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PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RADIO



COMMUNITY RADIO AS A
PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION TOOL



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Abstract

It has been over 20 years since the Hon'ble Supreme Court gave its landmark judgement declaring airwaves as public property. Since February 1996, Government of India has made a conscious effort to open up the airwaves to a diversity of media and also create a space for the Community Media. In the context of development communication, the Community Radio as a participatory communication tool has proved its effectiveness and reach and created a paradigm for involvement of the beneficiary in the decision making process. This study discusses how Community Radio sector in India has empowered and given voice to the most marginalised and ensured their participation in the development process.

Keywords

Community radio, Empowerment, Voice, Social mobilisation, People's participation.

Community Radio is by definition a broadcasting system established by the efforts of a specific or identified community, owned and operated by the community for the community's welfare. According to Girard (2001), it is a kind of public service broadcasting but serves a community essentially small (by the very limited capacity of its transmitter) rather than a nation. Tabing (2002) describes community radio station as one which is "operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community".

Community radio is a third-tier of broadcasting alongside public radio and private, commercial broadcasting. It gives marginalized communities the opportunity to express their views often ignored by mainstream media. As per the UK Frequency Allocation Table (2013) prepared by the United Kingdom independent regulatory body, OFCOM and the Frequency Allocation table of Federal Communications Commission (FCC, 2015), the independent regulatory in the United States of America they administer spectrum for all three tiers of broadcasting Public Service Radio, Private Commercial radio and Community Radio.

Community radio has three key aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and management, and community participation. As community groups have defined it (World Bank Institute, 2007), "community radio is distinguished by its limited local reach, low-power transmission, and programming content that reflects the educational, developmental and cultural needs of the specific community it serves".

Community radio stations across the world have come up as a genre trying to break through the commercial broadcasts driven by audience ratings and advertisement revenue and government controlled public stations or even stereotyped National Public Radio, which fails to address the needs of ethnic communities or communities struggling to make ends meet. Community Radio is a new experiment in India although using the National Broadcaster for social mobilisation through radio is as old as the early seventies when farm radio broadcasts were regularly aired on All India Radio¹ (AIR).

Farm and Home Unit of All India Radio was started with a view to serve the farming community by motivating them through sustained broadcasts, to adopt and practice scientific methods of cultivation for increasing Food Production and Rural Economic Development (Thamizhparathi & Subramani, 1964).

Media and development

Media's role in human development is clarified by Amartya Sen's (1999)

argument that political freedoms lead to improved economic development outcomes and good governance. This is brought about by developing responsiveness to public concerns. As per Sen (1999), the free press amplifies voice of the dispossessed and lead to more informed choices about economic needs. Economic decision-making is improved in an atmosphere of political freedom.

Wilbur Schramm in his book *Mass Media and National Development* (1964) discussed the role mass media play in development communication. For Schramm it was their content that was the key to their use in development. Schramm has put a lot of importance on feedback for successful communication for development as he says a proper feedback helps implementation to finding whether or not the community is meeting their purpose or aim. According to him, it should never be a one way traffic. Modern communication technologies, would be of great use to meet the demand by multiplying the messages and reaching each and every worker associated with developmental work (Schramm, 1964).

The mass media according to Lerner (1958) plays a crucial role in the modernisation process. He notes, “as people are more exposed to media, the greater is their capability to imagine themselves as strange persons in strange situations, places and time than did people in any previous historical epoch”.

Radio and social mobilisation

In India social mobilisation through radio has a long history. Soon after Independence the national radio broadcaster, All India Radio began using radio in the humongous task of nation building. Public communication and social mobilisation for development were important pillars of these broadcasts. The emphasis on using radio broadcast technologies for rural development continued with independence and beyond.

India has had a long and rich tradition of using radio for non-formal education programmes, rural development and also for providing various types of learning opportunities.

Rural Radio Forum

The Rural Radio Forum launched in 1956, covering 150 villages in Pune region as a pilot project was hailed as a cost effective method of bringing about community development. This was an experiment in utilizing broadcasting to create awareness among rural people about various improved techniques of agricultural production, health and hygiene. The theme of the radio forum was “Listen, Discuss, Act.” The forum was organized in such a way that

face to face two way communication was possible. Rural programming in regional dialects formed an important part of the overall programme content. However, as AIR became more and more centralized with rigid rules and programming guidelines it lost touch with its listeners. The Chanda Committee² describes the programmes as dull and drab and low on variety.

Community radio and empowerment

Several studies have examined the role of media and development and some studies have looked at community radio as a process of democratization of media. A study by Pavarala and Malik (2007) talks about the magic of community radio stations like Namma Dhwani³. Pavarala (2003) and Noronha (2003) in another study reflect on the contribution of stations like Namma Dhwani and the Pastapur radio experiment⁴ in South India. The studies are largely based on visits and interactions with the community radio participants and reflect on how groups utilize such small scale broadcast media for developmental and cultural purposes.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcaster's (AMARC) study, *Community Radio Impact Evaluation: Removing Barriers, Increasing Effectiveness* (2007) has found that the main social impact of community radio is voice for the poor and marginalized. Another important study on community radio is *Empowering Radio* by the World Bank Institute (2007) spread across five countries in three continents: Colombia, Peru, Mali, South Africa and Nepal has tried to address a whole range of issues from the radio station's relationship with the community in terms of programming, ownership and control, through management of the stations by different types of volunteers (including training and capacity building) to accountability and good governance and sustainable financing. This study finds that community radio has at least four roles: an advocacy role in which it defends the interests of the population; as a public forum for monitoring and discussion of issues related to accountability and governance; a partner of government seeking to inform and involve the community and as a provider of services that result in a better delivery of public services in domains such as health and education.

Across many continents and in several countries, community radio stations have been fostering community participation and creating an appetite for transparent and accountable governance. "It (community radio) aims not only to participate in the life of the community but also allow the community to participate in the life of the station...at the level of ownership, programming, management direction and financing" (Girard, 2001).

AMARC (2007) conducted a social impact assessment of community radio through a participatory action research process that involved 927 CR

stakeholders. Some of the key findings of the Community Radio Social Impact study were:

1. Community Radio is a voice for the poor and the marginalized,
2. Community Radio is effective in poverty reduction,
3. Community Radio is effective in ensuring proper governance,
4. Community Radio is effective in achieving development goals,
5. Community Radio is effective in empowering women.

Community radio makes it feasible for communities to connect viably with issues pertaining to their own neighbourhood, broadcast in their own native language. In this way, people become creators of their own community specific media and also be able to articulate and participate in the development process. As Fraser and Estrada (2001) have said “Community radio provides a mechanism for enabling individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own stories, to share experiences and, in a media-rich world, to become creators and contributors of media. Moreover, it is characterized by its ownership, programming, and the community it is authorized to serve”.

In a way it also broadens their horizons of thinking and over time may even lead to a scenario where communities will be increasingly aware of the national issues of importance. In many parts of the world, community radio acts as a vehicle for the community and voluntary sector, civil society, agencies, NGOs and citizens to work in partnership to further community development as well as broadcasting aims.

Beginnings of community radio in India

Social mobilization through ICT

The Bangalore-based communication campaign group, “VOICES” convened a gathering of radio broadcasters, policy planners, media professionals, and not-for-profit associations in September 1996 to study how community radio could be relevant to India, and to deliberate on policies appropriate for such an action. A declaration calling for the establishment of community broadcasting was signed even as a suggestion that AIR local stations should allocate regular airtime for community broadcasting was raised. Requests were also made for granting of licenses to Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and other non-profit groups to run CR stations. Subsequently, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made available a portable production and transmission ‘briefcase radio station’ kit to VOICES to do experimental broadcasts of programs for a hands-on learning experience toward the objective of setting up an independently run community radio station (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

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By early 2003, the Government of India released the first set of community radio guidelines but restricted eligibility to educational institutions. Marginalized and voiceless communities continued to remain outside the ambit of the then released community radio policy guidelines. Deccan Development Society, an NGO organized a workshop in Hyderabad sponsored by UNESCO in 2000 urged the government to allocate space for community radio. Representations were made by voluntary organizations, academicians, and individuals to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) which led the MIB to organize a workshop supported by UNDP and UNESCO in 2004 to work out a framework for community radio in India. In October 2005, the draft community radio policy was referred to a group of ministers, and finally approved by the Union Cabinet on November 16, 2006, permitting NGOs, educational and agricultural institutions to own and operate CR stations.

With the development of ICT technologies, communities in India began to explore these technologies to reach the community and make a diversity of programmes depending on local tastes and demands. Much like the Tuk Tuk experiment in Sri Lanka which uses an improvised three wheeler and a computer to broadcast socially relevant messages through loud speakers, MYRADA in Karnataka and Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh harnessed the ICT technology to narrow cast programmes to nearby villages using improvised technology and loud speakers and microphones (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

In Uttarakhand, young men and women broadcast programmes that inform the public about developments such as Panchayat elections, and record the historical and folk literature of the hills. The programmes are narrowcast – played back by community volunteers armed with cassette players – at local meeting points; and are also broadcast on a dedicated free to air radio-for-development channel on the Worldspace Radio Network (Maara, 2008).

Namma Dhwani and Sangam Radio are two successful experiments in using local radio on ICT mode. Namma Dhwani was a cable radio station in Budhikote in Karnataka managed by the community since 2001 (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). MYRADA has a radio license for Namma Dhwani and is broadcasting since August 2009 using a low power transmitter. Deccan Development Society runs a community radio station in Pastapur in Andhra Pradesh called Sangam Radio. The origins of Sangam Radio, is much like

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Namma Dhvani. It began on ICT mode and on October 15th 2008 switched to community radio broadcasts using low power transmitter. This community radio station is owned, managed and operated by women from marginalized Dalit communities.

As on 1st November 2016, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has granted 449 letters of Intent (LOIs) and signed 252 grant of permission agreements (GOPA). As per the MIB website, 200 community radio stations are operational in the country (mib.nic.in).

Community radio and participatory communications

In the course of the discourse in this study the attempt is to document some of the successful experiments for empowerment through community radio so that the question as to whether community radio stations have an impact on development and empowerment can be answered.

Radio Bundelkhand

In Bundelkhand there are four NGOs owned community radio stations operating. Radio Bundelkhand situated in Taragram in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh close to the city of Jhansi has programming for 12 hours. Dedicated to the interests of the communities, the community radio is managed in association with the communities living in the region of Tikamgarh and Jhansi districts of the Bundelkhand. The radio station also offers training to other community radio stations in content development and radio reporting. Radio Bundelkhand working in partnership with Development Alternatives (an NGO) and the rural communities of Orchha has involved a number of women in programme production. The radio serves as a platform to share stories, share experiences and solve problems.

Radio Bundelkhand is filling an important cultural gap in airing programmes produced in Bundeli and supporting the rich cultural heritage of the region besides promoting progressive development concepts by using the local idiom. The radio station is also actively involved in propagating sustainable agricultural practices specific to the region and working as an important participatory communication tool.

There are three other community radio stations in close proximity: Radio Dhadkan, Radio Lalit Lok Vani and Radio Chanderi ki Awaaz.

Radio Dhadkan situated in Shivpuri is using the broadcasts to disseminate vital information on several social issues. But more importantly the radio station has employed radio reporters from the local community who are themselves change agents because of the empowerment brought

through the radio station.

During author's two day visit to Radio Dhadkan in Shivpuri, Ramawati, a radio reporter had this to say, "I have moved forward. I am deprived of formal education, but next generation should not suffer on this count. Through using program on girls' education I try to convince the people that if the children are not sent to school, they will end up as menial workers".

During the listener group discussions which author attended in Shivpuri, two Adivasi women Parobai and Sonabai discussed about the institutional delivery. They were able to convince women of their locality to go for medical checks during pregnancy and were able to motivate women to do breast feeding. They have been able to be the change leaders because of their community radio. One Adivasi women from Nahori kala explained that because they are from the same community and share a common culture and idiom, behaviour change messages tend to have a greater impact.

One of the interesting experiments carried out by Radio Bundelkhand was a communication campaign on climate change named *Shubh Kal*. The programme was jointly produced and aired by four community radio stations in the region: Radio Dhadkan, Radio Bundelkhand, Chanderi ki Awaaz and Lalit Lok Vani. As part of this project 35 community radio reporters were trained in reporting on climate change. There were 50 radio shows on climate change issues which reached 400,000 villagers in 400 villages within a period of 10 months.

The radio reporters during their training internalized the concepts and were then able to convert this scientific information into simple and comprehensible messages using an edutainment approach and local dialects. Since these reporters were drawn from the local community and familiar with the agricultural practices they were able to effectively mobilise the community.

City Montessori School Community Radio, Lucknow

The City Montessori School Community Radio (CMS-CR) station is an educational institution run broadcasting station. This station was set up in 2007 and operating on 90.4 Mhz. During the seven years, the radio station has brought many changes in the lives of its listeners and the listening community in the neighboring rural areas of Lucknow. There are community volunteers like Sarita Rawat from Jhihjala Purva village who have brought changes to their village through first self-empowerment and then development of the village. Ramesh Yadav, a farmer from Malhaur village has been trained in radio production, recording, editing and mixing. Sarita is a talented girl and

she sings folk songs and anchors programmes on CMS radio. It was not only a window of opportunity for Sarita, the CMS radio was able to bring solar light to Jhiljhila Purva, a non-electrified village where Sarita lives. Another popular programme by CMS-CR station was *Saathi Haath Badhana*, a programme on health, hygiene and sanitation prepared with the involvement of the community. Thomas (2011) describes the potential of community radio as an “intentional tool for development and social change”.

Community radio and Livelihood Mission

Can community radio be a participatory communication tool where community members can be trained to create radio programmes in their language and cultural idiom on issues of their community? One such experiment was the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) which works on the model of community resource strategy.

The NRLM or Aajeevika is a programme of the Government of India for creating effective institutional platforms for the rural poor mainly women enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood options. The core belief of the NRLM is that the poor have innate capabilities to lift themselves out of poverty and if nurtured they can be enabled to cross the poverty line.

The NRLM aims at reducing poverty by community involvement and helping communities to work together. Social mobilisation of the poor and nurturing community resource for building institutions are important cornerstones of the programme.

The strategy used by NRLM for this capacity building and institution building among the poor is the Community Resource Person strategy which is pivoted on the resource persons drawn from the community who build and mould through percept and example, the Self Help Groups. These community resource persons themselves were poor women (labourers, manual scavengers, landless agricultural labourers, unskilled workers) from the lower socio economic status who were educated up to primary school and in some cases even illiterate. These women had internalised the good behavioural practices of not only thrift and credit but also using their affinity based groups for social action like picketing liquor shops, stopping domestic violence, managing fair price shops, running the Bima Yojana call centres in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh.

The women who had successfully overcome poverty and had reached a certain level of prosperity with the help of self-help groups were identified as resource persons. They travel and inculcate among women in areas like

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Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana not only issues of thrift and credit but also assessing the credit worthiness of women entrepreneurs, strategizing an enterprise and also address social and hygiene and health issues.

Since this was a community driven programme the community radio concept fitted in well with the strategy. Community radio stations already work with poor communities and actively involve them in programming, therefore radio programmes around the themes of NRLM – social mobilisation, financial inclusion, unified social action, institution building and livelihood promotion were developed using the community resource persons and the local listeners of the radio stations.

As a pilot project, two community radio stations in Haryana: Alfaz-e-Mewat and Mewat Radio in Mewat District of Haryana were linked to the State Rural Livelihood Mission to carry the Resource Block Strategy across the airwaves using the already poverty-free women of Andhra Pradesh as change agents.

