform in relation to the Constitution. As a result, broadcasting media became the tool of the market and no longer responsible to the people.

The concept of public media and community media

"The most vibrant and hopeful response to the trend toward globalization and commercialization has been the rise of community radio, and public access to radio and television stations and programs."

Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney (The Global Media: the new missionaries of corporate capitalism, 1997)

Herman and McChesney, American media critics, referred to the development of radio/television media for public services and growing communities as the most prominent hope among the expanding globalization of business.

Many words reflecting our understanding of the characteristics of a particular media are used to identify different types of media. For example, we often name radio-television media in Thailand as a state media since they are under state control; we name mass communication as a business mechanism, whether radio-television media or press media, as mainstream media or, a more common word, mass media. On the other hand, in many countries, especially western countries, a part of radio-television media was called public media because, despite being under the regulation of the state, they focused on independent management and the public interest.

Thitinan Pongsuthirak concluded that the concept of a public media emerged from the lack of confidence and limitation in the state's regulation and a market mechanism. Therefore, the key principles of public media are as follows:

1. All the people are able to listen/watch
2. program producers have freedom of expression and are neutral in presenting their programs
3. having a variety in content so that it will match interests for all groups of people

4. focusing more on the quality of programs than the quantity of audiences

5. having a role in developing the people's quality of life

Michel Tracey (1998) interestingly referred to the indicator of difference in public media as:

?In a public system, television producers acquire money to make programs. In a commercial system they make programs to acquire money?

Though having good principles, public media in fact has its own restrictions. Being public media, it cannot go into details nor have the diversity in responding to the different interests and demands of various groups in society. Thus the concept of alternative media, local media, and community media was developed to fulfill this communications gap in society.

In the 1970s, the concept of alternative media began in western countries and in many regions. It could be said that the movement of alternative media became widespread because of:

1. The emergence of new social movements e.g. women's rights groups, racial groups, migrants, environmentalists, peace movements, homosexual rights groups, and anti-racism groups. The substance, attitudes, and sentiments of these groups may be ignored or misrepresented and distorted by mainstream media

2. The old social movements, whether human rights groups, trade unions, farmer's movements or people in rural areas, which gain no interest from centralization, and the movement of the poor who are affected by policies favoring the rich. These people have no communication arena and freedom of expression in the public domain.

3. The political demand for alternative media, such as from local groups in North America, Eastern Europe or African nations is governed by various groups. Most of these groups establish their own underground media, and then evolved an alternative media.

Consequently, alternative broadcasting media or community radio is popular and widespread, and was used to fulfill this communications area, which each group needs for their expression. Furthermore, alternative media was considered by UNESCO as an important principle in developing and promoting the process of community radio.

According to *Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local* (1993), and quoted in the *World Communication Report* (1989) of UNESCO, the characteristic of a community media is as follows:

A community, reflecting both sociological and geographical features, is based on the horizontal communication of social organizations. On the other hand, community radio is a media that encourages the extensive participation of representatives from every minor group with economic, social and cultural differences.

The Hamlink's (1994) concept of the right to communicate and people's media illustrates more clearly the aspect of media for a community. The people's media must be free from any dominance; instead, it must empower the people.

?The word 'empower' means to give power to the people. It is a process in which people access their potential to control a decision affecting their lives. Empowerment will enable people to define themselves and build their own identity. It can be created intentionally as well as unintentionally. Communication has an important role in both disempowering and empowering people. Power is generated once people realize decisions can affect their lives and understand what they can do with such decisions. The people's power must include the expression of feelings, while

discussion and the exchange of experiences are the means of empowerment in the context of world communication

Community radio became apparent worldwide from America to Europe and Asia. Despite different contexts, its main principle is as a non-profit operation with the participation of communities. At the international level, there is the uniting of community radio networks, generally known as AMARC or the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters and Global Alternative Media Associations (GAMA)

In the United States, provisions on the allocation of frequencies are clearly divided into two types, commercial sector and non-profit. Certainly, the proportion of frequencies for the public interest is smaller (approximately 20-30%). Such proportion includes public media, educational frequencies, religious frequencies, and community radio frequencies. At present, the demand from the people is more than the proportion allocated by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), the state's independent regulator on frequencies. This excess demand in the United States results in the emergence of countless numbers of low-powered radio transmitters in the form of pirate radio stations as a communication method for people who are unable to achieve an official frequency allocation.

