

## Community Radio: An Innovative Medium for Capacity Building of Rural People

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### ABSTRACT

*Community radio is a radio service offering a third model of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting. Community radio stations serve geographic communities and communities of interest. They broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local, specific audience but is often overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters. Community radio stations are operated, owned, and influenced by the communities they serve. They are generally nonprofit and provide 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. Community Radio as a medium is continuously playing a significant role not only in dissemination of information but also in the propagation of culture and nation building, providing various minorities and remote and disenfranchised areas with a low-cost public domain. Community participation has played a crucial role in the success of Community Radio Eminent. The collective and interactive participation of the community is the mainstay of all the program. Previous researches showed that community radio is a powerful Information communication tool for capacity building of rural people. It can empower the rural community through community participation. This medium provides a platform to the rural people to come forward and share their views. Community Radio broadcast is free to the listener, and access does not depend on having electricity or individual radio ownership. People listen together in public places and at home. Running costs are generally low, making the radio the most affordable ICT in rural areas, particularly where wind-up radios are available. Some successful cases of Radio Ujjas (Gujarat), Radio Mewat (Haryana), Radio Mattoli (Kerala), Jnan Tarang (Guwahati) showed that community radio is a powerful medium of empowering rural people. Thus, this type of local and development medium can be useful for the rural development. This paper aimed at assessing the role of community radio stations in context of capacity building of rural people through community radio station.*

**Keywords:** Community radio, Participation, Capacity Building, Rural people

### INTRODUCTION

Community Radio as the third type of radio, an alternative to the State radio and commercial radio is now a reality in India. In short, it has been seen as the voice of the marginalized groups, an instrument of their empowerment and a non-profit mechanism managed by them. The last two decades have seen a rapid expansion in the number and popularity of community radio stations. Among the reasons for this are: the democratization and decentralization processes in many parts of the world; deregulation of the media and the relaxing of broadcasting monopolies by state institutions; and disaffection with commercial radio channels. Furthermore, awareness is growing of the social and economic benefits that can result when ordinary people have access to appropriate information. And it is also evident that when

people, especially the poor, can participate in communication processes and consensus building about issues that affect their lives, it helps them to cast off their traditional state of apathy and stimulates them to mobilize and organize to help themselves. As people are illiterate in rural areas, community radio is the most commonly used medium of the rural people in India to receive information, with almost every family in the provinces owning a radio set or having mobile phone with FM. Community capacity building (CCB), also referred to as capacity building, is a conceptual approach to development that focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people, governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations from realizing their development goals while enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results. Community capacity building often refers to strengthening the skills,

competencies and abilities of people and communities in developing societies so they can overcome the causes of their exclusion and suffering. Thus, Community radio is a powerful medium for capacity building of rural people.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Community radio is local and participatory communication medium for disseminating the information among the rural people. It is a powerful medium for giving information, education and knowledge to illiterate, small and marginalized group of society. Present paper aim is to assess the role of community radio in context of capacity building of rural people through community radio.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Concept of community radio**

Government is spending million of rupees in the name of rural development, but still it's not getting the desired results. Among many reasons, one of the foremost reason is the communication gap between government devised policies and common masses as people largely remain ignorant regarding them. In order to bridge this gap, a firm communication policy will prove crucial. According to this policy, local community media should be promoted in order to enhance community development, at least at grass root level. Among various existing genres of local community media, Community Radio will prove most effective as it can easily cover a wider range of area as well as diversified audience. Besides, experiments with community radio in many parts of India have proved it to be the cheapest and the strongest medium for fulfilling communication gap between the community and the Government. It has proved to be a vital tool in strengthening the 'Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression' As, the community radio is still evolving it might be possible that in the near future, we will witness its various new forms which will be more superior as well as user-friendly. On the basis of past researches we can say that community radio has proved to be one of the best medium of communication at the grass-root level.

Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on common man's day-to-day concerns and helps in realizing local aspirations. In this sense, it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community, through the content that is created by the people and for the people of the community. Community radio reflects the interests and needs of the community it serves. It challenges the traditional division

between the broadcasters on one side and the listeners on the other. Non-profit organisation and communities stand to benefit from this inexpensive yet effective means of communication. Community radio can be defined as having three aspects: non-profit making; community ownership and control; and community participation. It is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself, which means the community is owning and controlling its own means of communication (AMARC, 2014 ). Community radio is also defined as non-profit distributing which is designed to serve specific communities of location and interest, thereby providing programming that is relevant to the community, and with management structures that represent the community the station serves.

### **Community radio as a medium of participatory communication**

The power of community radio lies in its participatory nature, as both its content and technology are people-oriented. Community broadcasting provides news, information, cultural content and entertainment to communities defined by geographical location or common interest. The diversity of programme content available through community broadcasting, broadens the media choices available to listeners and customers. One of the basic factors of Community Radio is that it has to be participatory. As said by the UNESCO, A Community Radio Station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. It is now recognized that participatory communication approaches are powerful tools to bring in change and empower people at the grassroots to decide their own future. In the context of the information society and its transformation into a knowledge society, participatory communication plays a vital role as it is the marginalized people whose access to information needs to be increased for transforming the entire society to a knowledge based society and this can effectively be done through a proper and planned participatory communication method. In fact, efforts should be taken to find out possibilities to make at least some CR programmes interactive and two way. MacBride (1980). The main advantage of Community Radio is that the selected representatives of the community can easily be called to the studio/ station due to the location advantage to share with and debate their views. In some cases there can also be telephonic participation of the people from and among the community.

### **Principles of Community Radio Operation**

UNESCO described five major principle of community radio: (a) Access (b) Participation (c) Self Management (d) Community mandate and (e) Accountability

There are three key aspects that define community sound broadcasting, namely: (i) Community participation (ii) Non-profit Making (iii) Community Ownership and Control (CEMCA, 2011). Tabing (2002) adds the following as unique characteristics of a community radio station: (i) It uses technology appropriate to the economic capability of people, not that which leads to dependence on external sources. (ii) It promotes and improves community problem solving.

### **Community radio and rural development**

The modern concept of development gives emphasis to human and social development and does not end with economic development only. It has also been accepted that there cannot be any sustainable development unless people can become the agents of their own development and do not remain just a beneficiary. They are required to participate in every stage of the development process and in its decision-making. Empowering the people at the grassroots and their capacity building are the major concerns for modern development. Community Radio can emerge as a major tool for doing both. Community radio can play a significant and effective role in modern concepts of development like the Human Development Index and Human Security. Community Radio can come forward to give development a human face. It can also be a platform for bringing accountability of the development process, ultimately making the system more transparent and ensuring good governance.

### **Some instances of community radio station**

The instances of Namma Dhwani, SEWA Radio, Helwel Vani and many others reveal an inherent trend of the community to come together and make their voices heard. The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan was an initiative in Bhuj, Gujarat that used the medium-wave broadcast channel of All India Radio (AIR). Anonymous (2013). As far as the ongoing initiatives are concerned, the Pastapur initiative of the Deccan Development Society of Andhra Pradesh is one that uses the rich oral tradition of the community, and is managed entirely by Dalit women. Alternative for India Development (AID), Bihar, which has a radio initiative in Daltonganj, in the Palamau District of Jharkhand, uses purchased air-time from a local AIR channel. Namma Dhwani, the VOICES

initiative in Budikote, Karnataka, cablecasts programmes, made by the community members themselves, right into their homes. Some of the most recent community radio initiatives include, *Charkha's Pechuwali Man Ker Swar* in Ranchi, SEWA's '*Rudi no Radio*' in Gujarat and *Aragamee's 'Ujjala'* in Jeypore, Orissa. Institutions like One World South Asia, The Population Foundation of India are also involved in establishing several community radio networks in India, especially in states like Orissa, Bihar and Rajasthan.