Radio Mewat and Alfaz-e-Mewat were roped in on an experimental basis to do a series of 31 programmes of fifteen minutes duration on a daily basis on the social mobilisation and institution building processes of the Haryana State Rural livelihood Mission. These programmes ran concurrently with the CRP round of the Haryana livelihood Mission and strengthened the Resource Mobilisation strategy in the intensive blocks of Mewat by setting up production capacity in Tauru block and then broadcasting them in other intensive blocks like Nuh and Nagina and narrowcasting them in villages where the radio signals do not reach. The aim was to motivate women to form groups and promote a sense of unity as outlined in the Aajeevika mandate.

The objectives of the programme were:

- Provide tools to operating self help groups under NRLM to function better and also motivate other groups,
- Enable local stories to come out,
- Strengthen the functioning of village level institutions,
- Capture the processes of community mobilisation,
- Profile role models coming out from the community,
- Feature good practices.

The focus throughout the radio programme was on the community. The programmes were conceived and produced by the community with an anchor/reporter from Mewat itself. The radio stations were only a medium for the community voices to be heard.

The programmes produced on the activities were broadcast through radio transmission to Nuh and Nagina blocks where the social mobilisation was yet to begin. The programmes were also narrowcast in Tauru block where the radio signals do not reach.

Outcome

The episodes broadcast by Alfaz-e-Mewat and Radio Mewat focused on different aspects of community and social mobilisation:

1. Community stories of empowered women in self help groups,
2. Profiling Community Resource Persons in the project as role models for other women,
3. Stress on the concept of collectivization which brings women together and creating community leaders,
4. Highlighting stories of women who overcame poverty and built social capital,
5. Showing how community based media can effectively strengthen the functioning of these women,
6. Covering stories of successful Village Level Organisations: Social action, Bank linkage, role as secondary bank etc,
7. Odds faced by women in forming self help groups and collective action,
8. Community heroes and their individual success stories,
9. Success stories of collective social action by VO level organisations.

The focus of the programme was on the affinity based women groups and how these groups go beyond just thrift and credit to motivators for social action. The idea of a cohesive bond between the women resulting in collective action for the community was the main thrust.

Narrowcasting of episodes produced by Alfaz-e-Mewat as well as Radio Mewat to community resource persons of Haryana was organised. During the narrowcasting there was also discussion on the effectiveness of the tool (Community Radio) for social mobilisation, response from the community on the programmes including suggestions from them on the programming. The feedback was encouraging.

The community recognized that the radio programmes gave them an identity and respect. They felt empowered and admitted that radio has given them a voice that is largely ignored. The programme also created awareness. A lot of people came to know about the livelihood mission and asked the women how they can also join the self-help groups. The women activists

wanted more radio programmes and also wanted to be trained in production and dissemination through narrowcasting.

The episodes imparted knowledge and built awareness among the local community about Aajeevika, the concept of collectivisation and community ownership. The final report based on inputs from the radio stations showed that the community-produced programmes were effective in instilling the message of Aajeevika. The programmes had awakened interest in those blocks where Aajeevika programmes are yet to be implemented.

Social impact of community radio in India

Although at an individual level the community radio stations are working well in community mobilisation, researchers interested in development communication model were keen to understand the social impact of community radio. Many development practitioners believe that the sustainable development is not possible without participatory communication. Decentralised decision making through Panchayati Raj institutions was aimed at turning the planning process from a top down approach to a bottom up approach (Saxena & Ravi, 2006).

A study on *Social Impact of Community Radio* by Kar (2010) found that Community radio has given voice to the marginalised by reaching out to communities facing exclusion and marginalization. Most of the community radio listeners were women. Not only are decisions on programmes made by the community, in the case of the NGO supported stations, the decision on what to produce lies with the Community Managed Resource Centre. Some stations are also managed and funded by the community.

What is however interesting to see is, that, voice is not to be seen only as access to media - an end in itself- but seen in the context of what Sen (1999) describing poverty calls, “deprivation of basic capabilities”. Community radio can be seen as giving capabilities to the poor to participate in development. Community radio is effective in extending communication rights.

The study by Kar (2010) concluded that community radio stations are effective in empowering women since radio introduces women into a public space and gives them voice. Community radio has led to democratisation of media. The survey employed in the study showed that a majority of women listeners participated in some capacity in the community radio programmes. Their roles have ranged from being anchors to programme producers although only about twenty five percent were engaged in station operation.

Bandelli (2011) has looked at the involvement of women in radio

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stations through two qualitative case studies: Radio Namaskar, in Orissa, run by Young India and partly supported by UNESCO, and Radio Dhadkan, in Madhya Pradesh, initiated by Sambhav in partnership with UNICEF. In both stations, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of approximately 47 respondents, mainly female reporters and listeners.

The study concludes that community radio constitutes an opportunity for women to access information, which is otherwise denied, and acquire a voice, which otherwise remains unheard. They highly value the importance of information in increasing their knowledge and thus in expanding their ability to understand society and make informative choices. This is the case for women who engage with radio on a daily basis and for those who occasionally participate through listeners groups.

Community radio in the hills: Kumaon Vani and Henvalvani

Henvalvani and Kumaon Vani are two stations which have explored the potential of community radio in the hills of Uttarakhand where communities are perhaps very different due to the topographical features.

TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) has set up a community radio named Kumaon Vani in Mukhteshwar in 2010. The radio station is attached to TRISHA (TERI's Research Initiative in Supi for Himalayan Advancement). Due to being at a higher altitude its coverage has been recorded in far off areas like Nainital, Bhimtal, Almora, Ranikhet, Kausani, Champawat, Devidhura, Pithoragarh, Betalghat, Sheetlakheth, Gwaldham and Bageshwar.

A study on *Effectiveness of Community Radio in Uttarakhand* by Dhawan (2016) shows that given the geographical setting in the area, the radio has served as an important medium of communicating with the people and serving as a link between the institutions of governance and the people. It is seen that despite the presence of other commercial media, such as television and print, the community has stated the need for content that impacts their daily lives. Kumaon Vani has been able to fill this gap. Its unique set up of being community operated and frequent phone in programmes and community engagements makes it more relevant in addressing local concerns.

The study finds that as a response to the local needs, Kumaon Vani since 2010 has designed and delivered several programmes. Agriculture being the mainstay of the community, Kumaon Vani had hosted a show on agriculture which was sponsored by the Department of Biotechnology of the Government of India. It was tailored to the local agro-climatic needs. The issues covered were related to market access and specific advice from

experts on how to get better prices for their produce. This can be seen in line with the Government's impetus on organic farming, soil health card measures and promotion of agricultural markets.

Dhawan (2016) also describes Henvalvani as a community radio, set up in 2001 as a social movement by the youth in Chamba. This station got initial support from the Himalayan trust and got its license in 2012 for formal operation. Located in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand, the radio has served as an instrument for social mobilization. After construction of the Tehri dam and submergence of the old Tehri town, Chamba has emerged as an important commercial hub in the hilly areas. Many of the youth have been engaged in this community radio. Other than two permanent members, others have come as volunteers and given their time, acquired skills through a practical exposure and then have gone ahead to pursue their careers. The most unique feature is that there are many women volunteers.

The effectiveness of CR stations in Uttarakhand, Henvalvani over the years has gained popularity in the local community. Its reach is seen in nearby blocks and despite the frugally engineered transmitter, they are able to broadcast their content continuously. Currently there is 12 hours of original content being broadcast. Despite ups and downs in the financial operations in the radio, the people in the area have found a connection with Henvalvani. Started solely on a voluntary basis, it has seen more than 200 employees from its inception and is now regarded with respect as a training workshop for the youth in this area (Dhawan, 2016).

The impact of community radio stations in improving the well-being of the individual as well as society has been borne out by the pilot projects with the National Rural Livelihood Mission as also the various development messages carried by the community radio stations in Bundelkhand, Uttarakhand or in Orissa. The pilot communication projects and past research done point for a strong case for promoting community radio as a mode of participatory communication tool for empowerment and development.

Conclusions

It becomes evident from the discussions and the success of the engagement of community radio stations that the listeners are empowered by information provided by the stations which are relevant and useful and articulated by people of their community. The community radio sector has evolved as an important tool of participatory communication and advocacy and has resulted in adoption of important development messages for the betterment of the marginalised community.

The recognition of the power of community media in the development model will lead to greater empowerment and democratization of the media space and diversity of the media holdings.

Notes

- 1 All India Radio is India's Public Service Broadcaster and operates through 420 stations located across the country. It is a national broadcaster and covers 99 per cent of the population. It has a range of medium wave (MW), Frequency Modulation (FM) and Short wave (SW) stations.
- 2 The Chanda Committee was constituted in 1964 to prepare a report on radio and television in India. It presented its report to the Government in April 1966 asking for a Corporation to be set up for radio and television.
- 3 Namma Dhvani (*our voice* in Kannada) is a community radio production centre set up in Budhikote, 95 kms from Bangalore in the Kolar district of Karnataka. This radio production unit was set up by VOICES, a Bangalore based Development communication group and Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), a non- profit organisation that has been working in the Budhikote region.
- 4 Pastapur radio station was set up by Deccan Development Society (DDS) , a not for profit organisation in Machnoor village, Medak District of Andhra Pradesh. Since they did not have a broadcasting licence in 2000, they used the narrowcasting technique to air the programmes prepared by poor, rural women in the villages around Machnoor. DDS has now a Community Radio license.

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RESEARCHING COMMUNITY RADIO



REMINISCENCES OF A CONCEPTUAL
AND EMPIRICAL JOURNEY



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Abstract

This paper reflects on the first ever doctoral work on ‘Community Radio in India’ carried out by the author at a time when the not-for-profit sector was not a reality in the broadcasting ecology of the country. It traces how the campaign for community radio in India and some of the grass-roots experiments of narrowcasting informed her research findings and analysis. The paper also make linkages, where possible, to the changes that have been witnessed in the field of research on community radio over the last decade and a half – how the academic foundations have evolved, transformed and progressed and what are the newer perspectives and prospects for research with the changing policy environment and practices within the CR sector in India.

Keywords

Community radio, Social change,
Participatory communication, Voice,
Media democratisation.

“People may tell you that you are chasing a phantom and that nothing like this exists in India. But, this is an emerging area of study requiring comprehensive research that will not only contribute to policy advocacy, but also rigorously document a historical shift in the media-scape of the country as it happens.” These were the prophetic words I was greeted with when I approached Prof. Vinod Pavarala¹ after my admission to the PhD programme of the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad in August 2000. I was enthusiastically looking for a supervisor in a new city, holding on smugly to the ‘research proposal’ that had got me admission to this prestigious PhD programme of a Central university in the south of India. I had little idea then that I was standing on the threshold of being proffered a brand-new, incipient area of research (that I had no clue about), which would define and characterize all my academic endeavours in future.

In my two years of journalism and four years as a lecturer of ‘mass communication’, I had never come across anything called community radio. Prof. Pavarala could read doubt written all over my face. He then briefly explained the context and background of alternative media to me, and its role and relevance in the Indian context. He mentioned the 1995 Supreme Court Judgement declaring airwaves as public property. He also handed over a couple of documents to me – The Bangalore Declaration on Radio 1996, The Pastapur Initiative² on Community Radio Broadcasting (incidentally signed on the day of my PhD interview in July 2000) and a report analysing the community radio policies in some of the liberal democracies of the world. He said, “You may want to go through these before you take a final decision. Think over it for a few days and if you still wish to work with me, this is the field I am interested in”.

Those were still the days when Google had not become a way of life, and we were not sharing our anxieties and seeking people’s advice and vote on Facebook. But this was a crucial decision – it was a question of being able to endure and survive the topic for four-five long years. I was also wondering – why would I want to do research on radio in the era of Satellite Television? Nonetheless, I read the documents dutifully and diligently and thought through, and the rest, as they say, is history³.

In the ensuing paper, I reflect on my doctoral work and make linkages, where possible, to the changes that I have witnessed in the field of research on community radio over the last decade and a half – how the academic foundations have evolved, transformed and progressed and what are the newer perspectives and prospects for research with the changing policy

environment and practices within the CR sector, especially in India.

Ferment for community radio: Perspectives and politics

What is community radio?

As with any other research scholar, I too was expected to start with finding an answer to the question: What is Community Radio? How does one define it? As there was no policy on community radio in India, one could not fall back on picking up the ‘official’ definition and critiquing it. Therefore, the definition contained in the Pastapur Initiative became, for me, a respectable starting point as it highlighted the key aspects contained in the widely accepted characterization of community radio by AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) i.e. “community radio as having three key aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and management, and community participation”. These came to be adopted as the main facets of community radio even in the ‘Policy Guidelines for setting up Community Radio Stations’ announced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting much later in 2006.

The Pastapur document (2000) also added that, “community radio is distinguished by its limited local reach, low-power transmission, and programming content that reflects the educational, developmental and cultural needs of the specific community it serves”. In those days, the concept had not yet been complicated further to problematize the term ‘community’ – something that has become crucial now. Community was looked upon simply as “a non-sectarian group of individuals who are territorially-bound and share a common socio-economic position/interest (DDS, 2000)”.

Also, as I ventured out to find the crucial differences in community radio vis-à-vis the so-called ‘mainstream’ media, it was necessary at that point to understand that this was the radio for the historically disadvantaged people, and that, “the historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally as a tool for development” (AMARC, 1998). Tabing (2002) defined community radio station as “one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community” (p.9) added the crucial media democratization element to the basket of core characteristics.

Those were also the days when a paradigmatic shift was happening in the thinking on development or social change from a top-down diffusion of innovations techniques to the bottom-up participatory communication

approaches, hence, it became crucial to realise – something that what I keep reiterating even today in many discussions – that community radio is a social process in which members of a community federate to design and produce programmes; and that “it should be made clear that community radio is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself, i.e., owning and controlling its own means of communication (AMARC, 1998).

In the end, whenever someone asked – what makes a radio station a community radio station, I would answer it in the words of AMARC’s members:

...When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority and makes good humour and hope its main purpose; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice or a publicity gimmick; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated, not even the musical dictatorship of the big recording studios; when everyone’s words fly without discrimination or censorship, that is community radio. Radio stations that bear this name do not fit the logic of money or advertising. Their purpose is different, their best efforts are put at the disposal of civil society. Of course this service is highly political: it is a question of influencing public opinion, denying conformity, creating consensus, broadening democracy. The purpose – whence the name – is to build community life.” “Manual urgente para Radialistas Apasionados” (Lopez, 1997).

and

...Community radio, rural radio, cooperative radio, participatory radio, free radio, alternative, popular, educational radio. If the radio stations, networks and production groups that make up the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters refer to themselves by a variety of names, then their practices and profiles are even more varied. Some are musical, some militant and some mix music and militancy. They are located in isolated rural villages and in the heart of the largest cities in the world.

Their signals may reach only a kilometer, cover a whole country or be carried via shortwave to other parts of the world. Some stations are owned by not-for-profit groups or by cooperatives whose members are the listeners themselves. Others are owned by students, universities, municipalities, churches or trade unions. There are stations financed by donations from listeners, by international development agencies, by advertising and by governments” (AMARC, 1995).

Community radio worldwide

These definitions reflected the diversity in the manner that community radio was and is conceived and practiced in different countries of the world. To grasp this multiplicity further, together with my mentor, I took up an extensive analysis of the broadcasting legislation and policies on community radio in Australia, Ireland, South Africa, Canada and the US which could offer lessons for policy in India either through their long-term, durable experiences with community radio or present us with a significant breadth of vision about the role of independent and pluralist media.

Through a perusal of legislative texts, guidelines and statements, articles and documents available on the internet, we made a comparative analysis of the policy frameworks for community radio and developed a set of recommendations for a policy on community radio in India.

