



Community Radio: Need of the hour...

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Community radio is a radio station owned, run and maintained by a community, is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programmes and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny, whether this be for something as common as renovation fences in the neighborhood, or a community-wide campaign on how to use clean water and keep it clean, or agitation for the election of new leaders. The emphasis is on the ownership of democratic and development efforts by the members of the community themselves and the use of the media, in this case radio, to achieve it. In every sense, this is participatory communication (not programmes made about them by somebody else!). It is above all a process, not a technology, not merely a means, because the people are part of that means, and so are the message and the audience. Community radio is most relevant to a group of people, who live and act, as a community, and this could be several families, several neighborhoods, or even several villages or communities, but the important thing is that they interact¹.

Community Radio however, has a history that goes back some fifty years to Latin America, where several interest groups and communities, such as the labour unions, have used it in churches, universities, etc. However, seeking a narrow definition of Community radio is difficult, as it manifests itself in several different forms throughout the world.

As the Govt controls airwaves in India, the right to manage and regulate airwaves is solely the responsibility of Government of India. The airwaves are still not in too open for private utilization. In 1995, the Supreme Court directed the government to open up broadcasting. In doing so, it gave a rationale for community ownership of the airwaves. "Use of the airwaves, which is public property, must be regulated for its optimum use for public good for the greatest number.... Broadcasting is a means of communication and, therefore, a medium of speech and statement. Hence in a democratic polity, any private individual, institution or organization nor any Government ... can claim exclusive right over it. Our Constitution also forbids monopoly either in the print, or electronic media...." -- Judges Sawant and Mohan, AIR 1995 Supreme Court 1236

In the year 2000, FM broadcasting was opened up to the private sector for the first time, by charging prohibitively expensive broadcasting fees. In July 2001, India's very first privately owned broadcasting station went on air in Bangalore.

In December'02, the Government of India announced a policy for the grant of Community Radio Licenses to educational institutions and organizations to be identified/selected, in accordance with the prescribed eligibility conditions and on the terms and conditions given in the Guidelines for the grant of licenses for Community Radio Stations, is expected to

¹ Carlos A. Arnaldo

focus on issues relating to education, health, environment, agriculture, rural & community development.

As per this attempt of Government the interest educational institutes have taken interest to set up Community Radio stations in different parts of India. Till date more than 200 applications are under consideration of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting whereas more than 30 CRS are functional. But most of the functional community radio stations are established by different educational institutions & universities, whereas need of community based radio stations are in emerging need.

The community radio is to be confined to a small geographical area. It depends on low power transmission covering not more than 20-30 km. radius. It serves a community, which uses common resources for livelihood, habit & habitat and has common development issues and concerns, which are relatively, localized and nevertheless connected to national and regional development goals.

Community Level Interventions

As a number of community radio are going to be established & function at different rural parts of the country , they should focus on different sectors of health, HIV/AIDS information, education, Local Governance, Rural Technology and general information access sectors. There has been a perceptible pattern of behavioral shifts, especially of the young & women in local communities, which might be linked to long term broadcast campaigns and remote, marginalized rural communities. We may discuss some specific areas which are basic for a community to be serve by a community radio are:

- Agriculture
- Rural Health
- Rural Education
- Local Governance & peoples rights

Agriculture

The traditional image of the Indian farmers is that they are poor and uneducated. They have no access to the new developments in farming, even unaware about any new developments or options. This traditional image is no longer true. With so many means of communication available, it is no longer a hard task to disseminate information that will help the farmer to make his work productive and remunerative.



It is important to maintain an updated and enriched database of region specific agricultural information so that this can be shared with the farmer who needs it. Such information can be shared with the farmer who needs it. Such information can range from details about soil enrichment and seed selection to information about when the monsoons will arrive. Information about the market and the kind of prices different

agricultural products are fetching in both the national and international markets will enable farmers to decide what crops to grow. Community Radio can make it easy.