?We have to make sure that the voiceless have a voice?

(Kiilu Nyasha, San Francisco Liberation Radio)

?We have to make sure that the voiceless have a voice? is a confirmation from a member of the micropower radio network, which materialized as a challenge to both commercial radio and mainstream community radio. This confirmation was written down in the ?Seizing the Airwaves? by Ron Sakolsky & Stephen Dunifer, the pioneers of Free Radio Berkley, a low-powered radio station established without a license from the FCC, leading to a trial before the Supreme Court. Finally, Free Radio Berkley won the case owing to the constitutional guarantee of free speech, a key principle of the U.S. Constitution.

Pirate radio, unconventional radio, a so-called illegal radio without a government license, has occurred continually since there are new groups of people who need their communication areas but are unable to reach the existing media. What's interesting is that these emerging media imply a criticism of existing media with 20-30 years experience. Such criticism is that most of the existing media had transformed themselves into mainstream media to support the business sector and focusing mainly on income and sustainable growth. The point is that this existing media was less critical and complied more with national media policies.

From the experience over the past 20-30 years, it seems that community radio cannot escape changing the earlier intention of western community radio. It has become similar to mainstream media and new radio stations are emerging to challenge all the time.

A community radio has many limitations. Undoubtedly, it is difficult for any non-profit media to survive in today's capitalism. Furthermore, the participation and spirit of volunteers in jointly creating a community radio are the major challenges to the sustainability of a community radio station.

In authenticating community radio, the key rules are to check the source of financial support if considering the independence of a community radio station; and to look into the cooperation and sense of mutual ownership between volunteers and members of the community, if considering the sustainability of a community radio. These two rules, if insecure, may lead to the end of community radio.

Most community radio stations in North America, Australia, and Europe have similarities in their

sources of income. Income is mainly derived from listener sponsorship received directly from listeners and community members in the form of a member fee or donation. This accounts for 50-60% of the total income. Another 20-30% is supplemented by funds from tax through the government's policies or the parliament. The remaining 10-20% balance is from sponsors, both business and associations, as well as special activities of that community radio station to raise funds.

In the United States, the FCC is responsible for allocating radio frequencies. The Congress allocates a budget in the form of funds managed by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This supplementary budget, not more than 25% of the total budget, is to support public and community media.

In each country, community media may be called differently according to its technology and expression, for instance, community radio, neighborhood radio, or remote broadcasting radio. It should be noted that community media doesn't mean only broadcast media but includes press media, local media and various forms of moving media.

The major challenges, which are also common problems with community radio, are management, goal achievement, fund mobilization, and sustainability. These challenges begin as soon as the structure of a community radio's executive board is established. Other challenges include the transparency of management, democracy in working practices, decisions on management, and the editorial department.

In addition, the scope, regulation, and statute of a community radio station must be defined; the content and schedule of programs must be arranged in accordance with the interests of various groups; and the balance and quality of information and entertainment must be maintained.

In the first stage the challenge of community radio is the readiness and common spirit of members who administer a community radio station, particularly in developing countries where the majority lives in a community or earns their living from an agricultural sector. These people aren't familiar with communication devices and have their own burdens in working. Therefore, some community radio stations start with the active participation of the people, but as the period of happiness passes by, the interest and enthusiasm of people in developing their community radio station decreases. Few persons are left to respond to the broadcast. Finally, those community radio stations may be distorted or terminated. According to the analysis of Cees J. Hamelink, a scholar in media, when the strength of a community in jointly administering their community radio station weakens, there would be an opportunity for power groups, whether politicians, businessmen, or the military, to exercise influence over a community radio station.