This analysis was done in the context of the political realities of broadcasting in India, our field experiences in studying community radio initiatives in India, and the discussions in various forums regarding appropriate policy to open up broadcasting for the civil society sector.

The broadcast laws in India, until November 2006, did not permit community radio. Radio broadcasting, in India, had shifted from being a government monopoly to a highly commercialised broadcasting after Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) announced the Phase-I of auctioning of licences to set up private FM stations in November 1999. Radio entertainment in India witnessed a revival of sorts but privatisation of broadcasting merely escalated the corporate monopolisation of the spaces being made available for public use.

Evolution of broadcasting in India

By revisiting the evolution of broadcasting in India from the vantage point of access to, and control of media technologies by marginalised sections

of the society, my research inferred that although advancing democratic functioning of radio has been a vital concern in the continuing debates for a comprehensive media policy in India, little had been done to open up broadcasting for the non-profit social sector. This had unleashed a demand for collective re-appropriation of the airwaves for social development by those seeking a more equitable distribution of the radio spectrum.

Campaign for community radio in India

The period of my research coincided with the phase when community radio campaigners in India were struggling to get rural communities the right to set up low-cost local radio broadcasting facilities, but to no avail. The long-standing demands for a third tier of independent, not-for-profit broadcasting in the country yielded a confined ‘campus’ avatar of community radio in the first quarter of 2003 that allowed ‘well-established’ educational institutions to set up FM transmitters and run radio stations on their campuses (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

This decision diluted somewhat the hegemony of the state and market over radio, but it seemed at that juncture [the scenario and perceptions are different today], that radio, designated by several as a medium of the poor, had been hijacked by the elites.

After many rounds of consultations with the lobbying groups, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting officials came up with a draft policy on community radio in June 2004 that incorporated provisions to allow both non-governmental organisations as well as civil society groups to get licences to start radio stations. This was finally submitted to the Union Cabinet for approval around July 2005. In the cabinet meeting held in October 2005, the government referred the policy to a Group of Ministers for further discussions.

After many rounds of consultations with the lobbying groups, and in response to a campaign by activists, academics, non-governmental organisations and rural communities to demand that the expanded community radio policy be announced without delay, the Cabinet finally gave its seal of approval, in November 2006, to community radio policy that incorporated provisions to allow non-governmental organisations to get licences to start radio stations.

For me, it was an exciting experience to be present in all the meetings of the community radio activist networks and to scrupulously follow all the posts of the community radio-India mailing list.

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Another crucial component of any PhD research is a thorough literature review. The theoretical entry points that aided me in analysing community radio as a sociological phenomenon, and an alternative media included – media globalisation; communication for development; civil society and public sphere; and gender and development.

Media globalisation

Freedom of expression and equitable access of communication media are seen to be seriously threatened in the twenty-first century by the unhindered growth of media organisations into large-scale conglomerates. In India, the 90s were marked by a gradual easing of state monopoly over the electronic media. Globalisation and liberalisation of the economy inevitably meant greater power to market forces, which made their presence felt in the media sector. Media globalisation diminishes freedom of information and restricts the diversity of information. This is evident in the fact that even as we have an expanded menu of media outlets, the uniformity of the content renders meaningless the increase in the number of information sources (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

An expression of this widely shared anxiety could be seen in the countervailing public demand for greater decentralisation of political power and distribution of the benefits and control of media technologies. A sustained critique of media globalisation has yielded fresh perspectives, which emphasise horizontal communication, people’s participation and indigenous knowledge. As realisation dawned about the ill effects of one-way, vertical communication processes, historically marginalized communities started mobilising themselves in order to make their views heard.

Communication for development

There is a long, chequered history of the so-called ‘dominant paradigm’ in development, which emerged in the post-World War II years as many nations emerged from colonialism and embarked upon an exercise of nation building, which involved a model of economic modernisation and liberal democracy (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). This dominant paradigm promoted a top-down approach and “one size fits all” policy prescriptions. Print media and radio, initially, and television later, were seen as instruments for the dissemination of information related to the state’s agenda for development. There was little stakeholder involvement, and local knowledge or participation of people at the grassroots was rarely considered essential in these efforts. The whole

approach was prescriptive and pedagogical, and treated people as only passive consumers of information.

However, ‘community radio’, in the sense of a non-state, nonmarket venture, owned and managed by the community was a relatively recent idea in India. This was being articulated against the backdrop of participatory approaches to development that were popularised by the rise of new social movements. Media systems such as community radio were seen as key agents for facilitating a self-propelled and self-sustained people-centred development and a more democratic development process. My research highlighted the complex nature of participation in diverse social, economic and cultural circumstances and identified important related concepts such as ‘conscientisation’ (Paulo Freire, 1970) and knowledge sharing.

Civil society and public sphere

There has been a renewed interest in the concept of civil society and its political counterpart, the public sphere, as countries around the world are being undercut by the realities of contemporary globalisation. As media globalisation diminishes freedom of information, erodes the diversity and quality of information in the public sphere, civil society becomes increasingly ineffective. Taylor (1995) defines civil society as “a web of autonomous associations, independent of the state, which bound citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their mere existence or action could have an effect on public policy” (p.66).

Community radio was seen as providing to the marginalised an arena, outside the state apparatus, that may be used as a potent instrument for democratic deliberations and negotiations. Such an institutionalised space for discursive interaction and for political participation through the medium of talk could be looked at as an alternative post-bourgeois model of public sphere that Habermas (1962) stops short of developing in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Nancy Fraser (1992) critiques the singularity of Habermas’ public sphere and proposes the forging of what she calls ‘subaltern counter publics’, spheres that function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; and as and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

Gender, media and development

There is a sustained effort by feminists, women’s movements and poor women’s grassroots organisations to mainstream gender in social change discourses by introducing alternative practices and philosophies that

challenge the sex-role stereotyping that have led to women's increased marginalisation. Gender was a significant dimension in studying the community radio initiatives launched by community-based organisations that were seeking to deploy communication technologies for social change in general and empowerment of women in particular. By examining the intersections of development frameworks and feminist theorising, the author's research explored the manner in which management, control and ownership of media technologies by marginalised women provided them access to representation and decision making and helped in activating women's alternatives for fostering social change.

Contemporary frameworks

Now that community radio has become a reality in India, scholars are seeking to fathom deeper into the more significant characteristics that identify the sector and for an understanding of 'community radio' as a conceptual category. For that an intense reading must be undertaken of the concepts that I had not been able to engage with in-depth at that time. These include:

Conceptualising 'community': Community radio as the voice of the under-represented and a tool for social change first seeks to engage itself with the community. In any working definition of community radio, the concept of 'community' explicitly highlighted is that of the 'geographical community', while the 'community of interest' that may even extend 'across conurbations, nations and continents' (Lewis, 1993, p.13) must also be considered. 'Community' which is considered a repository of culture, language, human values and tradition in the non-Western world. However, most sociologists are now aware that the culturally defined and organically integrated communities may not necessarily be internally harmonious and homogeneous entities and are often marked by internal conflict, oppression and patriarchy.

Voice: Couldry (2010) considers 'voice' to be more than just the act of speaking. He considers that voice includes the practice of paying attention which makes it effective as a value and sustained as a process leading to outcome. For him, to deny someone the potential of an effective 'voice' i.e. "the process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions... is to deny a basic dimension of human life". Third World scholars consider having a voice, to incorporate "inclusion and participation in social, political, and economic processes, meaning making, autonomy, and expression."

The typological maze: Though various scholars have delineated the

Gender was a significant dimension in studying the community radio initiatives launched by community-based organisations that were seeking to deploy communication technologies for social change in general and empowerment of women in particular.

characteristics that differentiate the fundamentally citizen-controlled alternative from the typically state or corporate controlled mainstream media, there is much heterogeneity within the single category of alternative media. In a comprehensive overview of definitions that reflect on the multiplicity of alternative media, Atton (2002) declares that in order to deploy ‘alternative’ as an analytical term, we would need to be more specific than saying ‘non-mainstream’. Alternative media are characterised not only by their critiques of mainstream media, but also by the alternative socio-cultural values and frameworks which underlie their organisation and production process. In contrast to mainstream media’s liberal democratic ideal of the “informed” citizenry, alternative media promote the participatory democratic ideal of the “mobilized” citizenry.

Increasingly, therefore, scholars are focusing on the heterogeneity within this sector and the experimentation that is taking place in the practices of such initiatives. They are critiquing the mono-theoretical lens which considers all alternative initiative as alternative to mainstream media and in this way, skips other identities of alternative media (Bailey, Cammearts, & Carpentier, 2008; Rodríguez, 2001). Bailey, et al (2008) and Bosch (2010) have suggested the term, ‘rhizomatic media’, to indicate greater fluidity, interconnectedness to the state and the market, and, the anarchic and non-linear character of what has variously been called ‘critical media’, ‘citizens’ media’, and ‘radical media’.

Getting your hands dirty: Methodologies and fieldwork

The perusal of pertinent literature and a study of the issues and discourses nurturing the fledgling community radio movement indicated a remarkable absence of sustained, context-specific research undertaken on the potential of community radio and its sociological and political ramifications with respect to the media scenario in India.

Hence the next phase of the research was embarked on with the intent of recording the methods and motives with which grassroots NGOs and media activists were pursuing the cause for community radio and the critical issues related to the functional and efficacy aspects of community radio.

At that time, even as the government was reserved about legislation to facilitate the functioning of community radio in India, some grassroots organisations had initiated radio projects to support their community development work.

I studied the socio-economic and cultural profile of the region and the political context in which the community radio initiatives had materialised in different parts of India. It was also an essential component of research to delineate the history of the presence of NGOs in the region where their community radio projects were located and also their philosophy of development work.

The fieldwork also endeavoured to highlight the level of community involvement in existence in the community radio projects as it undertook case studies of all known ongoing experiments with community radio in India.

The community radio initiatives that are profiled, included:

- (a) Alternative for India Development (AID) project in Daltonganj (Jharkhand);
- (b) Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) project in Bhuj (Gujarat);
- (c) VOICES project (1996) in Budhikote (Karnataka); and
- (d) Deccan Development Society (DDS, 2000) project in Pastapur (Andhra Pradesh).

The case studies of these ongoing experiments helped understand – how the message development process of community radio by itself becomes a training ground for participation in the broader issues of development at the community level; and the extent to which community radio enhances the process of self-expression, public dialogue, collective action and empowerment.

The research work used qualitative methodology and multiple methods of inquiry for accomplishing the objectives of the study. The case study method was used, involving in-depth and open-ended interviews and focus groups, along with analysis of documents.

As the approach was interpretative, that sees social reality as mutually constructed between people in the real world, I avoided getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and was open to adopting new paths of discovery as they emerged.

Following Patton (1990), the qualitative research done was understood as a complex system that was more than the sum of its parts. Participation of rural audiences was sought in a more significant manner than as mere respondents in the interrogative context of a structured questionnaire. The focus groups were conducted in the local language and in comfortable settings where the members would normally gather to hold discussions in their villages.

I can still recall some of the spontaneous reactions and statements that took us by surprise. In midst of an focus group discussion in a village in Jharkhand, Chandrika Bhuinya, a Dalit labourer shouted at the researchers angrily: “Can we eat radio? Nothing will come out of all this. People here don’t have land, water, or electricity while all the upper caste villages around us enjoy all these facilities”.

In contrast to this, there was Shashikant Mahato, a visually impaired man in another village of Jharkhand, had articulated, “the programme has brought light to those who have been living in darkness”.

Focus group discussions with listeners were convened in such a way that they represented gender, religion, caste and age depending on the socio cultural profile of the village. Direct contact was made with the people, situations, and phenomena under study in order to gain insight on multiple interdependencies. There were times when all male colleagues in the team had to be asked to lead all the men away from the focus group discussion site, so that the women would lift the veil and speak.

Thick description, inquiry in depth, direct quotations capturing people’s personal perspectives and experiences formed the qualitative data to describe how people were experiencing the phenomenon. Researcher’s subjective experiences, observations and insights of the researcher also shaped an important part of the inquiry and were critical to understanding the subject. In-depth interviews with representatives of the various civil society organisations, programme coordinators, content producers and policy planners were conducted.

Data analysis was not treated as a distinct end process and, as mentioned earlier, a substantial amount of parallel analysis was carried out as data collection progressed. The researcher kept moving from data collection to data analysis and back.

On the whole, the most fulfilling part of the project for me was listening to community voices – women talking about their issues, men and women discussing the developmental concerns of their region, and community radio reporters and project coordinators sharing details of the programmes they produced.

Researching community radio: Emerging themes and concerns

The field of community media studies is evolving as a meaningful space of research. Scholars doing research on community media are focusing on the

The qualitative research done was understood as a complex system that was more than the sum of its parts. Participation of rural audiences was sought in a more significant manner than as mere respondents in the interrogative context of a structured questionnaire.

heterogeneity within this sector and the experimentation that is taking place in the practices within initiatives.

I am sharing some preliminary thoughts here about the possible areas of study that I would consider delving into if I were to do research on community radio today.?

We now have something termed as ‘community radio’ in India today – and more than 200 of them, and so, analysing their working that highlights their uniqueness, documents their endeavours, and critiques their practices against their stated vision, as well as the core universal non-negotiable principles associated with community media could be a good starting point. There is a whole lot of good grassroots work waiting to be documented there and analysed within the existing and emerging conceptual frameworks.

As community radio is identified with ‘participation’ – carrying out research that helps a community radio identify its levels and extent of community engagement could be another potential research theme, that would analyse the interpretation and notion of participation adopted by NGOs or/and governments for community radio. The study could also attempt to ascertain the nature and extent of community participation discernible in different stages of the content development and distribution process of community radio.

The funding imperative and sustainability conundrum needs substantive and sensitive research to figure out the means adopted by community radio initiatives to become self-sustaining as also, the different ways in which sustainability is interpreted and conceptualise by them.

An important question that community radio stations today are having to deal with is: Who is participating/listening? This calls for research about the nature of the audiences and opens up the debates around the notion of ‘community’ for the community radio station. Researchers must understand the manner in which the ideas of inclusivity, equity and diversity manifest themselves in the daily functioning of a community radio and the efforts in place by the sector or the station to enable previously powerless individuals and communities to take control of the means and content of communication.

Community radio stations based on campuses need to be researched to highlight the novelty of their location, approaches and practices. Policy is a major area, as also the ideas of freedom of expression and the politics around ‘news’, and the related areas of the relationship between

community radio and the state. Community Radio as a cultural resource and the struggles around identities has huge possibilities of in-depth research. Similarly questions around ownership and management of community radio – the ways in which community ownership gets operationalised on the ground – has potential to be studied extensively with focus on the sense of ownership among producers, volunteers and listeners of community radio programmes.

There are many other ideas that one could mention and discuss here, including those related to appropriate technologies, spectrum allocation, the political economy of the sector, the licensing procedures, volunteerism, the NGO-isation debate, community radio and disaster/conflict, the self-regulation versus external monitoring dilemma etc. – many of which are probably being explored already.

But let me end here by saying that the research on community radio may not provide us with all the answers, but let us all make a sincere effort to ask the right question.

