



THE COST OF STAYING ON AIR

Surviving as community media in Zambia and Zimbabwe

ZAMBIA

ZIMBABWE

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Executive summary

Donor funding for media development has always been stretched. Add a shrinking Official Development Assistance envelope and more organisations competing for the same money, with a growing consensus that media plurality matters, and the arithmetic gets difficult fast. There will never be enough project funding to sustain every media outlet that deserves to exist.

Community media feel this most acutely. But these deeply local outlets also have something other media do not, which is their embeddedness in their communities. People know the presenters who are speaking up for better services and announcing the good and the bad news. Local businesses depend on these stations. Traditional leaders listen. That relationship is an asset, and a number of stations in Zambia and Zimbabwe are starting to treat it like one.

Our research has found that, on average, it costs between US\$2,000 and US\$9,000 per month to keep a community media outlet running. This cost is even higher for commercial media outlets, even those serving their communities. They face fewer restrictions on income, i.e. caps on advertising minutes per hour or restrictions on advertising for national vs community-serving businesses. But entry and fixed costs for commercial outlets remain high, which can deter commercial registration.

In Zambia and Zimbabwe, broadcasters face a choice between community and commercial licences, each with distinct costs and conditions. Community licences are the more affordable entry point, but they restrict profit-making, advertising, and require stations to serve and represent community interests while encouraging local participation in programming and governance. In Zimbabwe, community broadcasters cannot air political content and are limited to four minutes of sponsorship announcements per hour. Commercial licences, by contrast, carry higher costs, with fees of up to ZMW 20,000 every five years in Zambia and between US\$6,900 and US\$23,200 annually in Zimbabwe, along with an additional public inquiry fee of up to US\$8,700 at the registration stage, introduced in the 2025 amendment to the Broadcasting Services Act. These licences allow unrestricted advertising and broader revenue generation but impose a heavier entry and operational cost burden.

Internet connectivity remains expensive, and outages force stations to rely on diesel generators, pushing costs higher. Salaries are the largest expense, while transmitter leases, royalties, and regulatory fees add further recurring costs.

Broadcasters in Zambia and Zimbabwe face compliance challenges that add both cost and risk.

In Zambia, broadcasters we spoke to highlighted the challenges posed by the Tax Clearance Certificate (TCC) which must be renewed annually, requiring stations to demonstrate full and timely submission of monthly tax returns. Since both private and public advertisers often require a valid TCC before entering contracts, lapses in compliance can restrict access to advertising revenue and delay cash flow recovery, particularly for under-resourced stations.

In Zimbabwe, broadcasters we spoke to highlighted the challenge of having to comply with multiple regulatory authorities, including the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) for taxation, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) for broadcasting licences, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) for media registration and practitioner accreditation, and local municipal councils for business operating licences. These institutions operate under distinct regulatory frameworks with separate compliance requirements, deadlines, and enforcement mechanisms, which can increase administrative complexity and exposure to penalties.

Statutory funds such as the Broadcasting Fund, which are intended to assist media in distress, remain small and are usually exhausted quickly, since few media houses honour their obligation to contribute to them, reported some of the participants in this research.

Globally, governments have adopted various measures to ease the burden. In some countries, broadcasters receive fee waivers, sometimes partial, sometimes complete, on licence application costs and spectrum usage fees. Others channel direct government support into dedicated funds, or use fines and fees imposed on the industry to finance community media. Some countries use their public service licence fee to support community media, and in some cases local municipalities provide ad hoc funding¹. These

approaches warrant consideration in shaping policy recommendations for Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Some of what is emerging locally is practical and low-cost. One community station in Zimbabwe collects \$1 a year from listeners, accepts donated livestock and grain, and resells them to cover operating costs. Local taxi drivers give presenters free rides. None of this generates large sums individually, but together these arrangements reflect a community that has decided its radio station is worth keeping alive.

Others are working out barter arrangements with local businesses. Advertising space exchanged for internet access, or solar energy shared in return for reduced rent. This kind of informal exchange economy rarely appears in sustainability frameworks, but it is functioning in the field. A station with a tower on a large plot in a remote area holds a scarce asset. Several Zambian broadcasters now rent tower access to other operators, and that income holds steady even when advertising revenue falls. One station has diversified further, investing in equipment for hire, building a multipurpose hall, and constructing a small block of residential flats.