In Thailand, the concept of community broadcasting media is recognized by the Constitution of B.E. 2540 (1997), and is mentioned in the master plan for developing mass media, information technology and telecommunications for the development of the people and society 1999-2008. This is a vision to enhance the mutual consciousness and self-esteem of the people, which will lead to a good quality of life and happiness. The objective of the master plan is to achieve a balance of three parts i.e. state media (40%), people media such as NGOs, communities (20%), and private business (40%).

Ubonrat Siriyuwasak (2004) suggested that the philosophy of community radio is the idea that media belongs to people and the people are the direct owners who will administer by themselves with non-profit intentions. This suggestion is in line with the idea of Kanjana Kaewthep that communication must be of the people, from the people, for the people, as much as it can be.

Jumbol Rodkamdee (1999) said that people can participate in national communications activity through a community radio station which is of the people, by the people and for the people, according to the approach of UNESCO which refers that using a community broadcasting media is a participatory communication focusing on media access, participation and self-management of people. It also focuses on participatory communication in relation to the understanding and

acceptance, on the basis of diversity and plurality, of the honor and prestige of people.

Vittaya Chiangkool (1997) proposed that in order to provide rights and opportunities in communication to the people, apart from having the policy of radio and television liberalization, the state should encourage people's organizations or communities to own radio and television stations, or appoint their representatives to manage public radio and television stations.

Pisit Chavalatawat (1999), a scholar in mass media law, agreed that it is necessary to reorganize the media and to increase its role and involvement with local civil societies so that it will conform to the new community structure which has more autonomy. By providing, when restructuring, a guarantee of the rights and freedom in order to create the participation of local people in activities, the state recognizes the ideal concept of 'local media is done by local people and for local people.'

These academic concepts are in line with the feeling of people who need their own media as a mouthpiece and a medium within communities and societies; particularly people's organizations such as the Assembly of the Poor that jointly submitted their problems to the government, exercised its rights to assembly under the Constitution, and was adversely affected by the unjust structure of the media.

Chaipan Prapasawat, advisor to the Assembly of the Poor, explained that:

'The allocation of frequencies for radio, television and telecommunications, is involved with power and interest groups. Thus, the state grabs it so that people cannot take part. This leads to damage and loss. For example, in 1997 Thailand had more than 500 radio stations of which more than 200 stations, or more than 40%, belonged to the Ministry of Defense or the military. Moreover, where people didn't have their own media, they had to use other ways to communicate, such as strikes. It could be said that the state raised the potential for violence in the structural level. From the very beginning, media expression has been a fundamental freedom for humankind. It can build both war and peace. Therefore, it's time to give media back to the people.'

Mrs. Sompong Viangchan, the representative of the people who protested the construction of Pak Mool dam and a member of the Assembly of the Poor, expressed her opinions:

'We want people in Ubonthani to understand what we will face. We want them to be our alliance?

'We want to have radio and television programs that respond to our problems and needs. We want to have media that conveys our local traditions and music.'

'We don't want to see our children look down upon the cultures which are our own origins,'

(Quoted from Supara Chanchidfah, 'Radio Free Isan', Bangkok Post 16 May 1999)

These opinions, which are the same as from other groups, reflect the 'absence of communication rights'. A representative from the Slum Network said that 'people need their own frequency because nowadays it belongs to a few groups of people like soldiers and capitalists while the poor and slum people want to speak out but they can't.' Another representative from a labor network said that 'people don't have an opportunity to communicate about their problems so they have to gather together at the government's residence. This makes Bangkok people bored. Providing media time or media frequency to the people to communicate their problems will help decrease the mobs.' A representative from a democratic organization said that 'people must partake in an agency that allocates radio and television frequencies. If we let the government do it with full authority, no frequencies would be left to the people. In the past, farmers and laborers

can't communicate about their problems to the whole of society.? (Quoted from the document of the People's Agenda for Thais, 2000)

Kittipong Suthi, from the Association of the Blind of Thailand, expressed that:

?The blind are disabled in the press media but radio media can compensate for the blind. So we'd like to have a radio station for the disabled. Apart from the blind, there should be radio media for other people like the elderly who can't read, small children, patients in hospital who want to rest, and the illiterate.?