Notes

- 1 At present, he is the UNESCO Chair on Community Media at the Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.
- 2 A UNESCO sponsored group meeting of community radio advocates, organised in Hyderabad by Deccan Development Society (DDS) in July (17–20) 2000, issued the Pastapur Initiative on Community Radio, which declared that the government has an obligation to take its intentions of freeing broadcasting from state monopoly to its logical conclusion, by making media space available not only to private players but also to communities. This landmark document petitioned that the government create a third-tier of broadcasting in India by permitting a not-for-profit community radio sector to complement the existing state-owned public radio and private commercial radio.
- 3 It is acknowledged here that, as this is a self-reflective paper on the first ever doctoral research on Community Radio in India carried out by the author, it borrows a good deal of material from her co-authored book, *Other Voices: The Struggle for Community Radio in India* (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

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INSIGHTS FROM THE PAST



EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF
COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA



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Abstract

This study is an attempt to deliberate upon the critical issue of sustainability in the community radio sector with some insights from functioning of various community radio stations in India. While providing a brief account on the interlinked challenges faced by community radio stations, the study discusses a few case studies within the framework of social, technical, financial and institutional sustainability. It is based on the author's interactions with different community radio stations across India and also her own managerial experience of working with one of the stations. Insights from these varied incidents have been put together to deliberate upon common concerns and also share some interesting observations from the field which can indicate towards possible solutions.

Keywords

Community radio, People's participation, Community media sustainability, Chanderi Ki Awaaz, Vasundhara Vahini

“Every day when I leave from home in morning there is a sunken feeling, the uncertainty of future daunting every time I look ahead. But the moment I enter my studio somehow my heart takes a spin and I am back to my enthusiastic self. The magic lies in our listeners’ love, and that’s what keeps me going despite our struggle with resources every day” – Jagroop Singh, Radio Bundelkhand.

This is one statement which is reverberated in every community radio journalist’s story. This terse statement indicates a paradoxical situation concerning the strenuous struggle this community radio journalist has to undergo yet the unremitting zeal with which one holds the ground. This study is an attempt to collate such struggling voices of people dedicated to work for development through use of community radio into an evocative talk. Before venturing into integrities of the above statement, let’s move back a step and understand community media with its characteristics and challenges.

Community media, as the term implies, is any form of media which is designed and operated by and for the community. UNESCO (2011) clearly defines it as an alternate media for people which acts as a transparent and discursive space for representation of their interests and issues. Here, this concept of alternate media is distinctively based on the group of people the media will be serving that the actual content of that media (Medrado, 2007). A closer look at this ‘third world’ media which seemingly exist amidst the private media organisations and the public broadcasters, both thriving with money and power, will explain the constructional details behind it.

So this media doesn’t distinguish itself in terms of content but the people engaged in its operations including those at the both sending and receiving end. Since a community is a group of people who share a common culture, follow same way of living and often exists together as a society geographically also. Thus a community has its own set of beliefs, practices and even challenges which are not easily understood by an outsider. In a community, a group identity is defined, created and maintained for survival in a geographical space, through an exchange of initiatives and information. For such an exchange, a community thus creates, and is also created by, a community communication system, which includes the various communication roles (and their actors/performers), needs, and resources available to the individuals and subgroups which make up the community called community media. It is within the framework of a community’s communication system, therefore, that its media should properly be identified and created (Das, 2011).

Another analogical approach aptly describing the concept and functioning of a community media compares it with a rhizome’s characteristics

of connectivity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. Just like a rhizome expands its roots in all directions, in a non-uniform manner and builds networks at both horizontal and vertical levels, a community media also functions in the similar manner which allows it to remain grounded in the grassroots and simultaneously engage in organisational networks. Interestingly, this unique aspect about community media, about its embeddedness in the civil society and its position as the ‘third voice’ other than the state and the private owners makes the community media highly elusive in nature.

Drawing from the above arguments, ‘people’ in community media framework become the focal point and an imperative aspect is their participation in the whole process. Participation, as categorised into seven levels, begins at the weakest form of passive participation and goes up to the highest seventh level called self-mobilisation (Mikkelson, 2005). These varying degrees of participation are apparently quite reflected in the various community media existing today. Moving up from passive receivers of broadcasted information, to subtle participation in form of suggestions and comments to becoming leaders of their community media channel, it is undoubtedly an arduous process of eliciting people’s participation.

Mapping the unmapped path

Connecting back more specifically to community radio, it is one of the most vibrant yet challenging media forms. Given the unconventional media space occupied by community radio, the route to its successful and sustained existence is also dissimilar to that of the other mainstream media formats. The community radio movement in India spans back to 2002 when community radio was legalised for only educational institutes and began with Anna FM (first campus or university operated community radio station) going on air in 2004 (Seth, n.d.). The process took more shape when the community radio policy was extended to include non-profit organisations also after which Deccan Development Society’s Sangam Radio was initiated in 2008. It was then followed with several more stations in the country subsequently. With around 449 community radio stations licensed presently out of which around 200 are operational, it leaves behind a big number of 249 as non-functional stations and not ignoring the wobbly status of many community radio stations it poses a huge challenge in front of us for sustaining this crucial third world media today (as stated by Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India).

While working as a part of a community radio station, it is an enriching and vivacious experience the long list of hurdles at every step of its process could not be ignored. Operating a community radio station is an uphill task as it requires a multifaceted, low-cost system which can ensure community

driven programming as well as validated flow of information with a non-profit model of working. All these interlinked but perplexing objectives make it a struggle for the station to operate.

To reconnoitre these challenges in detail, a typical community radio station, which broadcasts in the radius of 10-15 km of area (if not obstructed by a hill or any other large building) structurally consists of a recording studio, a transmitter and an antenna. Next, is the human resource responsible for content generation and broadcasting (or narrowcasting also at some places) it, and third and most importantly comes the listeners who are ideally also the contributors or speakers in the radio programmes. With these components, a usual day at a community radio station includes creating radio programmes, scheduling them for broadcast, live telephonic sessions and researching issues for next day's programmes. As linearly simple as it sounds this process is quite meandering with several knots in between. Looking more closely, for example, creating radio programmes would involve identifying the issue within the community; further researching on it for validated information; capturing community perspectives or practices on the issue on recorder and then editing the recorded audio bytes into a relevant, interesting as well as informative radio programme. Thus, the processes inside a community radio studio are much more rigorous and expand beyond those of a commercial FM station. All the challenges are intriguingly inter-linked with one as a precursor or successor to the other one. Some of the key challenges faced by a community radio station include:

- High costs involved in community outreach and engagement exercises (with an activity as simple as regular field discussions with community groups),
- Lack of information and training on technical functionalities of the radio station,
- Limited access to validated and scientific information which can supplement the local wisdom with correct facts,
- Huge gap of knowledge and access to new technologies and tools which can enhance community radio functioning
- Limited sources of funding and a continuous pressure to devise cost-effective strategies,
- Lack of fund generating or marketing skills,
- Difficulty in sustaining constant motivation among community radio functionaries including both volunteers and paid members,
- Discuss burning issues in the society with complete exclusion of regional political perspectives,
- Lack of access and resources for providing required training to community radio personnel,
- Issues related to retention of the trained personnel due to lower

remunerations (CEMCA, 2015; Dagron, 2001; Pradhan, 2011; Kazi (n.d.), Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

In view of the above discussed modalities in operating a community radio station one pertinent question that arises is how sustainable this model of community communication is? Should we go on praising its strengths and keep promoting more community radio stations to get established or should we reflect on these practical issues reportedly faced by almost all the stations presently working in the country? Sustaining the currently operational as well as the coming up stations is an issue more urgent than discussing their merits and demerits.

Defining sustainability for a community radio

A community radio station thrives with the participation of its community in terms of its programme production, management and most importantly visioning. However these processes involve greater complexities, which, in different ways create uncertainties for the community radio station. These uncertainties give rise to the need to understand the exact meaning of sustainability for a community radio station and contextualise possible solutions for the same.

Let's look at the various 'models' that emerged in the process of interacting and reviewing some of the functional community radio stations in different regions; and understand sustainability in community radio in its various forms:

A. Social sustainability: It refers to the degree of community participation in every aspect of running the station including programme production, broadcasting and management of daily operations as well as strategic decision making. A station which stems from community's own initiative and builds its programmes based on its interwoven dynamics can be called as a socially sustainable structure (CEMCA, 2015).

Community radio station run by independent community volunteers

It is often debated that a community radio station differs in its concept and its actual functioning. Some cases appear to be more influenced by the licence holding parent institution or the funding agency which may or may not be a government body. Despite varying views if we truly want to witness a community managed community radio station one should visit Chanderi Ki Awaaz. It is a small community radio set up in a rented space at the centre of a small town of Chanderi in Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh. The station is presently

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broadcasting for six hours in a day with a team of eight people who are all local residents of the town. The fact which makes this station unique across the country is that all these eight station staff members have been working as volunteers and the station has been able to sustain itself completely on the volunteer-ship model for the last seven years. Nobody gets paid here except the electricity and rent bills which are managed sometimes through DAVP (Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, which is a nodal agency through which all government ministries route its audio and visual advertisements) revenue or any local government project. At a point where institutional sustainability becomes the focus of discussion among many community radio teams, Chanderi Ki Awaaz is an exemplary case of community owned and operated station. It has faced its own issues with one person staff to delayed rent bills to a point two years back where everyone had almost expected it to shut down. Probably at this point it's 'owners' came forward and the team again grew back to a healthy number of eight. Interestingly, all the community radio staff members here have excellently synchronised their time with each other. Every person devotes two hours a day as per his/her convenience and availability so that there is a rotating schedule for all. No one person bears the burden of administrative work or anyone task alone but the person present in the studio is responsible for the next two hours. With no commercial advertisements or funded projects, Chanderi Ki Awaaz team displays an amazing level of determination and satisfaction of working for their community comprising of a semi-rural set up comprising majorly of Chanderi weavers.

These kind of strong community driven cases in the present community radio sector in India are prominently visible at several other places also. Therefore these examples help us to understand that it would not be an impractical idea to visualise a completely self-dependent community radios stemming from the local communities, and when that is the case the sustainability of community radio no longer remains questioned as it then evolves and continues to exist with the community.

B. Technical sustainability: A community radio station can never be sustained without building internal expertise on at least the basic technical know-how of the station set-up. An external training support or equipment updating can be facilitated but for error-free smooth functioning of the technical set up a community radio station must have its people enabled with the basic skills. This is especially crucial for stations located in remote areas which are not easily accessible so that time duration for any repair in case of an emergency can be minimised¹.

Experiments with technological innovations for community radio stations

Recognising the evident technological gap in the context of community radio stations, Development Alternatives had initiated an exploratory programme for identifying and piloting low-cost technological solutions for enhancing community radio functioning in various ways. Under this initiative Development Alternatives was able to explore a variety of innovations ranging from low-cost FM antenna to integration of Java Information System Management into community radio programming, Gramin Radio Inter Network System (GRINS), Mobilevaani and automated Smart Transmitters. These technologies were selected considering the different challenges faced by community radio stations such as increasing community engagement, increasing the radio outreach, lack of training and information, automation requirements, data documentation and management, integration with digital media and bringing cost effectiveness in current functioning.

This exercise consisted of two phases – research and development of the technology and secondly pilot testing of that technology at the most suitable community radio stations. After carrying out more than 20 such pilots at community radio stations in geographically varied locations (including mountainous terrain of Uttarakhand, coastal areas in Kerala and other states like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana etc.), interesting results were seen². Some of these technologies demonstrated low-cost efficient solutions to some of the grave issues faced by the stations. Also, the participating community radio stations expressed keen interest in adopting these technologies in their functioning and despite a few extra efforts pooled in for implementing them, they shared positive outcomes of using these new technologies. This initiative, however, requires further advancement in terms of policy level facilitation and scaling up.

C. Financial sustainability: Financial resources form a critical component of running the community radio station and more than the availability of funds, a transparent and accountable fund management system is more essential. This is important for building a trusted and strong relationship with the community as well as its other stakeholders. An interesting incident during an annual team evaluation exercise at Radio Bundelkhand community radio station showed that it is actually not enough to assign the fund management role to one particular stakeholder, even to the parent organisation. It is extremely important to involve all the community radio staff members in the process of budgeting and managing income and expenditure. Even if the staff members initially lack understanding and skills for this exercise they should be trained gradually but definitely be kept involved throughout. This

not only builds up a clear and well managed system but also brings financial sustainability as all the stakeholders are kept aware of the financial condition of the station always, so that they all pool in their efforts when required.

Typically, a community radio station has three sources of funding. The first one and the simpler looking one is the advertisements in which government advertisements received from form the major chunk. These advertisements which are to be broadcasted at a fixed rate of Rs. Four per second, in some cases, provide enough funds for a station to sustain its expenditures. However, there are certain limitations, like, there is a cap of 5 minutes per hour for advertising for community radio stations³ per year for the community radio stations to operate in a tax free mode above which they will be liable for service tax. As a matter of fact the very first step of attaining empanelment with DAVP is another major glitch with DAVP advertisement fund and several radio stations are still struggling with it. Furthermore, the information about new release orders also does not reach timely to the stations owing to the technical bugs of internet and phone networks especially in remote regions where generally community radio stations are located. It is an uphill task to get payments released from DAVP for the previously broadcasted advertisements. 'Advisably' it requires somebody from the station to physically submit their invoices at the Delhi office of DAVP every time which is a repudiation of any funding received from running DAVP advertisements. So DAVP advertisements which could have been one secure source of revenue for community radio stations actually turn out to be a major nuisance considering all these factors⁴. The second source of revenue generation is the project grants obtained from either government or non-government funding agencies. Here, some of the key points which discourage them from funding community radio stations directly are limited reach of the community radio transmitter, and also inability to provide established impact level results. Third and the most difficult option is community generated funds which require highest form of community ownership based on strong engagement as well as mutual trust. This is the ideal format in which a community radio station is envisioned to operate itself i.e. with local people and local resources in its true sense. Therefore this model negates need of an external support or funds. However, it is seen as a debatable point by some which we shall be discussing further.

A self-funded community radio system

In lieu of the large non-profit funds for projects or any government funded programmes, can a community radio station survive itself following the model of commercial FM stations? A question worth asking because this question gives us two critical insights with respect to both financial sustainability as well as the ethical grounds held by any

community radio station. Firstly, it indicates towards the potential of generating funds independently through commercial advertisements and secondly it also reemphasises the ethical code of conduct a community radio station ought to follow which includes not promoting any specific religious or political party, any product/service which is not in common good of the community and so on and so forth. However, one cannot deny that with a critically balanced approach a community radio station can harvest onto the potential of private audio advertisements. Vasundhara Vahini, a community radio station functioning for more than seven years in Baramati, Maharashtra is one such station which is exactly following this model. As Yuvraj Mohan Jadhav (Station In-Charge) often explains how they have been able to generate sufficient revenue for running the station at a minimum cost, he talks about the opportunities lying with small local businesses who feel unsure of approaching commercial FM stations due to their alienated environment and high advertisement prices. Yuvraj clearly attributes this possibility to the strong community engagement the station has with its community people. According to him, when the community people recognise this community radio as their own where they have access and right to share their views easily then the community radio automatically has a higher credibility and trust with them⁵. Its capability to reach out to people effectively is endorsed by people themselves which then also attract local advertisements. However one cannot delink the fact in this case that Vasundara Vahini or community radio stations which are able to generate revenue through local advertisements are mostly located near the urban or semi urban regions with an access to the main market areas which ensures a substantial demographic reach to commercially relevant listeners.

D. Institutional sustainability: A community radio station for greater institutional sustainability should clearly define its policies for content generation, programme broadcasting, advertisements, stakeholder involvement, team dynamics, remunerations, work premises, gender issues and the list can be continued to include many things depending upon suitability for individual community radio stations. Also, equally important is the process by which these policies are formulated. They should be outlined with consent of all concerned stakeholders. Any kind of distress among the community radio team members over the policies can adversely affect both the institution's functioning as well as its social sustainability.