On the services side, one outlet in Zimbabwe now generates 90% of its revenue from content creation, brand management, website development, and social media management for external clients. A second has turned its digitised archive into a subscription product and runs an annual conference that generates event revenue independent of its publishing operation.

Some community stations in Zambia have also stopped waiting for advertisers or funders to approach them. They propose packages directly to development partners. These include radio programmes, jingles, interviews, drama. They become the project owner.

What this points to for donors is a need to rethink what counts as an investable cost. Solar panels require upfront financing when energy bills are the cost most likely to force a station off air, and a station that cannot broadcast consistently loses both listeners and advertisers. A transmission tower can generate monthly income. These are assets with a long-term return. Treating them as such, and financing them accordingly, is what an exit strategy could look like. Compliance burdens can be alleviated with appropriate advocacy strategies.

This paper consolidates field research from Zambia and Zimbabwe, where BBC Media Action researched the financial and compliance costs of running independent media outlets and the strategies outlets have developed to sustain their operations. The findings are based on interviews with broadcasters, regulators, donors, and media associations conducted between December 2025 and January 2026. All costings are indicative and based on interviews.

Part I: The costs of getting on air

Before a single programme airs, before one listener tunes in, a broadcaster in Zambia or Zimbabwe must navigate a set of registration requirements, licensing applications, and compliance fees. This is the first cost barrier, and for many it is the last.

Entry costs vary depending on the size of the station and the type of licence obtained. For a community media outlet operating on a non-commercial basis, broadcasters told us that the costs typically fall within the following ranges. Initial expenses include entity registration fees of between US\$50 and US\$500, application fees, and annual licence fees of between US\$120 and US\$1,100. In some cases, such as in Zambia, broadcast licence fees must be paid annually, and the licence must be renewed every five years. Stations are also required to pay frequency fees of between US\$130 and US\$600 annually, and music royalties of between US\$200 and US\$400. An average start-up capital of around US\$30,000 is needed to equip a studio. Once operational, salary costs typically start from US\$3,000 per month, alongside other monthly costs such as energy, rent, and communications.

A community broadcasting licence remains the most economical entry point in both Zambia and Zimbabwe. However, strict conditions apply. In Zimbabwe, a community broadcasting licence restricts the airing of political content and requires the licensee to continue representing the community interest that justified the licence allocation². Community broadcasters may air sponsorship announcements, but these are limited to four minutes per hour³. Commercial registration fees are considerably higher, starting from US\$6,900 annually for a local commercial station and rising to US\$23,200 annually for a national commercial station.

The 2025 amendment to the Broadcasting Services Act, introduced an additional requirement. Except for community radio stations, all applicants seeking spectrum allocation must undergo a public inquiry conducted by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe⁴. BAZ's published fee schedule puts the cost of attending such an inquiry at up to US\$8,700⁵. This fee is non-refundable and adds a further barrier to entry and to the licensing process, particularly for smaller or independent broadcasters.

In Zambia, the Independent Broadcasting Authority classifies community broadcasting services under a separate licence category with a lower entry fee of around ZMW 2,000. These licences prohibit profit-making and general advertising. Community broadcasters are expected to fund their operations mainly through membership fees, grants, and donations, and are required to serve community purposes, represent community interests, and encourage participation in programming and governance⁶. While they may broadcast sponsorship announcements and limited adverts relevant to their community⁶, they cannot rely on advertising as a primary revenue stream. Commercial broadcasting licences, which carry fees rising to ZMW 20,000 paid yearly and again every five years, allow unrestricted advertising income but are beyond the reach of most community outlets. The table below sets out indicative costs for launching and maintaining a

community radio station.

Source: BBC Media Action interviews with broadcasters, December 2025 – January 2026. Figures are indicative and reflect costs highlighted by participants when asked about expenses incurred in setting up a media outlet; this is not an exhaustive list. For further details on costs, see the reference list, which includes licensing fee schedules published by the relevant regulatory authorities. Zimbabwe costs are in USD; Zambia costs are in Zambian Kwacha.