(Quoted from Chutima Suncharoen, ?Article 40: a way towards media reform,? quoted from Chutima Suncharoen, ?Article 40: A Way Towards Media Reform?, Krungthep Turakij ? Judprakry 20 May 1999)

The way of a community radio

In the process to enact the organic law of Article 40 of the Constitution, there was an argument on which law, between the Radio and Television Business Operation Bill and the Organization Bill, is to be drafted first. Scholars supported the Radio and Television Business Operation Bill because it is a principle for reforming the media. Finally, the government chose to draft the Organization Bill first to establish an agency independent of government. During that time, some people acted under the name of the ?Article 40 follow-up group? consisting of the Thai Volunteer Service, Campaign for Popular Democracy, Union for Civil Liberty, Friends of the People, NGO's network, and people's organizations which had been acted since the promulgation of the Constitution.

Apart from the follow up to check the transparency of the government's action, there was also an intense conceptual fight on the different ideas between the people, government, and business. The NGOs based their position on the concept of people's rights, while the business community insisted on the free market concept, and the government believed in a combination between authoritarianism and capitalism which must be under the veil of ?national security?.

Therefore, the position of the Article 40 follow-up groups is mainly based on the people's media concept with a discourse that ?Article 40 returns media to people? as the document of the People's Agenda for Thais (2000) which stated:

?Concerning Article 40 of the Constitution, the Article 40 follow-up group, consisting of the Thai Volunteer Service, Campaign for Popular Democracy, Union for Civil Liberty, Friends of the People, and other Non-Governmental Organizations in various fields such as children, labor, slum people, AIDS, etc., jointly followed up and pushed forward mechanisms so that the intention of the Constitution wasn't distorted by some groups who weren't satisfied with the changes. For the past three years, the follow-up group has been closely following and pushing forward reforms by performing social movement activities. For example, representatives from different groups like children, youths, slums, Thai hill tribes and farmers, took turns to witness the meetings of the ad hoc committee for drafting the bill and submitted their demands from time to time; campaigned among the general public by organizing continually outside-parliament activities such as seminars, discussions, press release forums. Other strategies used by the follow-up group included a close follow up in the legislature assembly. For instance, a number of people, wearing green t-shirts with a slogan promoting media reforma, sat in the meeting of the ad hoc committee at the parliament in order to notify the committee that people were watching closely. This was a strategy to add pressure and bring the conversation in the meeting room into a debate in the public arena. In order to push forward our principles, representatives from the people's sector will participated both inside and outside parliament.

?People asked for their mouthpiece, a public radio-television frequency? (Thai Post 20 Jun. 41)

?Let people take part in frequency allocation? (Matichon 21 June 41)

During 1999-2000, there were 3 representatives from scholars and civil society as members of the committee drafting the bill: Assoc. Prof. Visanu Waranyu, Jiraporn Wittayasakpan, PhD.Dr. Nirun Pitakwatchara. In the drafting process, they played an important role in pushing forward the concept of the people's media. Furthermore, the movement of the people helped lead to a major change in the Organization of Frequency Allocation and Supervision of Radio Broadcasting, Television and Telecommunication Businesses Act B.E. 2543 (2000), article 26, which provided that:

?In making the master plan for the broadcasting business and television business, and in permitting such business to operate, shall take into consideration the proper proportion between the government's entrepreneur, private entrepreneurs, and the people. Not less than 20 percent of frequencies shall be provided to the people. In cases where the people lack readiness, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) shall assist the people to utilize such frequencies in the proportion as prescribed.

To favor frequency allocation for the people and the support of the use of frequencies by the people, the NBC shall determine a rule on the qualifications of people that should receive such frequencies as well as the utilization of such frequencies. At least, such people shall operate with the objective for the public interest and non-profit operation.?