Formulating regional consortiums

A very unique initiative was seen in Bundelkhand region where five community radio stations aligned themselves to build a consortium

on several occasions. It was an exquisite model which demonstrated multiple benefits for all the participating stations. Since Bundelkhand comprises of districts from both Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, the consortium also included stations from both the states including Lalit Lokvani (Lalitpur, UP), Chanderi Ki Awaaz (Chanderi, MP), Radio Bundelkhand (Orchha, MP), Radio Dhadkan (Shivpuri, MP) and Radio Kisanvani (Sironj, MP). Though their respective communities have their own issues and concerns, all these five stations share similar geographical and cultural concerns like Bundeli folk culture, climate change, agricultural livelihoods, water scarcity etc. Hence the grouping of these community radio stations worked fantastically when they produced programmes together with the right mix of Bundeli entertainment and useful information. This concept of holding same rights as equal partners in a project led to perfect sharing of expertise, skills and resources; and produced programmes with greater variety and of higher quality. The five community radio stations divided the total number of programmes to be produced in a series among themselves and then shared their programmes produced with each other. This kind of an arrangement allowed them to schedule the programme broadcasting according to preferences of their regional communities and also monitor programme quality jointly. The other key benefit recognised by all these stations was that they could apply for funded projects as a larger entity with each station's reach and engagement capacities grouped together, which also then reflected large scale impact overall in Bundelkhand region. This Bundelkhand community radio consortium is an interesting example for other community radio stations to explore which are located in same geographical region.

Dialoguing reflections

One prominent perspective construing all these instances and discussions is that there are certainly solutions for achieving sustainability in community radio stations in India. These learnings can be contextualised and modified and further enhanced to create many more solutions. Secondly, despite the everyday struggle those who work in these community radio stations have a staunch belief that they are on a right track and they might falter a bit but will never get derailed.

Nevertheless we must look for certain facilitating modifications at the policy level as well as advancements within the local community radio systems. Connecting back to the community radio journalist's statement mentioned the beginning, we must dissect these multiple layers of community radio sustainability and look across them to devise solutions. That statement reflected a shadowing insecurity stemming from unclear

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scope as a professional in the community radio sector indicating poor human resource (a part of institutional) sustainability. A community radio station being a low-cost organisation will always have limits as to what it can offer to its employed staff members. So it leads us to think whether we should be working towards widening the scope of professional growth for the skilled personnel or should we focus more towards developing a space like Chanderi Ki Awaaz has demonstrated? Or should there be a blended approach embedding the good from both the set-ups. It is an area open for more brainstorming and debate as this article intended to highlight some interesting observations from the community radio action in field.

One more idea to deliberate upon, is regarding the community radio awareness activities led by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in India. It is certainly a very important exercise which needs to be further strengthened. Another possible consideration here is that these awareness workshops should extend beyond the existing community radio or even NGO network because a community radio's functioning is more concerned with the general public than the operating bodies. If the idea of owning a community radio and running it with everyone's contribution is not publicly understood and accepted then increasing the number of licensed community radio stations will not make a difference. Therefore a mass level awareness on community radio among common people needs to be created for it to sprout on its own from the community.

As Yuvraj Jadhav sums up it all perfectly:

...Our future lies in our own hands, if there are challenges there are opportunities also, community radio is an irreplaceable tool which has no limit to its potential. Every day is a struggle but a whole new unexplored space lies ahead for us to capture. People see community radio as their own media and fancy it, come close and touch it but are still unaware of its challenges. We should make them a part of this community radio journey as true equal partners...

Notes

- 1 Based on my practical experience of working with Radio Bundelkhand as Deputy Manager, Rural Communications at Development Alternatives.
- 2 This is sourced from my practical experience of working with Development Alternatives during which I had the opportunity to work on the above said Small Grants Project for Technical Innovations in CR.
- 3 Policy Guidelines for Community Radio by Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India.

- 4 Experienced during working with Radio Bundelkhand as well as emerged during interviews with several other community radio staff which are not based in Delhi.
- 5 Based on personal interview with Yuvraj Mohan Jadhav from Vasundhara Vahini CR station in Baramati, Pune, Maharashtra.

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A HOME AWAY FROM HOME



MIGRANTS, THEIR VOICE AND
COMMUNITY RADIO



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Abstract

Migrant communities are among the most marginalised communities in any society and they face extensive xenophobia and discrimination. An important component of establishing migrant rights is for societies to establish spaces and platforms that allow migrant communities to express themselves and speak out. One important way to achieve this is the use of community radio, a form of radio that is owned, managed and run by communities themselves. This article examines the challenges of voice poverty as applied to migrants. It explores how community radio have addressed the issue of migrants' rights and inclusion through sensitive programming and affirmative spaces for migrants to participate in community discussions.

Keywords:

Migrants' rights, Marginalised community,
Community radio, Voice poverty,
Social inclusion.

“Many migrant workers do not have the time or money to afford visiting internet shops because most of them live in factory or plantation compounds and don’t leave very often,” station manager Ko Naw Kham told Mizzima Business Weekly in a mail. “Radio is a very easy way to get information,” he said. “Many migrant workers listen to the radio on their mobile phones while they are working.” – From a report on MAP (Migrant Assistance Programme) Community Radio, a community radio station for migrants in Mae Sot, Thailand (Source: mizzima.com).

...Year 2008. It is late in the evening, and I am sitting with Bijay Gurung, 26, in a small room on the terrace of a dhaba (local hotel) in Central New Delhi. Bijay is Nepali, a part time cook in the dhaba over which he lives, and a compulsive listener of *Desh Pardesh* (Home & Abroad), a radio programme (then) being broadcast across Nepal by a coalition of Nepali community radio stations, and receivable in Delhi and Mumbai over the WorldSpace satellite radio network¹. The room is lit by a naked bulb dangling on a wire, which sways slightly in the breeze from the window. The shadows move as it lights the face of the other eight men sitting with us, all Nepalis like Bijay, and part of the listener group that gathers on Tuesdays and Thursdays to listen to the programme. Some of them live in this very room with him; others travel a fair distance to be part of the group...

...“What do you like about the programme?” I prompt Bijay, and his face creases into a smile. “It’s in Nepali!” he exclaims, with a hint of reproach, as if to say: Isn’t it obvious? “Where else in Delhi can I hear a drama in Nepali?...”

...And then, more seriously: “And besides, it tells us useful things about other Nepali pravasis’ (migrants’) experiences when they come to the city. Most of us don’t know what it’s like to come away from our villages, what it’s like in the city. So many vehicles! And so many people ready to take advantage of you!...”

His excitement was palpable, as was those of his companions, many of whom chime in throughout the conversation to tell me the characters they most identify with in the radio drama² that forms part of the programme; the messages they have left for their families in the show’s call-in section; and the experiences that most resemble their own among those recounted by other Nepali migrants interviewed as part of the series. Many of the men in the room have been interviewed for the programme about their own experiences as well, by the local team producing the India end³ of the show; and this too is a source of pride, the experience of listening to their own

voices on the show a few weeks later a matter of novelty and laughter as they remark on how strange they sound, and on the inanity of what they have said.

Clearly, the programme is a lifeline in the lives of these men, building a sense of community in what has otherwise been a lonely and testing existence. They are united in their search for better pastures, a better life for them and theirs, for which they have taken the difficult call to leave all that they know, and come to an unfamiliar metropolis that holds the promise of a better tomorrow. But many of them are constantly on the verge of abandoning this search, to return from whence they came: Only some have relatives already established in Delhi and Mumbai, who have provided them temporary support while they find their feet. Those with such support count themselves better off, and thank their stars. The majority, like most migrants in the sub-continent, have come on a wing and a prayer, with little beyond what they can carry in small knapsacks. Many of those in the room have only begun to learn some Hindi recently, and make barely enough to afford a meal and share the rent for rooms they share with a dozen others. Others have come on the basis of little more than unsubstantiated stories from friends, and friends of friends. Some have come on the assumption that anything is better than their circumstances back home – a notion that they lose quickly when faced by their new circumstances.

To all of them, the programme is a connection to their people back home, a misty-eye-inducing reminder of the families, communities and festivals they have left behind, as also the language that they now only speak among themselves when they meet. But it is also a friend, since it shares experiences of migration, highlights the pitfalls and risks of being unprepared and without connections to established networks of migrants from their country – and the risks of unsafe behaviours that exposes migrants to health risks like HIV. To be able to listen to this information in the voices of those they know, and in a language they understand every nuance of, is a priceless boon. And so they gather, a few days every week, to share the satellite receiver that has been left in their keeping by the initiative, and listen to the programme.

In that room, nearly a decade ago, I was struck, once again, by the power of radio, and of voice; and by its ability to connect migrants with their roots and empower them with information, ideas and moral support while they are far away from home. The simple act of being able to participate, discuss, to have a voice, carries implications that far exceed the intrinsic value of the information being shared, creating a powerful shared experience that is enriching even as it is utilitarian.

In the time since, working with community radio stations across India and South Asia, that conviction has only grown. But to understand this

better, we must first understand the challenges that the experience of being a migrant itself carries.

Migration and poverty of voice

It is one of the vast ironies of human existence that societies rarely recognize the economic contribution that migrants bring with them, in the way of skills and cheaper labour; or the fact that the mingling of cultural influences and languages that the world celebrates as the democratic/liberal ideal happens, to a large extent, due to migration. The great syncretic traditions of Sufism, and the colloquial language spoken across much of North India – Hindustani, a fluent melding of Hindi and Urdu, with traces of Persian – are arguably as much a product of migration and the cultural synthesis that it brings, as any other influence⁴.

The Industrial Revolution, Colonialism, and the discovery of the New World all contributed to increasing migration in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (Moch, 2011). More recently, globalisation, and the inexorable pull of economic imperatives have forced industrial nations to seek workers and skills from elsewhere to cut costs and remain competitive. But while a number of people do migrate as a lifestyle choice, and globalisation has meant greater freedom for the privileged to seek education and better quality of life, this constitutes only one kind of migration: Voluntary migration. The vast proportion of migration in the last century and the current one has been on account of the second kind: forced migration, migration cause due to distress and disadvantaged circumstances⁵.

In the first 15 years since the turn of the Millennium, there has been a 41% increase in international migration, with more than 244 million migrants recorded across the globe. The number of international migrants has grown faster than the world's population, increasing the share of migrants in the World's population to 3.3% from 2.8% in the year 2000. Only a small proportion of this has been voluntary. Nearly 20 million of these have been forced migrants and refugees, driven from their homes by war, natural calamities and persecution (United Nations, 2016). Most of the rest have been an attempt to escape poverty and failing traditional livelihoods, especially agrarian livelihoods. Recent rises in ethnic and religious strife globally – the civil war in Syria and the rise of the religious extremism, in particular – have exacerbated distress migration manifold.

In India, of the 1.21 billion people recorded in the 2011 census, approximately one-third are internal migrants – migrants who have moved from one part of the country to the other. That means three in every ten people, or approximately 400 million people are migrants. Out of these,

more than a quarter – a 100 MILLION people – are considered to be living in extremely precarious conditions (UNESCO, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Of this vast population of migrants, nearly a third belong to the 15-29 age group, with more than 15 million of them being child migrants. Women constitute the largest single group of internal migrants, with more than 70% of all Indian women reporting that they have migrated after marriage (UNESCO/ UNICEF, 2012b).

Overall, a disproportionately large proportion of internal migrants also belong to socially disadvantaged communities, who are often also economically the weakest-off. Paradoxically, while these individuals migrate to escape these circumstances, the fact of migration itself disadvantages them further. Migration carries an illusion of being a viable alternative, a way to recast the die of life, as it were: Most of them start off poor, uneducated and discriminated against in their home contexts, and see the act of migrating elsewhere as a positive route to make a fresh start, and escape their circumstances. But by settling in unfamiliar areas far away from home, migrants end up facing new contextual barriers (urban settings, unfamiliar social customs); linguistic barriers, and as we noted among the Nepali listeners of *Desh Pardesh* – often a lack of the simple social structures most of us depend on to care and support for us within a community. A poor understanding of one's rights, both in the sense of basic human rights, as well as entitlements offered by social welfare programmes only stacks the decks further against migrants. Add the basic animosity of social groups to the 'outsider/other', a derivative of the inherent xenophobia of many human social groupings, and you have the beginnings of a perfect storm of disadvantaging circumstances that makes migrants among the most marginalised communities globally.

Of this vast population of migrants, nearly a third belong to the 15-29 age group, with more than 15 million of them being child migrants. Women constitute the largest single group of internal migrants, with more than 70% of all Indian women reporting that they have migrated after marriage .

In communication and development discourse, marginalisation is now widely understood as a consequence of 'poverty of voice', a form of poverty that goes beyond the economic, and underpins it: Voice, the ability to express, and to have the means of presenting one's perspective to others, governs one's position within a society (Tacchi, 2006). Without voice, and the agency it provides, economic poverty and social marginalisation themselves, it can be argued, are impossible to address except symptomatically. Within every society, those who have the least voice, inevitably, are the most marginalised. As an extension, migrants, by virtue of their unique circumstances, face a double-whammy of voice poverty, becoming even more marginalised than the existing marginalised in that society. As a consequence, they become a hidden part of their new communities, eternal hangers on at the outermost fringes, unable to participate in local discourse or influence it. In one of the sublime ironies of the human condition, migrants are doomed forever to be mute spectators even as they contribute to the economic welfare and

prosperity of the other sections of their new communities.

In discussions around voice poverty, liberal/democratic processes and representative democracy in particular – are often posited as remedies to voice poverty. But this often obfuscates the actual issue, which is one of agency. Representation, while checking some boxes related to engagement and participation in a limited way, does not guarantee control over the means of expression. Communication and media scholar Nick Couldry, in his seminal work *Why Voice Matters* (2008) examines poverty of voice, and concludes that not only it is important to have ways to physically speak out, but it is important to have enabling frameworks, media and systems that support voice that matters ('second order value of voice'). "If, through an unequal distribution of narrative resources, the materials from which some people must build their account of themselves are not theirs to adapt or control, then this represents a deep denial of voice, a deep form of repression," he notes (p. 9). It is readily evident that migrants' new contexts provide them no platforms where they can ask for support, seek information, or demand their rights. Migrants constitute too small a proportion (and too economically weak a section) of their new communities to lobby successfully for their issues to be presented by the mainstream media prevalent in their area. Media ownership is also extensively skewed towards powerful political and economic entities and individuals, preventing disadvantaged communities from owning them and governing them.

Is there an alternative platform that migrant communities can access; a safe platform which privileges the marginalised over the unmarginalised, where equality and plurality are guiding principles, and where migrants could conceivably have their say? Luckily, the answer is yes. It is called community radio.

Community radio and migration: The argument

One of the commonly used phrases to describe community radio is radio 'for the people, by the people and of the people'. In its co-option of the democratic principle, this definition of community radio succinctly captures its ethos of ownership by the communities who are also the radio station's beneficiaries, participants and listeners. From its origins in Bolivia's Miners-run radio station more than 70 years ago (O'Connor, 2004), the essence of community radio is the fact that its agenda and priorities are set by the community members within whose geography the radio station operates. In its ideal form, community radio makes us all active producers and participants in the creation and consumption of its content, in languages we use and are familiar with – rather than being passive consumers of content developed elsewhere, without our inputs and acquiescence. By definition, community

radio is expected to reverse the hierarchies of control over information, by providing voice to those who have none (Fraser & Estrada, 2001).

It is a logical extension of this principle that community radios, by their very definition and purpose, are best placed to be inclusive of a plurality of voices, perspectives and ideas. By extension, as a platform envisioned almost exclusively to foster community voice and conversation – and curated by community members – community radio is also arguably the medium best placed to foster discussions by and for migrants.

It is in this sense that community radio assumes special significance for hyper-marginalised populations like migrant communities, which are likely to be among the *most* voice poor in a given area. Indeed, one would argue that community radio is the solution to the challenges of social inclusion of migrants, and to giving them due voice.

