

# Community Radio - Need of the Hour

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**Abstract:** Community Radio Station is one innovative idea which started with the help of a 'Basic Radio' and has brought revolutionary changes in the lives of people. Earlier Radio used to be a National Broadcaster. Community Radio is for the community, about the community and by the community. Firstly, Community Radio is characterized by the active participation of the community in the process of creating news, information, entertainment and culturally relevant material, with an emphasis on local issues and concerns, current issues, race issues, economic problems, environment, education and many more. Secondly, it is essentially a non-profit enterprise. Thirdly, Community Radio programming is designed by the community, to improve social conditions and the quality of its cultural life. In India, particularly in Gujarat, Community Radio is appreciated by the people and has an active participation to broadcast the shows. (i) Rudi No Radio, is a show run by SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association). It was launched in April 2005 in Ahmadabad district of Gujarat State. (ii) Campus Community Radio was established at The Sardar Patel University of Anand City, Gujarat, and was also one of the early birds to start Community Radio in Gujarat state. In fact it is the First Campus Community Radio station in Gujarat which has been in the service since 2004. In simple words, "Community Radio Station is a tool to bring communities and people together, give them power of communication to discuss various subjects affecting the community and try to bring positive change in it".

**Keywords:** Community Radio, Social Issues, Education and Cultural Life.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Community Radio is a radio service offering a third model of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting. Community 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 non-profit 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 Station is one innovative idea which started with the help of a 'Basic Radio' and has brought revolutionary changes in the lives of people. One would find various definitions of Community Radio, but after all, the idea itself could be perceived in as many ways as there are minds. Earlier Radio used to be a National Broadcaster. However, with the growth in technology and education, one can start radio station of his own.

The word Community Radio gives some insight into it. It is a Radio which serves to the particular objectives of certain community. A process which involves Members, Groups, People who with the help of radio technology try to connect one another, try to bring change in the particular group or society. They set out the objectives, plan out the programs and air them to reach out to the people. It is unique in the sense that the community itself takes the center stage, decides to get

grip of the situation and looks for solutions. In doing so, they come in the driver's seat. It reduces, and in some cases completely removes, the dependence on the establishment. Simple means of communication is a major tool to bring positive changes in the society.

Community Radio also means Radio in the community; For the Community, About the Community and By the Community. There is a wide participation from regular community members with respect to management and production of programs. This involvement of community members distinguishes it the Philippines that are operated for P P P P P – Profit, Propaganda, Power, Politics and Privilege.

A Community Radio Station is owned and controlled by a Not-for-Profit Organization, the structure of which provides for membership, management, operation and programming primarily by members of the community at large.

**1. Firstly, Community Radio is characterised by the active participation of the community** in the process of creating news, information, entertainment and culturally relevant material, with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. With training, local producers can create programmes using local voices. The community can also actively participate in the management of the station and have a say in the scheduling and content of the programmes.

**2. Secondly, it is essentially a non-profit enterprise.** In these days of highly commercialised broadcasting, the ethos of Community Radio remains independence and responsibility to serve the community, not the advertiser. As the station is owned by the community, it also maintains some responsibility in the running of the station.

**3. Thirdly, Community Radio programming is designed by the community,** to improve social conditions and the quality of its cultural life. The community itself decides what priorities and needs are in terms of information provision.

In simple words, "Community Radio Station is a tool to bring communities and people together, give them power of communication to discuss various subjects affecting the community and try to bring positive change in it. All these with the help of a simple technology of radio." The Importance of Community Radio was realised by International Bodies too. Since the early 1980s, UNESCO has been actively involved for the promotion of Community Radio. This is primarily because UNESCO was successfully able to identify Community Radio as an agent of positive change and development.

A lot of people still raise eyebrows when it comes to the Functions of Community Radio service. A deeper look in its functions will reveal its importance from macro to micro level.

**1.** Community Radio basically brings the people together. It helps in strengthening their identity. There are variety of cultures and way of life in the world. Community Radio assimilates the different groups, provides them a platform for expressing their identity. The Community Radio spotlights the local culture, local identity and dialect. It is successful in doing so because it mainly caters local content. Simple definition of culture is people having similar ideas and way of life live in a community. They share their life present, past and future. The gradual evolution has also attached many other things in culture. Artistic expression via songs, dramas, stories, dances and music also helps in showcasing a distinct nature of culture. Community Radio stations are vital for preserving, and in some cases saving, different cultures.