### **Significance of community radio**

Mainstream media is unable to cater to the basic information needs of the community, as it mainly runs with profit-making motives and is market driven, so here comes the need for the community radio. According to Sharma and Kashyap (2013) following are the characteristics of community radio: (i) Community radio narrows down the differences between the broadcaster and the audience. (ii) Its approach is towards empowerment at the grassroots, which automatically strengthen the democracy. (iii) The chief characteristic of community radio is that it is non-profit making and whatever profits are gained, are put back into the running of the station. (iv) The success of this kind of local radio station is that it complements the oral tradition of communication, and it is built on the tradition of participatory development. (v) Decentralized community radio maintains close ties with the local community and provides local people the opportunities to voice their opinions and ideas, share their knowledge which enables them to solve their own problems. (vi) Community radio is also important as a training ground for new entrants to radio and as a place where new ideas can be tried. (vii) The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouth-piece of the oppressed and generally as a tool of development. Community radio became popular as an alternative media to public and commercial radio in the late 70s. (viii) Community radio is an essential partner in community development. It can be characterized by its access, public participation in production and decision-making, management by listeners, and its operations rely mainly on the community's very own resources. (ix) CR incorporates new languages, inventive formats, novel music and innovative ways of pressuring the authorities. It works as a cultural broadcast mechanism that adapts perfectly to reflect the interests and needs of the community it serves. (x) CR Forum states that community radio stations "should be designed to serve a specific well-defined local community." It also states that community radio programming "should be relevant to the educational,

developmental, social and cultural needs of the community.” With the introduction of community radio broadcasting, the world of radio listening has changed, especially in the remote areas where radio listening revolves around community centers. The listeners generally assemble at a place when they listen to community radios. They get a scope to discuss and react, thus there is a collective response. Also the programmes are such that people can easily identify themselves with them. (xi) Community radio is an integral part of the life of a community, and it is involved with the problems, challenges, and joys of the community.

According to Singh (2011) the community people use the radio as a tool to understand and look for solutions of their problems, as well as celebrate their local culture and tradition. It can be easily predicted that in future community radio will strive to bring people together through interaction, just like teleconferencing, where listeners will be able to talk through radio network using small wireless sets. As we know, community radio possesses great potential but it needs to be further examined, experimented, analyzed and implemented. Community radio serves valuable purposes for both the broadcasters and the audiences, and so it deserves to be given enough chances and right conditions to succeed, so that it can enjoy the confidence of the masses.

### **Functions of community radio**

Main Functions of Community Radio as Formulated in South Africa Community radio stations should: (i) Promote and reflect local culture, character and identity (ii) Assist in creating a diversity of voices and opinions and encourage individual expression (iii) Increase access to a diversity of voices on air (iv) Assist in creating a diversity in broadcasting ownership (v) Be responsive to the needs of their community (vi) Contribute to human resources development for broadcasting and where appropriate to job creation (vii) Encourage members of the relevant community to participate in programming and production matters (viii) Encourage innovation and experimentation in programming.

According to Colin and Sonia (2001) Community radio aims to fulfill the following functions: (i) Reflect and Promote Local Identity, Character, and Culture (ii) Culture is also Language (iii) Create a Diversity of Voices and Opinions on the Air (iv) Provide a Diversity of Programmes and Content (v) Encourage Open Dialogue and Democratic Process (vi) Promote Development and Social Change