But seeking this ideal is not without its challenges. Part of the problem lies in the way community radio is imagined in many countries in South Asia, notably Bangladesh and India, which both have formal licensing procedures for community radio. This has meant a certain distancing of community radio from the ideals we have just outlined. Equity and affirmative action on behalf of the marginalised may be the guiding principles of community-owned-and-run media; but it is a reality that community radio stations are not always set up by institutions or organisations that are wedded to this ethos. More importantly, the structures of licensing and establishment of community radio in countries with formalised licensing procedures, it could be argued, often actively obstruct the direct ownership of such processes by communities, because licenses are only given to organisations that have specific types of legal constitutions and registrations. Creating a voice for the marginalised, migrant communities included, is then limited to an initiative by the community radio station, an extension of social development work conducted by the parent body which runs the station on behalf of the community – and totally subject to the organisation's own priorities.

Additionally, like any other social institution, community radio stations are subject to the capriciousness of majoritarianism and the politics of human behaviour and power relations. Those with power and numbers, inevitably, will try to make the community radio station a platform that embraces their agenda and their priorities, thereby furthering the inequities in the community rather than ameliorating them. This is complicated by the fact that this pernicious influence is likely to be more pronouncedly visible with reference to the marginalised among the indigenous population within the ambit of the community radio station, who are acknowledged, even in a cursory way, as existing within that community. Migrants, who are more invisible in terms of

the community discourse to begin with, are less clearly identifiable as voices suppressed by this capture of the community radio station's agenda.

So what is to be done? Beyond the obvious need for reforms in the way community radio is licensed, managed and implemented in countries – as a development resource, rather than as a community-owned platform for self empowerment and freedom of expression – is the re-building of public understanding of its purpose. Equity, affirmative action and inclusion must become the core purpose of community radio, around which all its other activities and processes are oriented. Social inclusion should underpin every action and every decision made by the community radio station, instead of being an on-again/off-again methodology that is subject to the whims and fancies of the current crop of volunteers within the station, or the pressures exerted by sections of the society the stations is situated in. Above all, the community radio station should become the place where those without a voice go to talk, engage, introspect, and demand their entitlements. It should develop an internal policy that places the interests of the marginalised and migrant populations uppermost; and that emphasises equity and social justice the most. By doing so, the community radio station will slowly create a settled space within the community for those once seen as alien to it – and pave the way to understanding and mutual comprehension, instead of suspicion and hostility (Ramakrishnan & Arora, 2015).

And fortunately, there are enough international and national examples to suggest that this is perfectly possible.

Radio Corax, Halle, Germany: Content by, of and for migrants

Radio Corax, located in Halle in the state of Saxony-Anhalt was formally set up in 2000, and traces its roots to the anti-fascist and workers' rights movements in the country in the 1980s. In this sense, the station, and the people working in it, see themselves as social activists first, and as a radio station second – firmly placing the purpose of the station within a rights and free-speech context over all else⁶.

Broadcasting is a state subject in Germany, meaning each of the states is free to devise its own laws on the matter⁷ – and it is worthwhile to note that Saxony-Anhalt is widely perceived by the rest of the country as the one with the most liberal media laws. This is a fairly relevant factor in making Radio Corax one of the most influential German community radio stations, and renowned for many of its path breaking activities⁸.

Strongly volunteer driven, the station has about five part-time employees, but more than 250 volunteers, many of whom are local university

students –the station has about 300 registered members. Both employees and members contribute an annual fee to be part of the station, and for the privilege of producing programming for the station (Pavarala, 2014). The station itself is involved in a variety of cultural activities, including the annual Radio Revolten Cultural Festival, which showcases and celebrates experimental audio and audio installation work from around the globe; and a variety of partnerships with universities and philanthropic foundations. The station itself is a publicly accessible space, often resembling a youth club more than a radio station. “More custodians of a public space than a radio station,” smiles Michael Nicolai, one of Radio Corax’s earliest members and current Director of Programming and Development, referring to how it sees its ‘ownership’ of the radio waves it uses.

The station broadcasts 24 hours a day, about half of which is live programming. Programming focuses on local culture, music, student activities and political activism: Corax has never shied away from its student activism and anti-fascist history, and prides itself on its pirate and protest radio roots. But more importantly for our purpose, Corax has established important precedents by broadcasting content in about 12 languages, including those spoken by immigrant communities such as the Vietnamese and Kurdish. In 2004, Corax engaged on two sublocal radio projects in Halle-Neustadt, both focusing on migrant communities. The first involved Russian migrants in the area – Halle-Neustadt lie in what was once Communist East Germany, and has significant Russian population – eventually working with more than 100 Russian-speaking residents who discussed aspects of the integration, co-operation and co-existence of Russian culture in Halle. The second centered on Corax’s partnership with a local Kurdish club, which resulted in a Kurdish broadcast over the station that lasted till 2005.

Both were intrinsic to the eventual development of Common Voices Radio⁹, Radio Corax’s most ambitious programme, and created in collaboration with the Refugee Radio Network, a European online radio and TV station focused on refugee and migrant information. Common Voices Radio is a weekly programme designed, produced and broadcast over Radio Corax by refugees and migrant communities living in the Halle area – a specific effort by the station to develop a space for the migrant sub-communities on the airwaves. It is broadcast in multiple languages, with no translation or interpretation, and questions-answers and concerns relevant to migrant communities: How to locate a language course, for instance; or how to access refugee services or identity papers. The programme’s vision is to build bridges and an empathetic understanding between all the communities living in Radio Corax’s listenership area – a multicultural experiment in plurality and diversity. It is no surprise, therefore, that Radio Corax has become one of the largest sociocultural projects in Saxony-Anhalt, as well

as the largest non-commercial medium in the country.

Radio MAP (Migrant Assistance Programme), Thailand: Community Radio by migrants

With over 2.5 million migrants, Thailand is an important destination for migrants in South East Asia (Ladek, 2016). Many of these migrants are from Myanmar. Confiscation of land, civil war, human rights abuses and a lack of jobs has forced scores of people to flee across the border. Though registered migrants are eligible to receive social welfare and subsidised medical care, language barriers and limited access to information mean the migrant communities often live in poor conditions and are often treated poorly. Most live in isolation, unable to access basic support in an unfamiliar land.

Typically, migrants take up what are known locally as 3D jobs: Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding – jobs in the construction industry, agriculture, fishing, domestic work and garment factories. These are industries where fewer questions are asked, which are happy to have access to cheap labour. Migrants, in particular, due to their circumstances, are exploited mercilessly – the story of migrant communities the world over.

It was to address the issues faced by migrants – and especially women migrants, an even more exploited sub-group, who are often forced into Thailand’s infamous commercial sex industry, or trafficked – that a local organisation known as the Migrant Assistance Programme decided to explore the possibilities of setting up local radio stations which would be run by and produce content for migrants. They eventually ended up establishing two: One in the Chiang Mai and one in the town of Mae Sot, on Thai-Myanmar border. Chiang Mai is a well-known industrial zone, as well as a tourist attraction. Mae Sot houses a garment, textile and manufacturing industry. The stations are run by migrants who have been trained by Migrant Assistance Programme in technical and production skills (Russeau, 2013).

One of the key challenges is that the migrants belong to multiple ethnicities – Kayin, Kayah, Shan, Mon, Rawang, Bama and Tavoyan, to name a few – and speak a variety of languages. But the advantage of having volunteers that belong to all these ethnicities is that the stations can generate programming in multiple languages as well. Accordingly, the stations broadcast in Shan, Burmese, Thai and Northern Thai, allowing each ethnic group to listen to information and share their stories in the language they are most comfortable in. Consequently, the stations have transitioned from being an intervention designed to address migrant communities, to become resources that are owned and managed by the migrants themselves – and which are coveted places for migrants to volunteer their services as they

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seek to help others with the information they themselves have received. The stations now offer migrant assistance information, and a place for migrants to express themselves culturally.

Additionally, the Migrant Assistance Programme stations have also transcended the physical limitations of the broadcast itself, by assisting in the creation of more than 19 spaces for migrant women to gather, share information, and invite others to speak to them. The women have also managed to organise themselves into self help groups, and mutual support groups.

Gurgaon Ki Awaaz and Radio Active: The Indian experience

When this author first met the team at the soon-to-be Gurgaon Ki Awaaz (GKA), one of India's first urban community radio stations, there was a lot of discussion on who the station's community would be. After all, Gurgaon was a corporate hub, a playground of the wealthy and well-to-do and saturated by media. There were already six commercial radio stations that could be heard in the area. Who would the station address? What was its listener 'community'?

The Gurgaon Ki Awaaz team, after much consideration, took a principled call on its audience, that has given it a special identity ever since. It chose to speak to the culturally alienated locals, overwhelmed by the rapid urbanisation of what was once their ancestral land – and to the economically weak migrant population that swept in to be the domestic support and ancillary support staff for the well-to-do crowd. This choice turned it into an alternate station, a station that provided a different kind of information: information of assistance to those who found it difficult to access it, and cultural vignettes of a kind that is valued by local communities, but which are not reflected on other media outlets available in the area.

In a recent interview to an online portal, Vandana Thapliyal, a Gurgaon Ki Awaaz team member reflects on how her own experience as a migrant informs the content she generates on the station. Having moved to Gurgaon at the age of nine from Pauri in Garhwal, Uttarakhand, Vandana recalls how much she hated Gurgaon when she first moved cities as a child, for reasons that had little to do with infrastructure – back home, she was allowed to peacefully co-exist with the boys in her neighbourhood and school. In Gurgaon, the sudden cultural conservatism came as a shock – she found herself in classrooms where speaking to one's male classmates was frowned upon, and she had to wear long kurtas as part of her uniform everyday. These experiences, she says, translate on-air when she speaks to other migrants in the city, who might feel the same sense of dejection she once did (Kumar,

2016).

Arti Jaiman, the director of the station says, “cities need to be planned in ways to receive migrant populations”. Community radio stations can also perform this important function of introducing the subject of migration to non-migrants, often a prickly topic because of the strong emotions it arouses in the local populace, which often feels it is being invaded by outsiders. Community radio stations do this by creating airtime spaces for migrants, and changing the narrative of the migrant as the faceless outsider – but also by creating a familiarity with other cultures, softening barriers.

At the other end of the country, a Bangalore based station called Radio Active 90.4 engages with migrants through a programme called *Kasa Shramika Parisara Rakshaka* (“Rag Pickers are also Environmentalists”). The multilingual show is hosted by a couple who work as waste-sorters and scrap dealers in the city: Rag pickers and waste collectors in many cosmopolitan cities in India are migrants from a variety of states. Like the migrants who MAP Radio in Thailand engage with, they do the jobs which no else wants to do – including refuse collection and sorting. It is a silent and unobtrusive task, invisible to the cities bustling inhabitants. The show is an eye-opener to the station’s listeners, for many of whom the show was their first introduction to the lives of the waste pickers. For some, including Debashish Roy, a software engineer working in the city, it was a strange reminder of home: After listening to a rag picker’s recollection of his home town, Siliguri, on the show, he was left mulling over the different trajectories that people’s lives take. Debashish is also from Siliguri.

Together, these examples of how community radio stations contribute to discussions on migration, and how they systematically contribute to the unpacking of the many myths that surround migrants and migration are a powerful testament to the importance and power of community-owned voice and platforms. It is up to policymakers engaging on issues of migrant rights, identity issues and delivery of rights-based entitlements to comprehend the potential of the medium, and engage creatively with it to take concrete steps towards the inclusion of migrants within the communities they choose to settle in.

The final word should go to Vandana from Gurgaon Ki Awaaz, “I began to see Gurgaon in a completely different light when I began working here in 2010. Thanks to the radio station, migrants can feel at home in a strange land, and can work for their own well-being”, she said.

- 1 The Worldspace Satellite Radio network was a Direct-to-Home (DTH) radio service which broadcast programmes to Asia and Africa between 1999 and 2009. The Digital Broadcast Initiative, under which the Nepali programme *Desh Pardesh* was produced, used a channel on this network to reach migrants across a diverse set of geographies in India and Nepal.
- 2 Radio drama: Fiction-based dramatic productions meant to be heard over radio, using a purely audio medium. Radio drama uses voices (dialogue), music and sound effects to tell stories.
- 3 Components of the *Desh Pardesh* show were being produced simultaneously in India and in Nepal, with communities in the respective geographies. Nepali migrants in Delhi and Mumbai participated in the portion of the programme produced in India
- 4 “Hindustani language”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindustani_language
- 5 “What is Forced Migration?”: <http://www.forcedmigration.org/about/whatisfm>
- 6 <http://commonvoices.radiocorax.de/about-us/>
- 7 “Broadcasting in Germany”, <http://germanlawarchive.iuscomp.org/?p=386#ToC7>
- 8 From an informal interview by the author with Michael Nicolai, Programmes Director of Radio Corax, Jan 2017
- 9 <http://commonvoices.radiocorax.de/about-us/>

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COMMUNITY RADIO



AN EMERGING TOOL FOR
SCIENCE COMMUNICATION



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Abstract

The three instances cited in this article point to the ability of ordinary citizens with the inclination to report on science being able to harness the facilities of Community Radio Stations so as to broadcast science programmes. Together, all the three experiments integrate the creative abilities of radio reporters in the communities to demystify and communicate science in a language (even colloquial language) that their listeners understand. This article provides a glimpse of three such interventions – a programme series on ‘Science for Women Health and Nutrition’ and mathematics on radio or Radio Maths and the science of climate change, a programme series that goes by the name Shubh Kal. While contributing to raising scientific temper, which is every citizen’s duty, as enshrined in the Constitution of India, these initiatives have laid the foundation of a people’s science movement in the country.

Keywords

Community radio, Science Journalism, Shubh Kal, Climate Change, Radio Maths.

The Community Radio Movement in India is on a nimble-footed journey for science journalism with a network of science journalists that is today many times the combined numerical strength of science journalists in all other public and commercial media put together.

The form of science journalism that community radio stations are practicing is a school of people's science, standing on its own feet and able to demonstrate what many traditional forms of science media education have never tried before. The science journalism practiced by community radio practitioners is through a media that engages and shares with the community an ever expanding and widening array of scientific topics, all fitting into the broader realms of entertainment, and yet remaining educational in their own (some would even say, pedestrian) way. Listeners, numbering many thousands, have become participants in a shared journey of curiosity and learning.

The combined vision, never defined though, is to produce quality pieces of entertainment that take out the intimidating from science rendering, making science programmes more friendly and accessible. The result is a broad collection of orally communicated science that is a mixture of new science, hard science, pop science, historical science, and even very silly science (a programme alluding to the science behind 'namaste' the pan-Indian greeting, for instance). Subjects treated include the science of HIV and AIDS, nutrition, agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, climate change etc. There is even a series of radio programmes on mathematics.

Needless to mention, all this has come with a degree of support – both, pecuniary as well as the intervention of civil society actors to enable creativity in communication for science.

This article provides a glimpse of three such interventions – a programme series on 'Science for Women Health and Nutrition' and mathematics on radio or Radio Maths¹ and the science of climate change, a programme series that goes by the name *Shubh Kal*.

The former two have been developed by a number of community radio stations across the country under the aegis of the Government of India's Department of Science and Technology (DST). The programmes have been run by a number of community radio stations across the country and the results have been most surprising. Besides exploring the frontiers of science, the programme has also established a template for a partnership between community radio stations and government agencies like DST (dst.gov.in).