Cost Category	Indicative Costs	Indicative Costs
	as listed by interviewed participants	as listed by interviewed participants
	 Zambia	 Zimbabwe
Fee currency	Zambian Kwacha (ZMW)	USD scarce; parallel market rate 33% above official rate
Entity registration	Name clearance: ~ZMW 120 Name reservation: ~ZMW 213 Incorporation fee: ~ZMW 1,300 Reserve capital: ~ZMW 20,000 Community/faith registration: ~ZMW 1,000	~US\$500 +US\$8,700 public inquiry fee for commercial (non-refundable)
Application for Broadcast licence ; community radio	~ZMW 3,000 for community radio (cf. ZMW 5,000 for commercial radio)	~US\$400 (non-refundable), US\$2,900 for local commercial broadcast licence application . Figures higher for national commercial ²
Broadcast licence ; community radio (annual)	~ZMW 2,000/year (private non-commercial) + ZMW 2,000 licence fee every five years, cf. ZMW 20,000/year + ZMW 20,000 every five years for commercial stations whether small, medium or large	~US\$800/year, ~US\$2,900 for local commercial broadcast. Higher for national commercial + starting US\$2,000 contribution to Broadcasting Fund for commercial stations
Frequency fees	~ZMW 2,500–6,000/year depending on location (urban: ~ZMW 6,000; peri-urban: ~ZMW 3,000; rural: ~ZMW 2,500) - ZICTA	~US\$30 to S\$50/month per frequency per site
Music royalties	~ZMW 3,500/year (medium station) ZamCops	~US\$400/month; ZIMURA (talk-heavy stations may pay less)

A snapshot - A community radio station in Zambia

This community radio station broadcasts 24 hours a day. It is well followed and reaches over a million listener.

Monthly costs run to around ZMW 500,000. Salaries alone account for over ZMW 200,000 of that. Then there is compliance: tax returns, pension contributions, workers' compensation, licensing fees, insurance, and an annual audit that costs over ZMW 200,000 on its own. None of this is optional, and none of it pauses when income is slow.

Load-shedding made everything harder. At its worst, the station was spending around ZMW 12,000 a week on diesel just to stay on air, with most available cash going to the generator. The instability also damaged equipment, and repairs were delayed because the money was not there. The station did not reduce its broadcast hours despite this. When the regulator gave stations permission to cut back, this one stayed on.



Cash flow is a persistent problem. Most advertising clients, including government institutions, pay in arrears. The station's bills are monthly. The debtors list keeps growing. The response has been structured but exhausting: demand letters, payment plans, a committee to follow up.

Advertising revenue alone does not come close to covering costs. So the station has built an income portfolio that has almost nothing to do with broadcasting: 11 rental houses, tower rentals to other operators, a café, a marquee and garden available for hire, livestock, equipment hire, and fundraising events across the year. That is how they have been surviving.

The technical picture has gaps. Repeater stations in two nearby towns have no back-up power. When the national grid goes down, transmission goes with it. A solar upgrade is planned, and has been planned, but is waiting on funds.

What holds it together is partly the revenue diversification, and partly something harder to quantify. The station is a household name. It has won awards for best radio station year on year. The community knows it, trusts it, and tunes in. That trust does not pay the audit bill, but it is the reason the station keeps trying to.

Part II: The compliance burden

Several commercial and community operators report losing customers and business during Tax Clearance Certificate (TCC) compliance gaps, albeit temporarily, with cascading effects on cash flow that take months to recover from.

In Zambia, those we spoke to mentioned tax filing as being a key challenge. The system works when cash flows on time. The problem is that it rarely does. Broadcasters are caught between two timelines running at different speeds. Clients who pay late, and a tax authority that expects filings on schedule. When the two fall out of sync, the consequences extend well beyond a fine.

The Tax Clearance Certificate is a document issued by the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) that confirms a business is tax-compliant. Broadcasters need a valid TCC to bid on government-sponsored programmes and to sign contracts with most major commercial advertisers. Without it, those revenue streams are closed. ZRA has the authority to refuse to issue a TCC, or to suspend or cancel one, if a taxpayer fails to meet their obligations. This may occur in cases of late filing, non-payment, submission of incorrect declarations, or failure to register for the appropriate tax types⁷.

Broadcasters told us that the TCC must be renewed every year. To renew it, a station must prove it has filed all monthly tax returns, including value added tax (VAT), income tax, and pay as you earn (PAYE), correctly and on time. Advertisers and programme sponsors require this certificate before agreeing a contract. When cash is tight, stations, particularly smaller ones, can struggle to keep up with monthly filing requirements given pressures on staffing and resourcing. If returns are not filed on time, ZRA may not renew the TCC.

In practice, a station airs a programme, invoices the sponsor, and waits. Money is short. The accountant is stretched, or the cash to cover what is owed to ZRA has not yet arrived. The monthly filing slips. The TCC is not renewed. The station can no longer legally sign new advertiser contracts or bid on government work. Several broadcasters reported losing customers and contracts during these gaps, recovering only once all outstanding returns were filed and the TCC reinstated.