After promulgating the law, the concept of the people's media became an argument in the general public arena. The authorities, led by the Public Relations Department, disagreed and objected to any media owned by the people on the ground that its quality, consistency, and language will not be compatible with the standard of central Thai language. Interested in media reform were the entertainment media and record companies that began to take part in every process of the NBC's selection and the Radio and Television Business Operation Bill. Generally, the concept of government and business always contradicted that of the people and scholars. Even today there's no sign that the mechanisms of the Constitution are completed. Meanwhile, it seems that the government and business has already changed the concession contract of privatizing radio, television, and telecommunications without considering the Constitution.

More than seven years after the Constitution promulgated, and despite very few changes in the structure, the dynamic of the people to realize their rights increased sharply, especially after Article 40 recognized the people's rights to own 20% of media distribution. One concrete result is the emergence of a community radio station where a civil society in Kanchanaburi province built a broadcasting transmitter and tested a trial broadcast by using a low-powered transmitter for the first time on 19 December 2001. This led to the establishment of community radio stations nationwide, as well as an opposition from the government. Regarded as an illegal radio station by the government, any community radio station is considered as just unlicensed.

Mr. Boonsong Chansongrassamee, the president of Kanchanaburi media reform group and the pioneer of the first community radio in Thailand, said that a community radio is a tool to convey the knowledge of the community and people which exists in everybody, not only for powerful groups. We have to create our alternative by ourselves. We have to contribute our time. I work in the media field with the idea to ?liberate? communication and dominance of thought by using media as a tool. (Hyde Park News Letter, 1st issue, June-July 46)

Following the first community radio station in Kanchanaburi, today more than 140 stations have been established by community organization networks throughout the country. On 10 October 2002, the first National Federation of Community Radio was established, but was seriously objected to by the authorities led by the Department of Public Relations and the Post and Telegraph Department. The authorities entered a charge that such a community radio was illegal

and violated an old law, the Broadcasting Radio and Television Act B.E. 2498 (1955) and the transitory provision article 80 of article 40 which stated that unless there is the NBC, the frequency can't be allocated. However, the government dared not oppose the emerging community radio because of high demand from the people, asserting their rights under the Constitution and the support of society.

Therefore, a solution for the government was to issue a cabinet resolution on 16 July 2002 in order to ratify the existence of community radios. Such resolution expressly stated that forbidding the people to operate a community radio might be regarded as unconstitutional. Then, the Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Prime Minister's Office, organized a meeting according to the cabinet resolution in order to set the provisional measures and rules for community radio. In this meeting, the National Human Rights Commission, the Campaign for Popular Media Reform, (CPMR) together with the National Community Radio Federation, the network of mass media scholars, and the network of mass media professions, jointly pushed forward the drafting of provisional measures and rules so that they will favor media access by the people.

However, during the meeting to draft the provisional measures and rules in the afternoon of 30 October 2002, a representative from the Post and Telegraph brought a warrant (from the Criminal Court, Bangkok dated 30 October 2002) to search and seize a radio transmitter at Ang Thong community radio learning center. This action was based on the old law that needed to be revised, the Radio Telecommunication Act B.E. 2498 (1955). Moreover, the court issued a warrant of arrest in order to arrest Mr. Sathien Chantorn, a coordinator of Ang Thong community radio. This incident raised again a serious atmosphere and distrust in the government's mixed up policy on a community radio policy. On 31 October 2002, CPMR, together with the National Community Radio Federation gave a press release and submitted a document to the National Human Rights Commission, the President of the Senate, and the Chairman of Committee on Public Participation of the Senate, asking for a follow up and inspection of the Ang Thong case.

Mr. Sathien Chantorn, a defendant charged with possessing a community radio transmitter, said that at the beginning, and not until 1983, his broadcasting tower was built from his personal funds and the government's leftovers which he had fixed and improved. In 2000, he asked for a budget from the social fund in order to run a public address system in his sub-district. Later, it was developed into Ang Thong community radio station until he was arrested and the station was closed in 2002.

The basis of community radio is how to send the information from the authorities to the people as a medium. We don't want it to be a one-way communication that just informs people. We want the people to understand a situation thoroughly and not be dominated by politicians and business, especially local politicians. (Interview of Mr. Sathien in Hyde Park News Letter, 2nd issue, 1st year, August-September 2003)

Regarding the cabinet resolution on 16 July 2002 allowing the operation of community radio stations, a task force to determine the control measures for community radio's frequencies must be set up in order to set provisional standards. The task force consisted of representatives from the authorities, scholars, NGOs, and community organizations.