### **Case studies of successful community radio stations**

#### **Case 1: Radio Ujjas, Gujarat**

Radio Ujjas is a successful community radio initiative that works to sensitize the people of Kutch on local issues, particularly on matters related to women. Started by the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) in 1999, Radio Ujjas arose out of the need to overcome the barrier that illiteracy poses to people's access to information. Moreover, Kutch is a large and disaster prone area that makes it difficult for any constant and reliable source of information and entertainment to be available to the people. Combined with the fact that approximately 90 per cent of households in Kutch own a radio set, KMVS's idea of using the medium of radio for development holds immense potential. Radio Ujjas works at the grassroots to identify concerns specific to the people of Kutch and involves the community members extensively in mobilizing resources and in program production. The program themes are very diverse and include education, handicrafts, fishing, panchayat, girls' rights, environment, natural resource management and such. The overarching aim of all these program is to give a space to women to voice their concerns related to these issues. For its first radio show aired in 1999, titled '*Kunjali Paanje Kutchi*', Radio Ujjas was awarded the Chameli Devi Jain Award in 2000. Currently, Radio Ujjas operates from the Bhuj and Rajkot AIR stations and enjoys a listenership of over 75 per cent. It has acquired government clearance for a radio station of its own. The proposed radio station will reach over 7000 people within a 10 km radius. This was a landmark achievement for all groups associated with this movement. Ujjas Radio has produced 7 more radio series- "*Tu Jiyaro Aiyee*", "*Kutch Lok ji Vani*", "*Bandhni Ji Gal*", "*Kutch ji Musafari*", "*Dariya Gher*", "*Sajiv no Sad*", "*Pani Thiye Panjo*", "*Tipe Jo Sad*" with more than 500 episodes. The first series after Kunjal, was on towards providing glimpses of rehabilitation and relief efforts, tales of bravery and inspirational messages after the devastating earthquake of 2001. The next series were more centered to showcase art and cultural heritage of Kutch in the present context. All of these program voiced community issues like drip irrigation, right based issues of fishermen community in the wake of rapid industrialization, derogatory idioms and phrases for women and how they can be rephrased, Traditional livelihood and Natural resource management from perspective of gender and local governance. All of these series were mainly aimed to addressing issues for holistic empowerment of women and it's context. The journey though spanned over a decade, has been extremely interesting and full of incidents

that showcased the true Kutchi "*Khamir (dignity)*".

### Case 2: Radio Mewat, Haryana

Radio Mewat, a community radio station, has contributed in promoting this dying art form and has given broadcast space to the Mirasis in several program. In fact, they have written lyrics for songs of education, health, hygiene and sanitation etc. which indeed is an indication of the success story of the radio. Radio Mewat was launched on September 1, 2010, in Nuh, Haryana, by an NGO-Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transmission (SMART). It broadcasts four hours a day and reaches out to over five lakh people in a radius of 25 kilometres. Mewat is a backward area, faring very low on all social indicators, with the literacy rate at an abysmal low of 24 per cent. Only 5 per cent households have a television set. Educating people about the very concept of a Community Radio was a Herculean task. Station has a tough job popularizing the radio station in a district where elders are suspicious of any new idea and are very protective towards their women folk. Also, there are power outages for days together. Moreover being in the interiors, it is difficult to get experienced people to work on a regular basis. However, Mewat has the highest penetration of mobile phones. This has served as an advantage for Radio Mewat, as most of mobile phones these days have FM Radio. Radio Mewat, according to annual report of the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, has been very active in interacting with the local community. Field workers regularly visit the villages for stories and also to engage with the communities. About 40 locals are actively engaged in creating a buzz about the radio station. The program on Radio Mewat are need based. Besides regular program on education, health, women empowerment, safe drinking water and small family norms, Radio Mewat also broadcasts information about various schemes of development viz. MNREGA, microfinance, Public Distribution System (PDS) etc. An exclusive programme called "*Gaon Gaon ki Baat*", gives an opportunity to every village to talk about their problems, achievements, unique heritage and their leaders. Radio Mewat uses all formats including jingles, songs, interviews, anchors and narrations depending on the subject.