In Zimbabwe, respondents identified the need to comply with multiple regulatory bodies simultaneously as a key challenge, noting that each imposes separate fees, renewal schedules, and penalties for non-compliance, which creates an administrative strain.

Broadcasters and stakeholders told us that multiple media-related taxes and fees are challenging for both start-ups and established outlets. In Zimbabwe, broadcasters are required to pay licensing fees to the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), while media organisations and practitioners must also comply with registration and accreditation requirements administered by the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC).

Participants further noted that during election periods, additional accreditation requirements imposed by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission increase compliance obligations for media practitioners. Although these costs are relatively low for local media, they add to overall regulatory and administrative burdens. Additional costs cited include municipal business operating licences, such as those issued by local authorities - like the City of Harare, which contribute further to compliance expenses for commercial media houses⁸.

In practice, a community or small commercial broadcaster is not managing one compliance relationship, but multiple overlapping ones, often across several regulatory and revenue authorities. These obligations operate on different cycles, with separate reporting requirements, fees, and enforcement mechanisms, which can make coordination difficult. The arrears that accumulate on transmission fees, music royalties, and licence renewals are often the result of a broadcaster that cannot keep pace with the administrative and financial demands of a system that was not designed with small, independent operators in mind.

Part III: Monthly operational costs

For small and medium media outlets in Zambia and Zimbabwe, average monthly operational costs are already daunting before a single programme is produced.

In Zambia, based on what research participants told us, monthly operating budgets range from ZMW 45,000 for small rural community stations to ZMW 170,000 for a medium-sized community or faith-based station, compared with ZMW 250,000–ZMW 450,000 for peri-urban commercial outlets.

In Zimbabwe, even a basic independent broadcaster faces US\$5,000 or more a month in recurring costs, covering salaries, rent, utilities, licences, and compliance fees, before accounting for unpredictable expenses such as generator fuel during power outages.

What is critical here is that these figures represent only the bare minimum required to keep a station on air. They do not include the costs of producing quality content, investing in staff training, or upgrading equipment and operations to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Cost per station (Type / Location) in Zambia

Source: BBC Media Action interviews with broadcasters, December 2025 – January 2026. All figures are indicative. Costs in Zambian kwacha (ZMW).

Cost per station (Type / Location) in Zambia	Monthly Operating Costs in Zambia in Zambian Kwachas
A Radio (commercial, Lusaka/Ndola, 15+ staff)	~ZMW 400,000–450,000/month
B FM (commercial, peri-urban, 15+ staff)	~ ZMW 250,000–300,000/month
Radio C (faith-based, rural, 40+ staff)	~ZMW 170,000/month
Radio D (community, rural, 20+ staff)	~ZMW 170,000/month
F Radio (community, rural, 5+ staff)	~ZMW 45,000/month

Monthly cost card in Zimbabwe

Indicative Monthly Operating Costs for a Community Media Outlet - *Source: BBC Media Action interviews with broadcasters, December 2025 – January 2026. All figures are indicative and in USD.*

Cost category	Monthly cost (USD)	Notes
Staff salaries	~US\$3,000+	Basic community media minimum; higher for commercial
Rent (office/studio)	~US\$300	Average
Electricity	~US\$100	Does not account for outage-driven generator costs
Water	~US\$50	
Internet/data	~US\$200	
Music royalties (ZIMURA)	~US\$400	Less for mainly talk radio
Frequency fee	~US\$50 per site	Per frequency per site
Transmitter lease	~US\$700	If leasing; US\$6,000 to buy outright (low power)
Generator/fuel (outages)	Variable	Diesel at ~US\$1.60/litre; significant during outages
Subtotal recurring monthly	~US\$4,800+	Excludes generator costs and larger salary bills

Indicative Annual costs (amortised to monthly equivalent)

Cost category	Annual cost	Monthly equivalent
Broadcast licence (Community)	~US\$800/year	~US\$66/month
Equipment and maintenance	~US\$700/year	~US\$58/month
Legal fees	~US\$1,000/year	~US\$83/month
Journalist accreditation (10 journalists)	~US\$200 first year / US\$150 renewal	~US\$17/month
Annual costs monthly equivalent		~US\$224/month

Part IV: Fighting back and surviving

The most important finding of this research may be that independent media in both Zambia and Zimbabwe are engineering their own survival. And some of their solutions are scalable, replicable models that the broader media support community should understand and invest in.