While the civil society was finding a common agreement on provisional measures in supervising radio, the Public Relations Department, who in the first place had disagreed with community radio, now filed a document to the Office of the Legislative and Judicial Council to consider the establishment of a Tambon Administrative Organization Radio.

According to the document of the Public Relations Department on social news dated 8 December 2002, Mr. Pramote Ratvinij, Deputy Director General of Public Relations Department, had a meeting with Mr. Yongyut Tiypairat, Secretary-General of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister, approving the establishment of community radio stations in every sub-district as a new

year gift to the people. The implementation was that the Post and Telegraph Department would allocate the existing frequency so that community radio stations can be set up nationwide. The transmission power of these new community radio stations must not exceed 20 watts and the antenna must not be higher than 30 meters. Before broadcasting, the officer of every station must undergo training on radio broadcasting management, program production, Thai pronunciation, and the gathering of information from the Public Relations Department. The number of radio stations in the first stage was 400 stations, and this would be increased to 1,500 stations. However, this idea was criticized and opposed to so much that the Public Relations Department had to end its action.

After 8 months of considering the provisional measures for community radio, recently on 24 June 2003 the government passed a vague cabinet resolution regarding community radio. This resolution authorized the Public Relations Department to manage a community radio program without the slightest degree of the people's participation.

At present, even though the Public Relations Department had ended the idea of a Tambon Administrative Organization Radio, it produced a manual on the participation in a preparatory project for community radio by the National Broadcasting Radio and Television Businesses Commission. Then, on 29 October 2004 the Department of Public Relations invited community radio entrepreneurs throughout the country and other interested people to join the Department of Public Relations' network. The Department of Public Relations will issue a license to broadcast community radio under a contractual condition that any income generating programs or advertisements cannot be over 6 minutes per hour. In addition there must be an executive committee managing the community radio's operations, exactly according to the Broadcasting Radio and Television Act. Participants have to pay a project the fee of 1,000 baht per year and security money of 5,000 baht, as security against violation of the contract. Interesting persons can apply at every Public Relations Office throughout the country during 1 November - 31 December 2004, as well as have to sign all contracts by 31 January 2005. From 1 February 2005, the National Broadcasting Radio and Television Businesses Commission will order all Public Relations Offices to take firm action against those who operate illegal community radios, for instance, by jamming the signal and seizing their transmitters.

Assist. Prof., Dr. Aerjit Wirojtrirat, Vice President of the Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR), gave a press release opposing such a plan of the Public Relations Department as it would affect the people's rights process. (Krungthep Turakij 15 November 2004)

The conflict on community radio between the Public Relations Department and civil society is like a long movie that will not end easily. Although the people, from their struggle, have a right to possess public frequencies, the government, in relation to its power, doesn't recognize that people have rights to govern themselves regarding community radio. The role of the Department of Public Relations in trying to systematize community media under its mandate with a possibility to advertise identifies the disorder between the government's policy and the vision of the Public Relations Department.

Consequently, using its authority to control but at the same time paving a way in favor of business became the ready-to-use policy of the government in the present time. This method is effective to follow the divide and rule principle. Obviously, the situation of community radio is confusing. There is separation and contradiction between those who agree with the systematization of the Department of Public Relations and those who disagree because they deem it as contrary to the intention of the Constitution.

While fighting on the concept with the state authority, the people's network at the same time is testing themselves about their strength and clear position on community radio. This will prove the legitimacy of exercising rights under the Constitution. Certainly, the present situation is full of confusion and fighting between exercising power and challenging that power.

State controls media + dominance of capitalism --- > people challenge power = a community radio

People possess media ---- > state challenges power = systematizing, arresting

People are strong = state/business has no meaning

People are weak = state controls, business dominate

Free from state + free from capitalism = independent people's media

Apart from the above problems, presently there are many hidden community radio stations. People or individuals that can purchase a transmitter can establish a station. These people include local politicians, record companies, commercial program hosts, and other individuals who haven't passed the academic process of community radio broadcasting.