**2.** With the advancement in technology, the world has become a Global Village. More and more people now can easily migrate from their native places to foreign shores in search of better life. A city like New York has probably found people from almost all the nationalities living on the banks of river Thames with the population so diverse, a facility like Community Radio station can help in giving voice to people from all the sections of the society. Community radio gives an opportunity to every one for participating with openness. Of course, when there are different voices, chances of discord are also there. However, Community Radio tries to air all points of view by taking neutral position.

**3.** Every community faces some problems or the other. It is of utmost importance that a free and independent stage is provided for elaborative and interactive discussion. After all encouraging open dialogue is very much healthy for democratic process. Community radio station is a perfect forum to help democratic process. It gives special power to every one for speaking for themselves. Because it is an open stage it also helps in developing tolerance level of people.

**4.** The basic function of democracy is to give power to people by distributing it with the help of decentralisation. People's participation in decision making makes democracy strong. Community Radio station gives an idea about the environment of Grass-Root level. Local Governments, Institutes and Policy-Makers can understand the grass-root

situation better with the help of Community Radios. They can plan and design programmes to help out local people by taking in account the views of community via community radio.

5. Community Radio programming is also helpful in bringing social change and development. There are many communities in the society who live sub- standard life. They have no voice of their own. Their view about life is very different from other classes of society. People have individual point of view about their situation and about their lives. For proper development and change, collective perception is vital. This is possible only by the means of discussion, and debates. Community Radio provides a platform where discussions can be held with open mind.

6. It is very difficult to imagine good Governance and Justices for all without civil society. Civil society is a community watchdog that awakens the conscience of establishments, politicians and authorities. Civil society makes people in power aware and alert about their duties for public. People at bottom have almost known for their way to reach out to the Government. Moreover in some cases even if they complain, they are not heard by higher authorities. It is this oppressed and marginalised section of people that goes to civil society for help. Here, Community Radio can become the voice of oppressed people.

7. Apart from this a platform like Community Radio is also used for sharing of information and innovation, providing voice to the voiceless, helping youngsters and women to become active members of community or society.

All the above mentioned functions clearly depict that Community Radio plays important role in social change of the country. It is no longer limited only to fun, entertainment and music, but it also covers vast range of areas such as current issues, race issues, economic problems, environment, education and many more. There is no doubt that Community Radio protects and preserves local cultures and languages but it also helps in bringing necessary changes.

This type of media has immense benefits when compared to other media. Community Radio is centred on a culture, group of people or local communities. This has major advantages because the platform of Community Radio offers a space to a particular group of people to discuss the variety of issues. To begin with, Community Radio uses local language and dialect. It gives an innate feeling of closeness, security and reliability to people who use it. Especially, in many parts of Asia and Africa where people lack even basic confidence to speak out their problems, a source like Community Radio is greatly useful for giving voice to masses. The infant history of Community Radio is full of remarkable examples of how greatly advantageous Community Radio is. It is helpful from individual level to the community level and, on the whole, for the society.

The importance of community media for community empowerment and democratization is well known. And voice based media are especially relevant in the Indian context, given the poor literacy levels in rural areas. However, despite Radiobeing an efficient channel for Voice—BasedCommunity Media, communities and independent organizations were forbidden to set up their own radio stations. Pioneering organizations such as ‘Voices’ and ‘Drishti’ Media choose a concept called Narrow Casting to circumvent the policy restrictions. They worked with NGOs ‘Myrada’ in Bangalore and ‘Kutch MahilaVikasSangathan’ (a women collective) in Gujarat to train rural community reporters to produce audio programs just like it would be done in a radio studio. But the programs were played out over loud-speakers in common community meeting points such as near temples and at Panchayat (village level governing bodies) meetings, or within ‘listener groups’ of women working together in self-help-groups. The audio production was itself done in a small studio where eminent village personalities and local politicians were invited for interviews, local artists were called in for recording folk songs, and school children were invited to recite poems and famous speeches by great personalities. ‘NammaDhwani’ (meaning, our voices), the setup at the village of Buddikote near Bangalore, even pioneered a new concept called cable casting where they used the cable TV network in the village for road cast. This was a brave step in many ways against the repressive government policies—since cable TV was run by local operators, NammaDhwani could purchase air time cheaply for their own programs even though it could not run its own radio station. The channel of course did not have any video—just a blank blue screen—but given the high enervationof television in the community, it was a fantastic outreach channel.