Embedding in community infrastructure

One of the community radio's survival is a study in social capital. The station runs on a budget of around US\$70,000 a year, most of which it does not actually have. Some 60% comes from international donors, which still falls short. The rest is patched together in ways that say a great deal about how much the community values it.

Community members pay US\$1 annual subscriptions and donate chickens (valued at \$7), goats (valued at \$50), and maize (valued at \$30) for sale into the station's upkeep fund. Local taxi operators give free rides to presenters. Solar power, installed for US\$1,000 maintained free of charge by a private energy company as corporate social responsibility, has dramatically reduced electricity costs. The station broadcasts to a community that considers it essential infrastructure. It is a year behind on its licensing fees and cannot afford to catch up. It is simultaneously one of the most creative sustainability stories in this research and one of the most precarious.

SMS short code revenue

One broadcaster we spoke with applied for a dedicated SMS short-code number, requiring a licence costing approximately US\$2200 for a 12-month period. Listeners text in to enter competitions or respond to programming. For a station with a strong listener base, this generates US\$1000 - US\$1400 a month in additional revenue. The ratio: spend US\$2200 to earn up to US\$12000 a year.

Tower and land rental

Two stations we spoke with, and that are performing well, share a critical asset. They own land with towers on it. Both now generate steady non-advertising income by renting tower access to mobile network operators. One station receives free access to the mobile company's generator in exchange. This income continues even when advertising revenue drops, making it a financial buffer.

Property and event rental

One station went further. It invested in a public address system and tent for hire, erected a multipurpose hall available for community events, and built a block of small rental flats. The rental income alone provides predictable monthly revenue, independent of advertising cycles. One outlet also organises an annual conference in a different sector, which generates revenue completely independent of publishing.

Broadcaster as NGO Project Owner

Rather than waiting for advertisers, some stations we spoke to approached non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, private companies, and public entities directly with packaged proposals, combining radio programmes, jingles, interviews, and radio dramas around specific development themes. This positions the broadcaster as a project partner rather than a distribution channel. The broadcaster controls the relationship, the content, and the price.

Door-to-door community fundraising

In communities where radio presenters are known personalities, direct fundraising from listeners at public events and door-to-door has generated supplementary income. This is modest in absolute terms but signals community trust that can be further leveraged.

The content services model

One outlet we spoke to has only 10% of revenue coming from advertising. The remaining 90% comes from professional media services such as content creation, brand management, website development, social media management, and editorial and branded stories for clients. Reporters earn commission on business they bring in above standard market rates, creating an internal entrepreneurship culture. While not without risk, this approach offers one viable path for outlets trying to stay afloat.

Monetising the archive

One outlet has found that its digitised archive of past publications can be monetised through subscriptions. Its online publication is now the primary subscription driver, overtaking print.

AI-assisted newsrooms

Another outlet has a dedicated department that uses artificial intelligence tools to assist in news compilation and virtual presentation, particularly for night shifts where staffing is expensive. It earns additional revenue through membership schemes, training, and consultancy services. With no printing or transmission costs as a digital-native outlet, its cost base is structurally lower than that of legacy broadcasters. However, this approach also introduces risks related to accuracy and public trust, which require strong human oversight, transparent workflows, and clear editorial standards to mitigate.

Conclusions and recommendations

This research looks into the financial and structural pressures facing independent media in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and the locally-developed strategies through which some outlets are sustaining their operations. It also identifies a set of practical interventions that donors, media development organisations, and policymakers could adopt to improve the enabling environment.

In times of political or humanitarian crisis, local media may be the only accessible and trusted source of information for communities, particularly where reporting is in local languages and covering issues of daily life. These outlets support civic participation, help people navigate public services, and play a role in emergency response. Their relationships with local audiences, leaders, and local businesses represent social capital that is difficult to replicate. The community-led innovation that keeps many outlets alive, through informal exchange or solidarity from local community, and in some cases new forms of adaptation, is central to the survival of public interest journalism in both countries.

At the same time, the sustainability of these media ecosystems is under pressure as a result of reduced institutional donor funding, rising operating costs, and growing compliance burdens. This instability also increases vulnerability to political interference and commercial capture.