In the meanwhile, *Shubh Kal* has been incubated by New Delhi based social enterprise, Development Alternatives, in a partnership with the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN). Development Alternatives' community radio station, Radio Bundelkhand, along with four other community radio stations in the Bundelkhand region were roped in for an experiment on communicating the science of climate change: community radio stations Chanderi Ki Awaaz, Radio Dhadkan and Lalit Lokvani. Each of the four community radio Stations broadcasts to about 130 villages, in total reaching up to 400,000 people (Singh, 2017; Singh & Shaikh, 2016).

The reporters alluded to have not been trained in journalism schools. Much to the contrary, they have been trained under the harsh sun, sweating and learning the intricacies of the subject. Moreover, most of these journalists are volunteers and very few of these radio reporters are paid journalists – often, the only money the volunteers get is to travel from their homes. In the case of Radio Bunkelkhand, for instance, a volunteer gets no more than Rs. 50 to travel to the community radio station. Tea served at the station is a perk.

To quote from an evaluation of the Science for Women's Health and Nutrition, "these (community) members (volunteering for the community radio station) are very poor and have to struggle to eke out the time required for a rigorous programme development. Almost all the members are active in the community as well as in the radio. Several community members have been added to the programme development and have visited the studio regularly to participate/organise community based programmes"².

While this article presses on the ability of ordinary people to decipher the formula of science communication, the examples of the communication programmes being alluded to here point to the certainty that with a degree of engagement and even at the expense of making it sound pedestrian, community radio has helped bring science and scientific reasoning in everyday life discourse among people who tune into these radio programmes.

Shubh Kal : Airing information to make their tomorrow more than just auspicious

Piloted in 2008 to bridge the communication gap between communities on the one hand, and scientists, policy and decision makers and government officials on the other, *Shubh Kal* has explored community radio as a medium for disseminating messages on climate change and for sharing the experiences farming communities in the Bundelkhand region have to offer with respect to adapting to climate change. In the process, the initiative supported by Climate and Development Knowledge Network has also strengthened civil

society processes by way of enabling voices on climate change impacts and adaptation.

Interestingly, the Bundelkhand region, a fragile ecosystem across the states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh has been witness to deep impacts of climate changes. The region's agriculture-dependant economy has been precariously pivoted on providing its farming communities access to information from scientists and researchers from India's vast agriculture research system. This is premised on the belief that simple adaptation actions like changing planting dates and crop varieties can help reduce the impacts of climate change.

Radio was the chosen vehicle for this effort to tune farmers into adapting to climate change – the region's statistics of penury ridden and vastly unlettered people meant that for many households could afford just the radio. Fortunately, the radio has also established itself as a credible source of information for the people and so, was suitably positioned to be leveraged. So too, the four Community Radio Stations in the region.

Development Alternatives³ made use of its Shubh Kal programme to build the capacities of the local community radio stations to broadcast about climate change, the issues that concerned it from the viewpoints of scientists and provided an exposition of how farmers of the region saw the very same issues. Building this capacity of the radio stations and their voluntary radio journalists also helped gain insights into how farmers were adapting to the change and provide a fresh perspective to scientists on interpreting the steps that the farmers had resorted to in the backdrop of their pedagogic understandings.

A prism view emerged from the initiative – community radio journalists learnt the tact of providing a platform for farming communities to be able to share their experiences; scientists were able to access a mine of hitherto untouched information and glean what they needed for bringing value to climate change disciplines of their choice; decision-makers and policy-makers got an insight into how government schemes needed to be tweaked or new schemes needed to be introduced. All the same, while training radio journalists on the science of climate change, Shubh Kal also produced research examining channels capable of communicating information on climate change to farmers.

All in all, the initiative to train young radio journalists on the science of climate change with help from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network proved to be a win-win as farmers learnt bare essentials like

advancing or delaying sowing seeds.

Training and workshops

Development Alternatives organised two capacity building workshops in 2012, aimed at training 39 radio reporters and village reporters from four community radio stations. To equip them with the knowledge to report on climate change reporting, the training covered the diverse set of issues a journalist needs to be abreast with – the concept of climate change, anthropogenic factors contributing to climate change and its impact on farming communities.

Aimed at enhancing the journalistic skills of the radio journalists participating in the programme, the programme targeted at training the 39 radio journalists to make interesting and effective climate change stories. To do this, the initial workshops were to create a capacity among the participating radio reporters to become climate change science reporters for their respective community radio stations. Development Alternatives' Shubh Kal project worked towards strengthening the capacity of community radio reporters, village level volunteer reporters and print journalists (from local newspapers) to understand the impacts of the changing climate on agriculture and other sources of livelihood in the semi-arid region of Bundelkhand in Central India.

Building such capacities also meant that they were equipped to ask the right questions to local scientific experts and policy makers (local government department officials) regarding climate change information which can then be communicated to the community. The training was meant to capture local concerns, knowledge and practices from the community and, importantly, communicate these back to local scientific experts and policy makers in order to help feed into policy making.

Realising that it was necessary to clear the fundamentals of the radio journalists undertaking the workshop on vulnerabilities of climate change, potential adaptation options and the objectives of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network-Shubh Kal project, Development Alternatives conducted a preworkshop reporter's survey to gauge the understanding of climate change issues among the participants.

This threw up invaluable information. For instance, the survey highlighted that participants understanding on the difference between climate and weather was particularly low and that they strongly connected climate change with deforestation and decreasing forest cover.

Following the theoretical understanding on climate change concerns and bringing the participants on the same page vis-à-vis the need for communicating issues connected with climate change, its mitigation and adaptation to it and how increasingly pronounced the impacts of climate change were for the most vulnerable small and marginal farmers of the region, the training took up the role of community radio stations in communicating climate change information to the three stakeholders (farmers, local scientists and local government department officials). For instance, the workshop facilitators stressed that climate change stories can also have additional angles such as effects on health, migration, livelihoods, livestock etc.

The radio journalists realised how they, as community radio reporters can reduce the gap between scientific researchers and communities by disseminating the information and creating awareness, while aiding government departments by providing simplified information to communities. In return, the reporters also understood their role in informing policymakers about local needs and issues.

The programme on producing climate change radio journalists as part of Development Alternatives Shubh Kal programme provided both theoretical and practical experience to the attending radio journalists, ‘teaching’ them the fundamentals of climate change journalism as well as the nuts and bolts of bringing up the issue of climate change during direct interactions with villagers, local experts and officials of the government (to collect information). Alongside, attention was paid to enhancing their skills, engaging in mock interviews, producing short radio stories and plays. The trainers from Development Alternatives along with experts sourced from government bodies emphasised on the importance of producing balanced, focused and interesting climate stories relevant for their audience.

Development Alternatives, together with other stakeholders hand-held the climate change science reporters, simultaneously emphasising that climate change science journalism is way beyond reporting on climate change disasters – as climate change science journalists they would play an important role to warn listeners of the adverse effects of approaching disasters. Reporters were thus trained to identify the emerging trends that may impact the communities they cover. They came to appreciate that in order to effectively recognise impending environmental concerns, they as the climate change science reporters played an important role in preparing communities prior to the onset of a climate crisis.

Facilitators involved in the hand-holding since the workshop and throughout the life of the Shubh Kal project cited the story behind the

The radio journalists realised how they, as Community Radio reporters can reduce the gap between scientific researchers and communities by disseminating the information and creating awareness, while aiding government departments by providing simplified information to communities.

Bundelkhand Package introduced by the government as a drought mitigation measure in the region and how it did not take off because people did not have any information on it and so, were unaware of the available benefits the package afforded. The emphasis here was that the coverage of such stories by community radios could help reverse this trend. Government schemes announced over the public broadcaster were often not in the local dialect and so, few would tune into these, unless it was for the urge of listening to Bollywood songs.

Such instances motivated the climate change science radio reporters and also helped them realise their enviable position by virtue of working directly with communities and being able to access issues at the grassroots. They also understood how they were pivoted to show policy makers and the wider community of climate change scientists and decision makers the real effects of climate change at the ground level and what innovations people and communities bring to the processes of adapting to changing climate.

An understanding of these concepts helped the reporters appreciate the adaptation options and sources of information. Needless to say, the information and knowledge shared at the workshop was couched in creating the confidence that the journalists would be able to make their own stories – using a creative licence that went together with advice on how to make their stories interesting besides radio programmes on themes related to climate change. They were also hinted with questions to ask the farmer or experts

Peer learning

The workshops on climate change as part of Development Alternatives Shubh Kal programme also provided a platform for knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences between community radio reporters from different radio stations. Later, a two-day workshop to appreciate and share feedback analysed the first set of programmes helped the journalists received mentoring from the Shubh Kal team.

After this initial radio content on climate change science, each of the radio stations made 12 radio shows on a host of climate change issues, spread across a range of formats – interviews, features, magazine, documentaries, dramas or talk shows that they broadcast to more than 400 villages from January 2013. All programmes subscribed to an ‘infotainment’ style using jingles and folk songs. Additionally, the radio shows were narrowcast to small groups of participants in 30 villages to obtain feedback and discuss the issues raised.

Besides these, the community radio journalists also exposed to programmes on climate change adaptation (particularly emphasising on mitigating its impacts on agriculture) produced by other radio stations in the country through the *Ek Duniya Anek Awaaz* content sharing platform. Surely, few local journalists from the mainstream media too were part of the process and they were also participants and facilitators during both workshops.

Science for Women Health and Nutrition

Science for Women's Health and Nutrition (SFWHN) is a flagship project of the National Council of Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, Government of India⁴. The project aims to increase the awareness and knowledge about health issues of women through community radio. Most of the women targeted to be reached come from the marginalised sections of the society in poorly literate as well as literacy challenged sections, both in the urban and rural sectors across the country.

The uniqueness and the success of the project are the broadcast of radio programmes to laymen in their own native languages, dialects and mother tongue to influence behaviour change in their daily lives. The project was started in 2007 and is now reached in its fifth phase in which 14 community radios across 14 states of India are implementing the programme.⁵

Through participatory programmes, specially designed with specific issues in focus and using the community in participatory forms of radio-programming, the project studies how best women can be encouraged to the benefits of science and scientific knowledge in their daily life, using the community radio.

Vigyan Prasar, the communication wing of NCSTC, through its Gender and Technology Communication division (GTCD), initiated the Science for Women's Health and Nutrition with the objective of promoting research and create awareness for communication of technologies to improve quality of lives and opportunities for gainful empowerment of women living in urban and rural parts of the country, besides farmers, artisans and tribal and people finding employment with the unorganised sector (Dutta & Mishra, 2014).

The programme is based on the belief that science, tightly coupled and an understanding of the natural world, can be best communicated by relating it to everyday life issues – how not to overcook vegetables to preserve nutrition; about washing hands before eating etc.

This, however is beset with challenges, stemming mainly from a lack of knowledge of the simple science behind what happens in our day-to-day life. Science, in science communication has to be appropriate to the users, the absence of information providers and of local communication content, a difficulty in selection of messages (relevant and correct information). Besides, an absence of structured comprehensive information and accessibility has hampered a need based identification of technologies.

All of these challenges can be met by addressing the lack of skills for communication. This will also help address the lack of special messages for deprived, underprivileged and selective population and a lack of inter-sectoral integration in knowledge sharing. To achieve this, Vigyan Prasar set out its objective as promoting technology awareness among stakeholders and development of activities or programmes on gender and technology communication. The Science for Women Health and Nutrition specially targets the most underprivileged group of women for all programmes – among tribal communities, those living below the poverty line and those living in disaster zones etc.

It has undertaken appropriate blending of awareness and training programmes, extension and demonstration of user friendly modern science and technologies and traditional wisdom especially for rural areas with a view to increase the contribution of women to science, technology and development through effective science and technology communication and overall empowerment.

Vigyan Prasar⁶ has also detailed the steps in developing the programmes:

- Identification of partners,
- Formation of advisory committee involving local experts,
- Assessment, evaluation and analysis to identify areas, topics, targets for intervention,
- Conceptualisation of programme,
- Brainstorming workshops, exploratory meetings and discussions,
- Training of women for creative content creation,
- Finalisation of programme,
- Development of resource material,
- Pre-testing the materials,
- Dissemination of the scientific information and knowledge,
- Training and workshops of resource persons.

This is preceded by a need assessment to identify technology gaps

Vigyan Prasar set out its objective as promoting technology awareness among stakeholders and development of activities or programmes on gender and technology communication.

and suitable subjects, topics, messages etc. Vigyan Prasar has also laid out procedures for the production of resource material and other communication materials.

The process of capacity building that the Science for Women Health and Nutrition programmes undertake are different from the Shubh Kal-CDKN approach in that the participation of women begins with schooled women who have shown an inclination towards science. The project begins with a baseline survey, each woman surveying up to 100 households.

The idea behind the initial survey is to convey that reporting science over radio is possible if they learn the basics of radio broadcast journalism. This is what happens after the field survey – as the radio station awaits the sanction of government grants, the women get to learn the basics of radio programming, recording and editing. As a result, in a matter of months, the radio station has a good team of women who examine and interpret issues concerning health and nutrition focussed on the needs of women, and through them, their families.

As Manjula, a volunteer attached to Krishi Community Radio Station, Dharwar says, “I was one of the active members of the survey, I had gone from house to house to asking the needs of the community, put up stickers, etc. I remember many programmes, including food tips, songs, plastic pollution, atmospheric pollution etc.” As part of her association with the community radio station, Manjula learnt to make Soya Milk. “This is not only enriching food for my young children, and supplements the protein requirements, but also makes me do things at home itself to get a better quality of food,” she says. Manjula also did a programme of special foods on the occasion of Sankranti, an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar. “This was really exciting, that younger people in the community can learn the traditional knowledge also. So, we villagers are also experts about things that we do know, she says”.

While the programme has reached out to millions of women through the involvement of over 100 radio stations, this article provides a brief study of two Community Radio Stations, Krishi CRS in Karnataka’s Dharwar district and Community Radio Vishnu in Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh.

Krishi Community Radio Station 90.4 Mhz

Krishi community radio station is the first agriculture based station in the country and was launched on 17 May 2007⁷. Since then, it has been serving the needs of the farmers to address the transfer of technologies on agriculture

and to address the issues and problems of the agrarian society surrounding the reach of the community radio station. The radio station is operated by the University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwar, Karnataka, the programme involved women from the local community, most of them coming from nearby slum settlements. As part of its mission Krishi Community Radio is engaged in active involvement of farmers in production of programmes. It reaches nearly 35 surrounding villages and progressive farmers are actively involved in the station.

In keeping with its mission, the community radio station felt that focusing on issues relating to health, nutrition, environment, agriculture and rural community development would help and in this direction, initiated a programme on ‘Science for Women’s Health and Nutrition’ in 2011. This programme was supported by the Department of Science and Technology.

The programmes broadcast by the community radio station are colloquial in language treatment and style and span different formats like Interviews with the scientists, chats, *krishi chintana* (a discussion forum for farmers and scientist), folksongs (*Hanti Padagalu*) phone-ins, skits, dramas etc. More than 50 percent of content produced by community members as it is evidenced by the programme *krishi chintana* (farmers to farmers experience sharing).

Getting to participate in the Science for Women’s Health and Nutrition radio programme was an empowering experience to begin with – innately, this is also an offshoot of the enquiring mind that pursuing a science programme brings. To quote Kamala Banggirappa, a young woman who participated in the programme, “my chance to come to the campus itself made me very proud and empowered. Who will otherwise let a 10th pass into their department in a University? We were initially really scared of a multi-story building. But now we walk in and out of the studio on a regular basis. I encourage a number of my co-slum dwellers to come forward and shed their shyness”.

The Science for Women Health and Nutrition project was actively supported by faculty members of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwar, Karnataka and experts appointed for the review and the vetting of scripts. Indeed, some of the experts also provided support to scientifically enhance the quality of the scripts.