We may remember the programmes like 'Chasara Hal' (condition of agriculture) and a humorous character "Manguli Bhai" of AIR Cuttack was so popular in 1980-90 in Orissa. Community Radio represents a small area then an AIR station (SW/MW). So it is a positive side of the CRS, because it can focus a specific area, belongs to specific habit and habitat, which help the local farmers to keep regular attachment with a regular self-monitoring by the interactive programmes like PHONE IN and active participation in the programmes.

Today the definition of agriculture is so widened and for which we can divide the radio programmes in three categories like

- i. Hardcore agricultural programmes; Irrigation, watershed management, land development, fertilizers, pesticides, and farming by machinery, weather report etc.
- ii. Programmes on allied subjects; fisheries, animal husbandry, sericulture, horticulture, poultry farming cottage industries etc.
- iii. Topics of general interest; Crop insurance, credit for farmers, social forestry, legal literacy etc.

Rural Health

In India health sector is still backward to reach all the people, not because of lack of medical practitioner or hospitals but the awareness towards health and hygiene. Still now people has no proper awareness about care during pregnancy, after care of a child, care of adolescent, other related health matters, facilities from government for utilizing medical, duty of health workers, etc. which requires a regular convince by any medium like regular meeting, discussion, IEC materials, folk media or interventions, etc. It may observe that most of the convincing methods can be fulfilled by the Community radio. When the local community participates actively and regularly it will create a strong awareness among them.



Topics of adolescent education, care of child and mother, prevention of various diseases like malaria, diarrhea, cholera, filarial, HIV/AIDS, pulse polio, skin diseases etc. Govt facilities and schemes related with health can be discussed or explained by experts or through different programmes to aware the villagers on these basic health hazards. The community radio can touch the specific health need & subjective areas to be reached.

Even the success stories on health will attract them towards for a healthier society

Rural Education

Education is one of the most important drivers of any country's social and economic development. Higher levels of literacy lead to greater economic output, higher employment levels, better health, better social structures, and higher marks along a number of other development indicators. More specifically, the impact o

and women has been shown to result in rapid improvements in family planning, nutrition, health, and income and is seen as one of the best tools for promoting social and economic development. As we know, about 70 percent of Indians live in villages. It is estimated that a rural population of 700 million people lives in 6 lakh villages. The reasons for children being out-of-school are to do with lack of physical access as well as social access. In several parts of the country, especially in small, remote habitations, children still do not have access to schooling facilities and thus remain out of school. Seasonal migration of families in search of work for several months every year is another reason which deprives children the chance to go to school. In addition, a sizeable proportion of children live in villages and habitations where formal schools exist, but due to social reasons such as caste and gender they are either not allowed to go to school, or not given the proper treatment in school. So they have limited chance to reach at universities or colleges, are in cities or towns, and it is often not possible for students to travel to cities or town to study. Distance education is the only method by which we can ensure that quality education is available to every child & youth in the country.



There is emerging need of community radio to reach at these unreached masses. Radio programmes can be used for both formal and non-formal education.

IGNOU is a pioneer in distance education through electronics medium. It has expanded its facility for the rural people through a radio channel like Gyan Vani and a TV channel, Gyan Darshan, VCD and audiotapes.

Community Radio will play a role of tutor, teacher, trainer, guide, friend and philosopher for a student. Interactive programmes are most useful to touch the heart of the needy.

Local Governance & Peoples Rights;

The opportunity for people to participate in economic, political and cultural life depends on their ability to access and use communication and information services. Individuals need skills and tools to locate the communication pathways, information, and audiences in timely fashion and in an appropriate format. Unequal access to communication resources leads to unequal advantages, and ultimately to inequalities in social and economic opportunities.