Both the experimental setups near Bangalore and in Gujarat were extremely successful in empowering communities, making them realize their rights, and lobby for their demands from local authorities. Given ready evidence, enterprising activists from organizations such as Drishti, Voices, Ideosync, Maraa, One World South Asia, and many independent individuals incessantly lobbied for a policy change to get permission for radio broadcast. Their efforts were rewarded in late 2006, but the policy still remains mired with many complications.

Community Radio stations also face other challenges, the foremost being financial sustainability and technology.

1. Community Radio stations are permitted 5 minutes of advertising per hour. If well marketed, this could help cover the operational costs to run the station and pay salaries to the staff. But it is practically infeasible for resource-crunched station operators to acquire business skills and look for advertisers while they also produce good quality radio content. We feel that having a central agency like Gram Vaani look for advertising on their behalf will be very helpful. But it is also important to create other revenue streams for community radio. We have a number of interesting ideas based on coupling radio with telephony services that we will outline in a subsequent post.

2. The setup used by most stations is quite basic—just a computer and mic, connected to the FM transmitter via a mixer. Although simplicity is good, the lack of interactive systems such as telephones, field reporting tools, and content sharing, makes it harder to sustain engagement from the community. Even software used to run the radio station can have a significant impact on its success. Most of the stations currently use Winamp to play out radio programs, and have to resort to hacks to do live broadcast, or interleave advertisements between programs. A professional radio automation system is very necessary to scale activities, but currently there is no free and open-source system that provides a one-stop solution to play out, broadcast, telephony, SMS, and Internet content sharing.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMUNITY RADIO

In India, the campaign to legitimise Community Radio began in the **mid-1990s**, soon after the Supreme Court of India ruled in its judgment of February 1995 that "Airwaves are Public Property". This came as an inspiration to groups across the country, but to begin with, only Educational (Campus) Radio stations were allowed, under somewhat stringent conditions.

Anna FM is India's First Campus 'Community Radio', launched on **1<sup>st</sup> February 2004**, which is run by Education and Multimedia Research Centre (EMRC), and all programmes are produced by the students of Media Sciences at Anna University.

On **16 November 2006**, the Government of India notified new Community Radio Guidelines which permit NGOs and other civil society organizations to own and operate Community Radio Stations. About 4,000 Community Radio licenses are on which offer across India, according to Government sources. By **30 November 2008**, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, had received 297 applications for Community Radio licenses, including 141 from NGOs and other civil society organizations, 105 from educational institutions and 51 for 'farm radio' stations to be run by Agricultural Universities and Agricultural Extension Centers (Krishi Vigyan Kendras). Of these, 107 Community Radio stations have been cleared for licensing through the issue of Letters of Intent. 13 Grant of Permission Agreements (GOPA) have been signed with license applicants under the new scheme.

By **30 November 2008**, there were 38 operational Community Radio stations in the country. Of these, two are run by NGOs and the rest by Educational Institutions. The first community-based radio station, licensed to an NGO (as distinct from campus-based radio) was launched on **15 October 2008**, when 'Sangham Radio' in Pastapur village, Medak District, Andhra Pradesh state, was switched on at 11.00am. Sangham Radio, which broadcasts on 90.4 MHz, is licensed to Deccan Development Society (DDS), an NGO that works with women's groups in about 75 villages of Andhra Pradesh. The community radio station is managed by 'General' Narsamma and Alcole Narsamma. The second NGO-led Community Radio station in India was launched on **23 October 2008** at 'TARA gram' in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh state. Named 'Radio Bundelkhand' after the Bundelkhand region of central India where it is located, the radio station is licensed to the Society for Development Alternatives (DA), a Delhi-based NGO. Radio Bundelkhand also broadcasts on 90.4 MHz for four hours a day, including two hours of repeat broadcast.

