



CUMMUNITIES ON 'AIR'

Community radio stations(CRS) engage the communities at the very local level, often play the role of a mouthpiece for them. As a definite agent of change at the grassroots, CRS could fill the void- economic, social and educational, reports *Madhvendra Singh Chauhan*

A recent visit to Karnal in Haryana gave us a chance to interact with farmers who came to the Institute of Wheat Research to attend a conference on agriculture. The interaction unfolded and farmers shared what they wanted from the government and private agencies. More of their questions were focused on making agriculture a viable economic activity and for that they were asking for various source of information from where they can get updates on advancements in farm technology, weather updates and other inputs on agriculture.

When asked about the present medium, from where they get these updates, these farmers said that they use both radio and TV to get updates on agriculture. However, due to limited availability of programmes on agriculture, farmers are left with no other option but to get whatever little information they can from programmes like Krishi Darshan. Apart from agriculture, there are several other areas, where people in the villages



want expert opinion and for that they find radio as an interactive medium to engage.

In the country, community radio (CR) is becoming a popular medium to interact with the community it serves. The approach of a CR is to have customised content for the local populace, and its local approach is what makes it popular among the masses.

A community radio in Dharward district of Karnataka has changed the lives of farmers in the region. Now people from the community participate in the programmes, get expert advice on what to do and what not in the agriculture and they also get a chance to share their ideas, success stories and problems with each other through it.

As a station manager of a CRS shares his views that people are keen to tune into his station's frequency as they get a chance to know about the happenings around them. The extent of its popularity can be seen in the formation of 'Chanderi ki Awaaz', a community radio station in Madhya Pradesh, which was set up by the money that was contributed by the community.

PRESENT STATUS

In India, there are 143 CRS, which are operational at present. Going by the

population size, the numbers of CR stations in the country are not very encouraging and many people believe that the faulty policies of the government are responsible for it.

Archana Kapoor, Director of Radio Mewat says, "there is this myth that if you set up a community radio, the government supports it, but the truth is that the government does not support you in any way."

She says that the process of getting a license is very time taking and tiring. At times, it can take as much as two years or more to get the license. One official from the ministry of broadcasting, who did not want to be named said, "we have planned to bring the single window clearance system in place to make the process faster and transparent, but it will take some time."

As per the data provided by the Min of I & B, the ministry received 1128 applications for CRS, issued LOI (Letter of Intent) to 386, rejected 477 applications and 265 applications are under process



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ARCHANA KAPOOR
Director, Radio Mewat



Future of CRS in India looks very promising and in next five to ten years, these stations will become sustainable and money will not be an issue in the long run

SATISH NAGRAJI
Sr. Manager
Radio & Convergant Media
One World

The official also added that the ministry is planning to introduce subsidy for those who are setting up CRS in India but refused to divulge more details on it. There are more than 250 applications pending with the ministry and are supposed to be cleared soon.

Zahir Koradia, the lead developer at Gram Vaani, an organisation that develops GRINS, a radio automation system specially designed for community radio stations, says, “most of the stations are run with a social objective and get their funding from NGOs and trusts. But prior to that the whole licensing process is very time taking and people face a lot of challenges in getting the license to operate the station.”

Apart from the challenging licensing environment, revenue generation is another area of concern for these stations. The CRS have tried various models to generate revenue but not many have succeeded in making it work. At present, most of these stations are getting their revenue from funding from the parent organisation and some of the expenditure cost is recovered through local and government ads and partly from individual donations.

STATES WITH MAXIMUM CRS

Tamil Nadu	-	22
Uttar Pradesh	-	16
Maharashtra	-	16
Karnatka	-	11
Madhya Pradesh	-	8

Source- Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2012

Archana feels that community radio is not a profit oriented business and only those people who have some social commitment should start such ventures.

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

Archana feels that CRS have an advantage over other mediums because of its local connection. She shares her experience with Radio Mewat, “Mewat is one of the most backward regions near Delhi. There is no industry and any other source of employment. Initially, people were hesitant to participate and looked skeptical. Gradually, when they realised that we are here for their wellbeing, they opened up.”

Now, Radio Mewat has become a roaring success and become very popular among the community. Now people complain, share and react to the programmes that are aired. Swadesh Samaiya, the station manager of ‘Chanderi ki awaaz’ says, “impact of our station is huge on the community and this can be understood by the fact that we receive calls from as far as 60 kms from our station. We have many programmes where local people get a chance to engage and interact with each other. The folk music works as a pull factor for us.”