Our nation has a Constitution, which is most detailed and lengthiest in the World. It is also Amended 94 times since today. India has thousands Acts enforceable till date. But, here is a question that in a nation where nearly 70 per cent of the illiterate population in the country are in eight states of UP, Bihar, Andhra, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka & thirteen states including Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, UP, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and

Bihar have literacy rate below the national average of 64.8%², how they can understand the Acts and enjoy the benefits. Whereas the most effective Acts like NREGA, RTI Act, PESA, CRZ, Domestic Violence Act, Forest Rights Act etc, which need high promotion & propagation for the benefit of community. The Govt. Schemes like PDS, Indira Awas Yojna, SGSY, PMRY, Pension Schemes etc, are also the rights of people and they have right to know for their benefit.

The law relating land, water, Coastal Zone, Wildlife, Right to life including livelihood are affecting the human life everyday and need a proper propagation in a suitable & effective way, which the community radio can fulfill.

Community Radio can be a bridge between Governance System & community through which we can see every citizen who is a victim of the system to directly participate to express his or her right and concern for change.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Community Radio Development:

(1) CR & Govt.

- i. The Govt & all should regard this media as a distinct sector for development rather than as an auxiliary of larger development as Community radio is an extremely important part of the whole media sector.
- ii. As Community radio is essential for empowering disenfranchised sectors of a population and bringing about democratic and social change. Governments should adopt and enforce legislation and regulations necessary for opening up space to community radio, but the process should be easier and must be availed in a stipulated time.
- iii. Options should be created by the Union & State Govts to earmark funds for media development with major focus on promotion of Community Radio.
- iv. Govt should ensure Advertising strategy for providing advertisements related to different pro-people schemes in community radio as like as print media through DAVP & others.

(2) CR & Donor agency

- i. Funding is vital for community radio development. Donors should invest in the development of community radio as an institution and not as a quick means of getting information across to a community as part of a larger project. This approach requires long-term commitment and coordinated efforts of donor agencies.
- ii. There should be a pooled resource fund or a micro credit loan system for community radio development that is not subject to the political or other priorities of a given donor.
- iii. Financial support is not a continuous process but for a token of support to sustain and strengthen the CR in all respect. Although sustainability of funding recipients should not be the primary objective of donors, funding

² Directorate of Adult Education

strategies and models should encourage financial sustainability in the long run.

- iv. Investment need in the development of a nationally accessible clearinghouse for exchange of information, ideas, contacts, and programming.
- v. Allocation of substantial resources necessary for rigorous quantitative and qualitative research as part of every media assistance initiative, including community radio projects, to measure their effects.
- vi. Donors and implementers should take care, how new technologies and the Internet can contribute to Community Radio development, focusing on issues ranging from program exchanges using the Internet to conversion to digital frequencies as a part of Digital World.
- vii. Assistance to the Community radio stations needed for Sustainability, Capacity Building and Adequacy to enhance ability to continue functioning after assistance projects end.

(3) CR & Implementing agency

- i. Existing needs should be responded by all projects and encourage input from the community to ensure a participatory assistance and implementing organizations should be careful not to overbuild community radio stations.
- ii. Implementing organizations should incorporate training of management, financial, technical, equipment maintenance, programme production, transmission, promotion and journalistic skills into their projects. Most importantly, they should prepare project beneficiaries to face and adapt to change.
- iii. Implementing organizations should design projects in a way to ensure that governance of a community radio station is not borrowed from outside and that the community acquires a sense of ownership and ownness.

(5) CR & Community

- iv. Active participation and cooperation should be ensured from community for maintain, manage and preparation of contents of the Radio Station, is most important.
- v. The community should encourage local art & culture, personalities, ideas and explore the local problems and demand for solution through the Community Radio Station as Community Radio is the voice of voiceless.
- vi. Local Listeners Groups should be formed & their suggestions should be taken into account and incorporated in different programs.

(The author Mr. N.A.Shah Ansari is a Social Activist & Media Professional, working since last two decades with major focus on human rights based issues in & around Orissa. He has received several awards like National Youth Award, Indira Gandhi NSS Award etc for his contribution in development field of the country. Now working with Young India, the Non-Govt Organisation based at Konark, Orissa which is going to establish a community radio station at Konark very soon)