According to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 47 Community Radio stations were operational in India by **1 November 2009**, including 45 campus-based stations and two Community Radio Stations run by NGOs. By **December 2009**, the number of Community Radio stations run by civil society groups had probably gone up to seven, including Sangham Radio (Pastapur, Medak District, Andhra Pradesh), Radio Bundelkhand (Orchha, Madhya Pradesh), Mann Deshi Tarang (Satara, Maharashtra), Namma Dhvani (Budikote, Karnataka), Radio Mattoli (Wayanad, Kerala), Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli (Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu) and Barefoot (Tilonia, Rajasthan).

By **4 December 2009**, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting had issued 'Grant of Permission Agreements' (GOPA) for 62 Community Radio stations. Most of the GOPAs were issued to Educational Institutions. Among the campus-based Community Radio stations started in 2009 'SARANG 107.8' is the only one in Karnataka, though there are few more which has received SACFA (Standing Committee Clearance for Frequency Allocation). Two other campus-based stations are already operational in Bangalore, Karnataka. SARANG 107.8 is run by St Aloysius College, Mangalore, a coastal town in the southern part of Karnataka. SARANG 107.8 FM means 'all colours' of Mangalore signifying various social, religious, linguistic communities and their harmonious existence- which is a requirement now after the disturbance in the context of attack on churches (post 14 September 2008) by radical saffronists, and later assault on women in a pub in the name of moral policing by similar groups. The local communities of farmers, fisher folk, medical/ legal experts, students, workers contribute regularly to this radio. The radio also spreads messages of peace and harmony among people through programmes based on the need for the same. Health and hygiene, agricultural messages, fisher folk issues, road safety, water conservation, rain water harvesting, folk culture and life, original entertainment by locals and students are the hall mark of this radio. Currently (as on the last day of July 2009), SARANG 107.8 broadcasts in Konkani, Kannada, Tulu, and English languages regularly, besides occasionally broadcasting in Malayalam and Beary languages.

Under the New Community Radio policy in 2006, any not-for-profit 'legal entity'—except individuals, political parties and their affiliates, criminal and banned organizations—can apply for a Community Radio license. Central funding is not available for such stations, and there are stringent restrictions on fundraising from other sources. Only organisations that are registered for a minimum of three years old and with a 'proven' track record of local community service can apply. License conditions implicitly favour well-funded stations as against inexpensive low power operations, several of which (e.g. Mana Radio in Andhra Pradesh and Raghav FM in Bihar) ran successfully on shoe-string budgets before the imposition of any community radio policy.

The licence entitles them to operate a 100 watt (ERP) radio station, with a coverage area of approximately 12 kilometres radius. A maximum antenna height of 30 meters is allowed. Community radio stations are expected to produce at least 50% of their programmes locally, as far as possible in the local language or dialect. The stress is on developmental programming, though there is no explicit ban on entertainment. News programmes are banned on Community Radio in India, as also on commercial FM radio. However, the Government recently clarified that certain categories of news are permitted on radio, including sports news and commentaries, information on traffic and weather conditions, coverage of cultural events and festivals, information on academic events, public announcements pertaining to utilities like electricity and water supply, disaster warnings and health alerts.

Activists and community workers from across the country have banded together under the aegis of the 'Community Radio Forum' in order to coordinate training and support for Community Radio stations, as well as to continue to petition for a more proactive community radio policy. The Community Radio Forum, India, was registered as a 'Society' and 'Trust' on **26 February 2008**. In the meantime, mobile telephone operators have begun to offer commercial broadcast services over GSM, evading completely government restrictions built around traditional concepts of broadcasting technology.

### Shows on Community Radio in Gujarat:

#### 1. Rudi No Radio:

One of the famous Community Radios in Gujarat is Rudi No Radio. It is run by SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association). It was launched in **April 2005**. Its radio frequency is 90.4 it is based out of Ahmadabad district. It caters to the rural area around Ahmadabad. It covers rural geography such as Manipur, Godhavi, Nidhrad, Garodiya, Palodiya, Vanchrada, Unali, Shilaj, Sanad, Jidra, Telav, Shela, Ghuma. This area is in 10 kilometres radius of Ahemdabad-Bopal-Sanad road. Interesting thing about this Community Radio is that it is run by rural women of this area. SEWA is an NGO that works for women empowerment and encourages entrepreneurship among rural women. Rudi No Radio focuses on developmental issues of rural women in Guajarati language. This community radio offers programmes on verity of topics. They include Education, Art and Crafts, Health, Nutrition, Insurance, Agriculture, Environment, Festivals, Communal Harmony and so on. Rudi No Radio tries to cover as many community members as possible. To promote the radio to spread awareness among listeners the team of the radio personally visits the area under community radio. Moreover it organises training and workshops for the listeners, and future listeners. An interesting fact about Rudi No Radio is that the rural women running the radio have no formal training in mass media.