The confusion during this time allows society to learn together and wait for the NBC to take action. The most important fact is that the process of supervision must be open for participation and with a social checking mechanism, and must be balanced by the total authority of NBC in interpreting what is community radio and what is not. If \_\_\_ has no vision in democratic media and has the same interest as a politician or a business, the process of allocation and licensing in the future will face an absolute crisis.

As community radio began to expand in Thailand, there were many academic works and concepts from many people who tried to define community radio; for example, Integrated Strategy Project, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, which published the directory of 108 community radio stations throughout the country and provided the 3 principles of community radio:

1. Jointly possessed by the people's organization
2. Operated for public interest not profit
3. Operated with the participation of the community at every step, from establishment, management, fund raising, program scheduling, program running, and assessment.

Moreover, there are 6 rules for a community in operating a community radio:

1. Must be a small radio station with 10-20 kilometers broadcasting range or within one or two sub-districts. Needs small budget and can be self-administered by a community.
2. Every group in a community, whether officially organized or not, and people of every age and every religion can access and utilize.
3. Work by volunteer participants is most important.
4. Listeners and program hosts are the same group. Various groups in a community will mutually define a program schedule according to the readiness of listeners and program hosts, and broadcast accordingly. May be only a few hours per day.
5. Reflects the needs and the characteristics of the local community such as a dialect, etc.

6. Free from domination by influence groups, interest groups and political parties at all levels.

However, rules and regulations in detail will be various according to different scholastic schools or a community's opinions. Absolutely, the characteristic of a community radio is full of diversity in content and appearance or even its position. Some radio stations are conservative while some are radical, both left and right. Some radio stations are neutral focusing on cultures but some are used by a community as a tool for debate on different issues; for example, the community radio of environmentalists in Kanchanaburi is not the same as the one for the Phu Thai people in Sakonnakorn, and much different from the one of the people in Songkla who oppose the construction of the Trans- Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline and gas separation plant.

According to the excerpt from the "Community Radio: Process of Revealing and Becoming" by Kanchana Kaewthep, PhD. in Krungthep Turakij, 19 February 2004, we can conclude from her experiences that a community radio is like a sequence from Jurassic Park in which there were many dinosaurs with different species, sizes, appearance, and eating behaviors. This is the same in the case of community radio. "Community radio stations which differ in their nature are made up by the context of each community. For instance, in the context of a big town with many business premises, such as Nakorn Ratchasima province, it will make up its community radio differently from Buriram province, which is a small town. Or the community radio of Nan province, which is surrounded by hills must be different from one of Pattani, a small border province."

Finally, there must be both qualified and unqualified community radios, which will make society livelier. Diversity is a freedom. The state and capitalism should let community radio be independent and support it when necessary. The social process, and the people's readiness and strength will be the final judge.

Assist. Prof., Dr. Aejit Wirojtrirat concluded that "community radio must be worked by the people. A person has to prove that he mainly contributes to his community. (Krungthep Turakij "Judprakry, 27 January 2004)

The democratization of communication must be implemented in line with the media, economic, and industrial re-regulation. This will solve the problem of media monopoly, cross-media ownership, etc. On the other hand this is a political de-regulation encouraging people to perceive "true" information and broadly express their opinion. The important thing is that mass media, as the "medium" on information, arts and culture of society, has an essential role in stimulating radio and television to be a public forum, as well as an institution encouraging learning on the social, cultural, and political aspects of democracy.

Herbert I. Shiller said that the planning of a national communication policy might only be in the hands of powerful groups, although such drafted policy reflects the different interests and opinions of people in the same group. However, when a subjugated group begins to realize the importance of information and its role, inevitably a fight to participate in the policy making process will happen. This is what happened in Thailand where civil society or the people, who had been a passive audience, started to present themselves and call for participation in the planning of the national media reform policy and media reform under the Constitution.

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