Community members and student members (drawn from the student community of the University) of the project team enjoyed close interaction with community members, which is a legacy from years of working of the

radio station. The studio was completely accessible and nearby community members felt that the campus did not create a barrier as they were welcome.

A 24-member Community Radio Station Management Board functions with eight women and 16 men. Community Members are part of the community radio station management team and enjoy policy and strategic level decision making responsibility. An Advisory Committee has been constituted for the project. The Board meets once in every 2-6 months. All documentation and decision making follows a prescribed procedure of sending an agenda for a meeting, convening the meeting, and open discussions are encouraged as per the minutes maintained.

Simultaneously, a 10-member Advisory Committee was constituted specifically for the First Phase of the Science for Women's Health and Nutrition Programmes in 2009 that supported the station. The broadcast timings were finalised in consultation with the community members, giving due accordance to the convenience and availability of community members.

The broadcast programmes (182 programmes in all) covered nine thematic areas relating to water and sanitation, weather and climate, biodiversity, soil health, women's health and occupational hazards, animal and human health, disaster management, astronomy and environment. Beyond broadcasting, there has also been value addition, especially with the university's extension department officers directly interacting with farmers and to address issues of prosperity amidst drought conditions and coping with the natural stresses that the community faces. The radio programmes spurred such activities like nature walks, seed collection competition, cleaning of local ponds, waste management etc.

According to Karuna, a participant in the project, "Since becoming part of the radio programme on environment and the activities that were organised in our village, I have stopped using plastics, and when it does come in packaged items like milk packets, I make sure it is segregated and then disposed, but not thrown in the fields."

Community Radio Vishnu – Maa Voori Amma

The radio station is run from the premises of an engineering college. Yet, one of the main aims of the programme was to establish close linkage with the local community and to engage with them for ensuring their participation. The community radio station was planned to be used as an empowering tool to educate the community members about health, nutrition, general awareness about social customs on the one hand and a healthy and scientific

approach to cooking, clean environment and health and well-being on the other hand⁸.

There was also a special objective of creating a greater awareness on the importance of immunisation, prevention strategies and treatment of common ailments, and dissemination of important health information to rural women in the surrounding areas. A 10-member community radio station management board with four women and six men (two from the community) oversaw the content for broadcast. All of them had major policy and strategic level decision making responsibility. An advisory committee was also constituted specifically for the Maa Voori Amma Programme.

Students and community members acted as anchors (voluntarily) for the entire programming of the DST Grant programmes and were not paid for this. Community members and students compered programmes voluntarily as well. On the other hand, school and college students and the teachers from the local schools were engaged to write the scripts. For expertise, they got help from local doctors besides other community members (including teachers from the engineering college).

Student scriptwriters from the college were also available on a per-episode basis. Most of these students engaged in script writing out of their own interest and their scripts were vetted by experts prior to recording. A local gynaecologist and doctors, including an eye specialist also served as advisory team members. Interestingly, the series involved visually impaired people as well. Besides, the local Krishi Vigyan Kendra contributes a 30-minute programme daily, engaging seven scientists from different areas of specialisation (rice, horticulture, fisheries etc.).

The experts also worked closely, not only vetting the scripts but also actively participating in programing. At times, the experts also led some of the programmes and community members continued to dialogue with the experts after the radio programmes. Over a period of six months (2011), 182 episodes were broadcast – 15 episodes on general health, 20 episodes each on the importance of vitamins and minerals; soils, sediments and water and the impacts of these on health; healthy cooking methods; the causes of anemia and precautions to be taken; first aid and primary care; organic farming and health; and women as role models.

The programme also produced 30 episodes each on the themes of atmosphere and health, balanced diet, nutritive value of various foods, gastritis, diabetes and ageing problems, population, food security and health, food toxicology, gynaecology and health for women and women

empowerment. Each programme had a jingle or a song to keep the interest of the listeners and engage them. Besides these, the radio broadcasts were complemented by awareness workshops and street plays in the three slum clusters and rural communities. Due to the high engagement of the community on an active basis, most of the participants from the community earned a radio as a part of their engagement role.

Formats included interviews, talent show, talks, discussions with experts, quiz contests, discussion forums and skits, adapted ballads and folk songs to communicate health topics.

Residents of the colonies of Kovvada and Durgapuram in the precincts of the community radio station spoke of how they worked to make their environment cleaner. Women attributed this to the awareness created by the radio programmes, a remarkable achievement considering that most of the women who mentioned this to the evaluation team were elderly and unlettered and were not directly involved in the programme. Speaking to the evaluation team, they said that while they were shy of talking about their very personal health issues, and radio programme had helped them overcome their shyness.

Community radio station Vishnu engages closely with local NGOs working on leprosy, visual impairment, etc. These helped to also produce programmes closely with the support of these NGOs as well.

Radio Maths

The Maths on Radio series has been a unique experiment to provide knowledge of numbers and impart basic numerical abilities to listeners. The project has also been funded by DST and intends to promote the use of mathematics in the day-to-day lives of people and address their fear of mathematics, among its other objectives. With support from National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), DST, Government of India, Radio JU (Radio Jadavpur University) conceptualised, produced and broadcast a radio series of 90 episodes on mathematics, (hereinafter Maths on Radio).

Launched in 2008, the station is run by the Jadavpur University under its Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP). Jadavpur is an urban settlement which is mostly inhabited by the student community and local people. Radio JU chose students studying in the 6th to 9th classes as its target audience for the series. Keeping the target audience in mind, majority of the Maths on Radio programmes were designed to address their needs.

Over a period of six months (2011), 182 episodes were broadcast – 15 episodes on general health, 20 episodes each on the importance of vitamins and minerals; soils, sediments and water and the impacts of these on health.

The regular broadcast of the Maths on Radio series in 2013 consisted of 90 episodes under the series title '*Sunno Theke Suru*' which translates as 'Zero to Zero' aimed at addressing the fear of maths among school going children, provide tips and introduce tricks and teach mathematics in an entertaining way. The Maths on Radio programme of Radio JU was primarily produced and broadcast in the local language, Bangla while a few episodes were also produced in Hindi to cater to the needs of urban cosmopolitan population.

Since the radio series was aimed at catering to the needs of school going children, a majority of the topics were curriculum-based. *Sunno Theke Suru* included topics like the number system, square-root, the metric system, percentage, quadrilateral, mensuration, geometry, trigonometry, history of mathematics and biography of eminent mathematicians. Radio JU also aired programme on the lives of eminent mathematicians like Ramanujan, Aryabhata and Newton and their work.

An end-line survey conducted among the school children by New Delhi based OneWorld Foundation India suggested that most respondents could identify Maths on Radio programme from a playlist of programmes, from the signature tune and its content. Around 50 per cent of the respondent said *Sunno Theke Suru* is their favourite programme broadcast on Radio JU.

The Maths on Radio programme was successful in addressing the fear of mathematics among many listeners, popularising mathematics in day-to-day life. Besides addressing this fear, *Sunno Theke Suru's* also helped many children change their approach to solving mathematical problems.

According to the One World report (2013), 65 per cent of the respondents felt that the Maths on Radio programme made mathematics easy for them while 59 per cent said that the programme was able to address the maths fear after listening the programme.

Radio JU team tried to package the radio programmes in a creative manner so that most of the listeners could relate the subject to their daily lives and are able to understand, 62 per cent said they were able to understand *Sunno Theke Suru* and 35 per cent were able to understand it up to an extent.

Dwelling on the reasons behind listening *Sunno Theke Suru*, OneWorld's report says that 29 per cent said that they listened to the programme because they liked mathematics; 23 per cent found the programme useful for learning mathematical tricks and tips; 17 per cent liked the programme while 12 per cent wanted to use mathematics in their daily life.

Similarly, 37 per cent found it useful for their curriculum based mathematics, 23 per cent for daily market related problems and 21 per cent helpful in solving riddles and puzzles.

The process

The production team of Maths on Radio included a mix of college students; volunteers, home-makers and core team of production professionals. However, understanding the needs for experts' intervention in producing mathematics programmes, Radio JU roped in a team of experienced professionals with background in creative programming and mathematics.

The production process began with conceptualising and finalising ideas and topics for the radio series. The findings of baseline survey helped in selecting topics for the radio series. However, most of the ideas came from the core team and team of volunteers. These ideas were shared with an advisory committee on a regular basis for inputs on programme design, following which, the production team chalked out the flow of episodes, structure and initiated research.

Research included background research for each episode, sourcing the internet, books and magazines besides websites like Wikipedia, www.vedicmathematics.org were referred to source authentic content. According to the core team, video sharing website YouTube helped in understanding and explaining the process of solving mathematics questions in an easy manner. YouTube tutorials were helpful in getting information on puzzles and riddles too. The research was followed by the scripting of radio programme which were finally vetted by experts on the Advisory Committee.

Programme format

The majority of Maths on Radio programmes of Radio JU were produced and packaged into a magazine format consisting different segments like drama, talks, vox-pops and interviews. These included a radio drama (role play), puzzle, mathematics facts, talks and interviews with school teachers.

Radio JU has produced a significant number of songs on Maths – every episode included a song, usually parodies of the Hindi / Bollywood and Bengali Songs. The idea behind using parody songs was to attract listeners to the mathematics programmes because the audiences could relate to these songs.

Another important and creative input in the programming was the use of characters in drama segment. Daily life characters like train hawkers and popular cartoon characters like ‘Shinchan’ were used to explain the process of solving maths questions and puzzles. To ensure and increase engagement with the audiences, questions related to the topic of the radio programme were asked during the show. Audiences could answer it over phone numbers of Radio JU. Prizes were given in almost every episode.

Conclusion

Science communication, when conjoined with everyday life and with local experts who can provide both, guidance and perspective, is possible with young people interested in science communications in rural India where the media is not led by the three ‘C’s – Cinema, Crime and Cricket.

The three series alluded in this article point to the important space science programmes have come to occupy in community radio. Following Radio Bundelkhand’s foray into communicating climate change in a people’s science language, many radio stations across the country have begun creating programmes on the subject.

In the past decade, over 100 community radio stations have partnered with DST to produce programmes on the ‘Science for Women’s Health and Nutrition’ and have produced over 1,000 women reporters involved in science communication. The DST programme has produced over 11,000 episodes and have reached over 800 villages. This goes together smaller strength of volunteers who have engaged with Radio Maths.

In all the three cases, the programmes had the support of partners willing to experiment with community radio. It goes to the credit of DST to have stayed the course of partnering with community radio stations, now for the eleventh year. Likewise, CDKN’s collaboration with Development Alternatives to produce programmes on climate change has demystified the subject.

At the end of the day, all these programmes have established that radio journalists, as creative communicators versed with their domain and with the knowledge of the formats they are comfortable to produce, can be depended on to take the mystery out of science.

Notes

- 1 'Radio Maths' is a series of programmes to popularise mathematics and dispel the fear of mathematics by making the lessons on mathematics interesting for listeners who form a diverse range of the population -- they might be children in the case of some Community Radio Stations or illiterate women in the case of other Community Radio Stations.
- 2 M&E Report of Krishi CRS, 90.4 MHZ, Dharwar, Karnataka
- 3 Development Alternatives is a NGO and the world's first social enterprise headquartered in New Delhi with field activities in the Bundelkhand region. Development Alternatives also holds the licence for North India's first NGO-operated Community Radio Station, Radio Bundelkhand. The Communication for Development team at Development Alternatives designed the Shubh Kal programme, that began with the a series of radio programmes on climate change, is now a larger programme on Climate Change Adaptation initiated by Development Alternatives' Communication for Development team.
- 4 <http://cemca.org.in/news/exploratory-meeting-community-radio-stations-programme-%E2%80%98science-women%E2%80%99s-health-and-nutrition-an#.WOXdpYGGPIW>
- 5 <http://cemca.org.in/news/exploratory-meeting-community-radio-stations-programme-%E2%80%98science-women%E2%80%99s-health-and-nutrition-an#.WOXdpYGGPIW>
- 6 http://www.vigyanprasar.gov.in/Gender_and_Technology_Communication_Division.htm
- 7 https://www.facebook.com/pg/krishicr/about/?entry_point=page_nav_about_item&ref=page_internal
- 8 M&E Report of Radio Vishnu, 90.4 MHZ, Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh

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INITIATIVE

COMMUNITY RADIO EMPOWERMENT AND RESOURCE CENTRE AT IIMC, NEW DELHI

On 29th March, 2017, 'Community Radio Empowerment and Resource Centre' was launched at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi. The Centre is a unique initiative by the IIMC, to integrate and develop the diverse professional, practical and research activities on community radio within a focussed and broader knowledge,



research and training platform. Shri Ajay Mittal, Chairman, IIMC Executive Committee and Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting launched the Centre and highlighted the need to build knowledge and capacity, develop archives and impart training amongst various stakeholders on diverse and emerging issues on community radio.

On this occasion, the 'Community Radio Empowerment and Resource Centre' also organised a two weeks

training program (29 March-11 April 2017) for the community radio practitioners and aspirants from all over the country. The training program, the first of its kind, covered in-depth wide-ranging topics such as content creation, technology, community mobilisation, policies and licensing, sustainability and finances, advertising and marketing, human resources, research methods, ethics and development communication. The training also had strong practical sessions and site visits to the community radio stations in the local/rural areas. Sh Aashish Joshi, Chief Executive & Editor-in-Chief, Lok Sabha TV, gave away certificates to the participants at the valedictory event.

According to Mr. K. G. Suresh, Director General, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, the 'Community Radio Empowerment and Resource Centre' will serve as the nodal point for assisting the existing and aspiring Community Radio Stations by providing, guidance, research, consultancy and capacity building services. It would also endeavor to create awareness about Community Radio in the remote and rural areas and among stakeholders including educational institutions, NGOs, Media

Educators etc.

Some of the core strategies of the Centre will be firstly to develop the Apna Radio as a world class Model Community Radio Station and secondly to partner with award winning Community Radio Stations. The Center will also build an archives on the rich and diverse materials produced and disseminated by community radio stations since the past several years. The ultimate objective of the Centre is to partner with developmental and infrastructure Ministries for transfer of knowledge regarding key welfare programmes and schemes through these Community Radio Stations with the help of participatory communication methodologies.

Acknowledging the widespread benefits of Community Radio Stations, the original policy intent was to set up 4000 community radio stations across India. Currently, only 206 Community Radio Stations exist in the country.

It may be added that in order to promote the Community Radio Stations, the I&B Ministry has increased the grant size for purchase of equipment for Community Radio Stations from 50% to 75% of the total estimated expenditure, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 7.50 lakhs. For North-Eastern states, grant shall be 90% of the total estimated expenditure, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 7.5 lakhs. To facilitate revenue generation for Community Radio stations, duration of broadcast of advertisements by Community Radio Stations has also

been increased from 5 minutes to 7 minutes per hour of broadcast.

After exhaustive consultations with its stakeholders, a strong need for an incubation centre emerged to scale up these Community Radio Stations. The Centre in association with IIMC's Department of Communication Research will also undertake an evaluation study of the present community radio stations in the country; so that they can be strengthened further to meet the future challenges in the light of lessons learnt and experiences acquired.

IIMC, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, has rendered yeoman service to development communications since its inception in 1965. The Institute has a very robust research department mainly undertaking studies on awareness generation and behavioral change communication programmes. IIMC is also home to a Community Radio Station, Apna Radio (transmitting on 96.9MHz frequency mode) that aims to give voice to voiceless person or community. Apna Radio has been in operation since September, 2005 and has been broadcasting for seven hours a day, broadcasting majorly in Hindi and few hours in English to its target audience that includes people in South Delhi. Given its strengths in mass communication and social change research and the existing knowledge capital and infrastructure, IIMC is strategically well placed to set up this Centre in its own Campus and nurture with its own expertise.

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