Rethinking what counts as an investable cost

Short-term, project-based funding models are no longer adequate on their own. Donors should consider multi-year funding frameworks that strengthen organisational ability to plan and implement their strategies. They should also consider financing core operating costs and capital assets. These could include transmission infrastructure or towers, renewable energy, and digital connectivity. These reduce long-term operating costs and can generate revenue.

A transmission tower owned by a rural station generates rental income from mobile network operators who are less likely to construct their own tower. Solar panels reduce the diesel costs that, in several cases documented in this research, consumed the majority of available operating cash during load-shedding. Treating these assets as investable and structuring donor funding accordingly is a more durable form of support.

Collective negotiated assets

One area that has received little attention in media development practice is the potential for media bodies to act as collective bargaining agents on behalf of multiple outlets simultaneously.

Energy costs, and the diesel expenses that arise during power outages, are among

recurring costs facing stations in both countries. When they are at their highest, they can take a station off air. Donors or media development organisations could fund, or negotiate, lower per-unit costs that individual stations could not access independently. The station in this research that installed solar for US\$1,000, maintained at no cost through a corporate social responsibility arrangement shows how these assets are achievable.

Internet connectivity is cited as a rising cost. In some cases, stations have already negotiated barter arrangements, advertising space for internet companies in exchange for connectivity, but these are ad hoc and not universally available. A collective negotiation with a national internet service provider could secure reduced rates or guaranteed bandwidth at lower cost than individual contracts.

Compliance and tax filing support

The TCC compliance process documented in Zambia, in which late-paying clients push stations into filing delays that then cost them their government contracts and advertiser relationships, is a structural problem. One practical intervention would be for donors or media development organisations to negotiate pro bono or subsidised compliance support from accounting and tax advisory firms. Several large professional services firms operating in Zambia and Zimbabwe have established corporate social responsibility or pro bono programmes. An arrangement, in which a firm provides a set number of advisory hours per year to a cohort of small media organisations, covering monthly tax filings, TCC renewals, and basic financial governance, would directly address an operationally disruptive risks these outlets face. The cost to the donor or media organisation acting as coordinator would be modest, principally the time needed to establish and manage the arrangement. The benefit to participating stations would be meaningful.

This model has been used in the legal sector, where law firms provide pro bono support to civil society organisations. Pilot arrangements of this kind, documented and evaluated, would generate useful evidence for the sector.

Licensing conditions and revenue allowability

The current regulatory framework in both Zambia and Zimbabwe creates a tension between the licence conditions attached to community broadcasting and the commercial realities facing these outlets. Community licences restrict advertising and profit-making, and in some cases, political content. Yet the outlets operating under these licences face the same fixed costs as any small media business such as salaries, rent, connectivity, compliance, and equipment maintenance.

The current advertising cap for community broadcasters and some level of prohibition on advertising-based revenue for community licence holders, restrict access to one of the few income streams available to small outlets. A review of these limits, informed by evidence on what level of advertising income is sufficient to affect the community

character of a station versus, can better contribute to its viability outcome.

The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation vehicle licence levy raises public revenue that flows to the state broadcaster. Stakeholders we spoke to told us about the current policy discussions taking place around the redistribution of 30% of the levy to independent media. If implemented, it would be a material domestic policy change available to support media viability in Zimbabwe. Progress on this commitment warrants continued attention from donors and media development organisations engaged in policy dialogue.

More broadly, the multiplicity of separate fees, licences, and compliance obligations facing broadcasters in Zimbabwe creates an administrative load that is disproportionate for small organisations. A consolidated billing or shared compliance calendar, even if the underlying fees remained unchanged, would reduce the management burden.

Summary of recommended actions

For donors and media development organisations:

- Shift a proportion of media support funding from short-term project grants to multi-year operational and capital financing, including transmission infrastructure and renewable energy assets.
- Explore collective procurement, or negotiation, of solar energy systems for cohorts of community stations, using the coordinating capacity of national media bodies.
- Negotiate pro bono or subsidised tax compliance support from professional services firms with CSR programmes in target countries.
- Investigate collective internet connectivity agreements with national providers.
- Document and share the cost and revenue models of stations that have successfully diversified income, to build a practical evidence base for the sector.

For regulators and policymakers:

- Review advertising minute limits for community broadcasters, with reference to evidence on the relationship between advertising income and community character.
- Consider policy dialogue around redistribution of licence levy to independent and community media.
- Discuss a consolidated compliance calendar or a single-window filing process for broadcasters to reduce the administrative burden of managing multiple regulatory bodies.

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