The Chanderi CR started a programme by the name ‘Chanderi ke Gaurav’ in which it highlighted the achievements of students and other people who have done well and brought glory to the town. The programme became a huge success and, according to Samaiya, after listening to such success stories people have started sending their kids to school. The CRS have also focused on women empowerment



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ZAHIR KORADIA

Lead Developer, Gram Vaani

extensively. 'Rudi no Radio' an Ahmadabad based CRS, runs various vocational programmes for the women including spoken English courses for girls of the community it serves.

Archana shares Radio Mewat's experience. Mewat is muslim dominated area, where literacy rate is quite low and women participation was negligible when Mewat CRS came in to existence. But after series of programmes on health related and other women oriented issues, they started participating. Mirasi music, one of the most popular form of folk music in the region had a great impact on the society and is being widely used by Radio Mewat.

CONTENT FOCUS

Community radio stations are for the development of community or society they operate in. so, content is designed to make it community centric, in the local language and participative. Zahir says, "the content of any CR is the major factor that drives that station, in fact it is so local, that people instantly connect to it."



Chanderi CRS for example, runs programmes like 'subah hoti hai, sham hoti hai' in which it captures the daily routine of the workers. 'Ghoonghat ke pat khol sakhri' is a women centric programme that talks about various success stories of women and also broadcasts expert opinion on various health related issues.

Satish Nagaraji of One World says, "We support the grassroots organisations in capacity building, getting the licensing and preparing thematic content."

One World runs a project named 'Ek Duniya Ek Awaaz(EDAA)'(one

world one voice). Through this project, the organisation helps existing CRS to share their content online. At present, there are nearly 1700 programmes in 26 different languages on the site of EDAA. The site also develops a microsite for each CRS it helps.

The focus, as station director of Gurgaon ki Awaaz said is all inclusiveness. "The very objective of the community is to engage everyone and holistically develop the society you work for. After lot of work with the women in the society, we see a lot of participation from them, so it is an effective medium to engage the target audience," she further added. The programmes are designed in such a way that they are more engaging and because it presented by people from the community, masses listen to it

Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) has decided a Rs 4/second rate for government advertisements for CRS, however, many CRS have complained that there's lot of delay in the payments and they don't receive many ads from the government



with more attention. On field activities, local folk music, phone in programmes are some of the pull factor that works in the favour of community radio stations across India.

APT ADVERTISING TOOL

Although, not much of advertising has been attempted with community radio in India, it has lots of potential due to its huge impact over the

society. Experts feel that, for region specific advertising campaigns, it can be very effective medium. The very advantage of a CRS over any other medium is its reach.

It is impactful and trusted by the community people. Till date, CRS are dependent on local and government ads for revenue. Few funded projects help them recover some operational cost. In the region, where such radio stations operate, prepare in house ads in local dialects that are going to be an advantage for the corporate world. It can reach the right audience in a minimum possible expenditure and

its impact, as experts feel will be more than any other medium.

FUTURE FORWARD

The future of CRS in India looks promising despite several policy hurdles. The ministry of I & B has been trying for long to streamline

the licensing process but till date, there has not been any significant move in this direction. The CRS are not willing to pay the increased licensing fee and people working and operating these stations say that there should be some subsidy from the government.

In their quest to make the content more engaging, these stations call local folk artists to their studios to perform live or to record it for future broadcasts. But, as Swadesh Samaiya of 'Chanderi ki Awaaz' says, "in the region, Bundeli music is very popular and has wider impact, so we call local artists to perform in our studios. But due to limited money, we cannot offer them any remuneration. This is very discouraging and I don't know how long will they be coming here."

Although, Radio Mewat has come up with some scheme to pay a token amount to the artists but it is not feasible for many other CRS to do so because there is always a shortage of money. For Satish, the future of CRS is going to be stronger and he is very optimistic about it.

On the technical side, the transmitters that are used in CRS can only be repaired in Kolkata and that works as a major deterrent. Only BECIL (Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Ltd.) has the facilities to repair it in Delhi. So, when there's some snag, CRS has to wait for weeks to get it repaired. There are only four manufacturers of radio transmitters in India and despite many suggestions no company has attempted to customise their products for community radio stations. Servicing of these transmitters remains a major issue and companies have to streamline their processes to make servicing less time taking.

On the positive side, it has been learnt that ministry is going to introduce some form of compensation to all the upcoming and existing CRS in India. Archana feels that the step would certainly be helpful to operators in recovering some investment cost. ■

The entire process of obtaining a license for CRS is very time taking and can take anywhere between 1 to 3 years. However, the ministry is planning to streamline the process but not much could be done in that direction