

# Of, by, and for the community

Unleashing the potential of  
local radio in Kisumu

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PROTECT (Protecting Rights, Openness and Transparency Enhancing Civic Transformation) is a coalition of organisations that, since 2019, has joined forces to pursue our common vision: a free, open, and inclusive Kenya.

To achieve this vision, PROTECT empowers civil society organisations, human rights defenders, and journalists to hold the government accountable and build an independent democratic society.

For more information, visit: <https://www.article19.org/protect/>

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## Introduction

We all want a world where we can access the information we need to make informed decisions about our lives. A thriving and independent media sector is essential to this vision. Yet unless media outlets are financially sustainable and digitally savvy, they cannot retain the editorial independence and business viability necessary to provide high-quality information to the communities they serve.

In Kenya, radio is the most popular medium through which people – especially those from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups – access information. In 2015, a nationally representative [study](#) by BBC Media Action found that **98%** of Kenya’s population had access to radio (compared to **81%** who had access to television).

Community radio stations are particularly important because they are local, accessible, and run by and for local residents, meaning their programming is of immediate relevance to their listeners’ everyday lives and concerns. But while this localism benefits communities, it often results in very small audiences, which works against stations’ efforts to attract revenue. In this context, it can be tempting for stations to accept investment that requires a compromise in editorial independence – with detrimental impacts for listeners’ right to accurate information.

**PROTECT therefore worked with community radio stations in Kisumu (a long-underserved city in western Kenya) to improve their reporting, enhance their digital presence, unleash their commercial potential, and become more financially sustainable – all without compromising their editorial integrity.**

This case study focuses on just one of the community radio stations PROTECT worked with: **Sky FM** (106.1 FM). Please see our [video case studies](#) to find out more about our work with other stations, which delivered local impacts ranging from a decrease in muggings to improvements in road quality.

## What did we do?



The PROTECT team at Sky FM

PROTECT coalition member Internews delivered a programme of training and capacity-building to Sky FM over the course of one year.

Key interventions included:

- Training and mentorship on data-driven journalism;
- A grant to enable the development and publishing of data-driven stories about issues affecting the local community; and
- Strengthening the digital skills of Sky FM's journalists to enable them to grow their audience and attract more revenue, thereby becoming financially sustainable.

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*'I'd like to thank them [Internews] first of all, because they trained us a lot on things we did not know, and that has helped us at Sky FM. You know, there are some things that you don't learn at school, but through this project we've got a lot of knowledge and information.'*

– Celine Abuga  
Station Manager, Sky FM

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## What impact did we make?

### Higher-quality information, better-informed community

Through its capacity-building training, PROTECT contributed to improvements in Sky FM's reporting, resulting in higher-quality information and a better-informed local community.

Two stories stand out here, both written by journalists who received training from PROTECT on data-driven journalism. As a result, their stories drew heavily on reliable data to investigate issues of importance to the local community:

- **'Human-Animal Conflict'**, by Elizabeth Obiero, explored the causes of such conflicts (such as deforestation and agricultural expansion) and how they affected Kisumu residents.



- **'Kisumu Demolitions Chronicles'**, by Odhiambo Shem, investigated how the County Government's project to gentrify Kisumu City led to the demolition of local businesses and loss of residents' livelihoods.



PROTECT thereby contributed to empowering Sky FM's audience – the residents of Kisumu – with the information they need to meaningfully engage in conversations about the issues that affect them: a vital first step towards mobilising around their own needs.

Moreover, commercial entities see data-driven journalism as highly (and increasingly) investible, so our interventions also contributed to improving the financial sustainability of the station.

## Serving an underserved community

Sky FM – like all the community radio stations PROTECT works with – is based in Kisumu, where [49% of residents live below the poverty line and 60% \(the highest proportion of all Kenya's cities\) live in informal settlements](#), which often [lack basic facilities](#) like electricity, water, waste disposal, and sanitation.

**By ensuring Kisumu residents could access high-quality, locally relevant information in the most popular medium in Kenya – radio – PROTECT provided much-needed investment in this long-underserved community.**

Sky FM also now broadcasts programmes specifically by and for women and youth, contributing to fighting stigmatisation against these marginalised groups and ensuring everyone has a fair chance to participate in society – which, in Kenya, is a constitutional right.

Importantly, these programmes are presented not only *for* but also *by* women and young people. This is vital because [studies have shown](#) that radio listeners elsewhere in Kenya feel inspired to take action in their own lives and communities when they hear people like themselves on the radio.

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## Improved digital presence, enhanced commercial viability

PROTECT's interventions also enabled Sky FM to diversify its reporting: expanding from radio broadcasting to include high-quality multimedia formats such as video, infographics, and podcasts. This allows people to consume the station's journalism in whichever ways they are most comfortable with and over a longer period of time, improving the accessibility of locally relevant information.

These rich forms of content are all hosted on [Sky FM's website](#), which, with Internews' help, is now hugely improved in both form and function. A professional web presence is vital to attract the interest and investment of commercial partners – and thereby to being a modern, marketable, financially viable business. Moreover, many listeners tune into the station

via its website, so it is vital that stories are specifically tailored to a web audience and presented in attractive, engaging, user-friendly ways.

Significant improvements have also been made to how content is archived on the site, making it easier for people to find the information they need.

Sky FM’s website is now highly interactive and seamlessly integrated with the station’s social media channels. This provides the local community with multiple channels for engagement and a platform through which to coalesce around issues that affect them – all while benefiting from a higher standard of reporting, greater access to information, and more diverse ways to consume that information.



## Exponential increase in audience

Sky FM has accounts on all the major social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. PROTECT worked to upskill Sky FM journalists on how to unleash the power of social media to improve their audience reach and business viability. This included training on how to target and increase their audiences, how to develop an engaging online presence, and how to become more marketable to commercial partners.

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*With PROTECT’s support, Sky FM has not only become a trusted and popular source of information but also provided an online platform through which the often-overlooked community of Kisumu can coalesce, converse, and collectively organise.*

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During the year in which the station received support from Internews, its social media audience increased exponentially – particularly on Facebook:



Facebook metric	Before PROTECT (2021)	After PROTECT (2022)	Percentage increase
Page reach	6,573	254,022	3,765%
Page visits	142	57,637	40,489%
New page likes	5	2,147	42,840%

This dramatic increase in engagement shows that, with PROTECT's support, Sky FM has not only become a trusted and popular source of local information but also provided an online platform through which the often-overlooked community of Kisumu can coalesce, converse, and collectively organise to improve their own circumstances.

Sky FM reported that this huge growth in social media engagement was also mirrored in an increase in listenership – which, in turn, has helped the station attract more investment and opportunities for revenue generation, contributing to its financial sustainability. This is a huge impact for PROTECT, as it translates to long-term business viability.

## Conclusion

Everyone has the right to information, and an independent, financially sustainable media is vital to guaranteeing this right.

By focusing on the most popular form of media in Kenya (radio) in a long-neglected community (Kisumu), PROTECT has ensured that more people have better access to higher-quality information about issues that directly affect them; that radio stations do not have to compromise on their editorial independence to attract the revenue they need to survive; and that media freedom – the lifeblood of an open society – is able to thrive.

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*'The PROTECT project has been very helpful to Sky FM and to me as an individual, and I really wish that we continue working with Internews and forge ahead.'*

– Odhiambo Shem  
Digital and Programs Manager, Sky FM

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