### Case 3: Radio Mattoli, Kerala

Radio Mattoli, Wayanad (Kerala) is another success story. It is supported by Wayanad Social Services Society. The management of Mattoli vests with the committee consisting of people representing different sections of society. It broadcasts for 16 hours and covers a population of about 8.16 lakh in

Wayanad district. Around 2.5 lakh people listen to Mattoli CRS at a given point of time, especially in the morning hours. Mattoli focuses on different communities living in Wayanad. Programmes are aired in the local language and in indigenous dialects. 'Mattoli School Clubs' open up avenues for school children to express their concerns, hopes, aspirations and talents. Programme '*Jan Vani*' help people to air their concerns and compel the duty bearers for interventions. The impact of programmes broadcast by Mattoli Radio are described below: (a) Reshma, a living testimony to Radio Mattoli: Wayanad district faced unabated farmer's suicide in the last decade, mainly due to unprecedented depression in the farm sector due to crops failure and price crash. A radio drama broadcast on Mattoli instilled a new hope and motivation for a young lady Reshma to hold on to life despite heavy odds. In a letter to the Station Director she said: "The very day I planned my suicide, Mattoli broadcast a radio drama, and it is only because of Mattoli I am alive today". A year later she wrote that she is happily married and is employed as a teacher. (b) Greater visibility to tribal identity: It has given greater visibility, recognition and respect to tribal dialects, culture and identity. As a result, for the first time in the state's history, electioneering was done in Adivasi dialects in Wayanad district also during the panchayat elections of 2010. (c) Small farmers get Rubber Board subsidy: Eight revenue villages in Wayanad district were denied Rubber Board subsidy for re-plantation of rubber, for reasons best known to the concerned officials themselves. Rubber Board responded quickly when '*Jan Vani*' took up the matter and extended the scheme to the deprived villages. Station members had a pleasant surprise when a farmer having received a grant of Rs. 25,000 came to Mattoli to thank the radio station.

### Case 4: Jnan Tarang, Guwahati

*Jnan Taranga*, the first community radio of the North-East has been launched by Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, Guwahati. Though it is run by the University, it has been actively engaged with community to draw talent, design content and reach out to the audiences. Jnan Taranga broadcasts 20 hours a day. The studio has been set up at a cost of Rs.60 lakh. Expenditure includes cost on various equipment for the studio, transmission equipment, training (including in-house and on community), human resource, production and contingency. An amount of Rs.40,000 per month is being spent for running the CRS presently. Though the University is committed to bear the expenditure, generation of revenue in the form of advertisement is necessary to sustain the

expenditure. Program are based on community development on the issues like health and hygiene, women empowerment, rights of the children, environment and bio-diversity, career counseling, governance, agriculture and entrepreneurship etc. Community based program constitute over 70 per cent of the total broadcast of the 'Jnan Taranga'. Educational program including awareness on the RTE Act and RTI Act are broadcast most regularly in between the community program. Over 500 program of various durations have been recorded and around 1000 CDs of songs and feature program have been collected with the right to broadcast the same from the respective authorities. Hence, dissemination of knowledge, preserving culture, its diversity, is a key role radio station can play to ensure that this is truly a community radio serving people. Archiving and documenting the people's knowledge will build a valuable repository for academic learning.

## CONCLUSION

Community radio is not just about broadcast content; it is mostly about the process of community engagement. One should note, however, that a "community" is no longer determined by the primary occupation of its members, such as farming or fishing, as was the case in traditional communities. Even in rural societies, the home is losing its role as a cradle of education. Many people now work outside of their homes and immediate surroundings, and thus their mobility has increased. Communities are more and more exposed to media proliferation, which influences the way in which people think of lifestyles and media functions. The tension between social transformation influenced by the larger society and the mass media, on the one hand, and attempts to retain traditional hierarchical relationships and individual strategies in immediate communities, on the other, increases the uncertainty of a particular form of coherent "community." Therefore, in the present context, one could say that "community" is a fluid concept.

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