## 2. Campus Community Radio:

The Sardar Patel University of Anand was one of the early birds to start Community Radio in Gujarat state. In fact it is the **First Campus Community Radio** station in Gujarat which has been in the service since **2004**. The frequency of the station is at 90.4. It covers 15 kilometres of area around the university.

It covers various topics which are related to Students of the Sardar Patel University.

It provides an opportunity to students to become active members of the radio. The radio station is also helpful in developing communication skill of students. The areas covered in daily programmes are Lectures, Debates, Panel Discussion, Programmes related to Health Issues, University News, Information about Admissions related issues, Institutional profiles, Cultural programmes and Traditional songs. This radio station programmes benefit all the students of the Sardar Patel University in different ways. Every day five transmission slots of an hour each are given to this community radiostation. The focus is completely on the student community. Students take full participation in radio station activities. They are involved in programme production as well as in technical aspects. This gives lot of confidence to students. This also helps in removing the fear from them. This is also a very good experience for them in radio technology. Many students find it extremely entertaining some also do funny mimicry in Gujarati language.

### Justification of the study in the Department of Extension and Communication:

The Department of Extension and Communication has been at the forefront for providing best of the Education and supporting infrastructure to students in communication field. The works of the Department covers both urban and rural area and has been highly appreciated. The Department fully understands the importance and usefulness of radio for communication for rural and interior areas. The remote area has limited means of communication and in this scenario radio plays a very vital role. The Department has experts and skilled staff to inculcate best of the Education of Communication.

This Department has various courses in the communication and the subjects covered by the courses have latest topics. The Department has also been involved in the research and project work in the field of Media and Communication. The research work includes different communication means from Radio, TV to new age media as well need assessment study of Community Radio in The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. The study, research and project work also help students to have practical knowledge and approach in their studies.

Community Radio is one area which has got high attention of the Department. It envisions the Community Radio not only as a tool of entertainment but also as the agent of change in the countryside. The rural area lacks many basic facilities and faces many problems. The Department wants to use the Community Radio to spread awareness about various issues and also to have debate and discussions on them with possible solutions.

Keeping this in mind the Department is planning to start project for establishment of Community Radio station which will encompass the area of 12 kilometers around the city. Participation of the students in preparing and running programs related to Rural Development will be given priority by the Department in the Community Radio station.

### Eligibility Criteria for the establishment of a Radio Station:

1. It should be explicitly constituted as a 'Non-Profit Organisation' and should have a proven record of at least three years of service to the local community.
2. The Community Radio Station should serve a specific well-defined local community.
3. The ownership and management structure should be such that it reflects the community which it serves. It should only broadcast programmes that cater to the Educational, Developmental, Social and Cultural needs of the community. (Entertainment is not banned explicitly).
4. News Programmes are banned in Community Radio as well as FM Radio in India. The organization must be a Legal Entity i.e. it should be registered (under the registration of Societies Act or any other such Act relevant to the purpose). Regarding the content, the two important provisions made are as follows: At least 50% of content shall be

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generated with the participation of the local community, for which the station has been set up. Programmes should preferably be in the local language and dialect(s).

5. The CRS license thus given by the government entitled them to operate a 100-watt (Effective Radiated Power) radio station, with a coverage area of approximately a 12-km radius. A maximum antenna height of 30 meters is allowed.

### 3. CONCLUSION

At the individual level, Community Radio is a wonderful source of entertainment and relaxation. It is a stress-buster. People can listen to it and can relax for some time. It helps in keeping the anxiety level under control. Also, people even forget their problems, at least for some time by listening Community Radio. Because of the fact that it is a source of information it also gives suggestions and advices. It helps in getting at the bottom of the difficult situations faced by people. There are many individuals who are extremely busy in their routines and they are not aware about many topics and issues. Community Radio is a source of broadening the Horizons of people. One area where Community Radio plays an important role is in the Social Behaviour. It discusses and debates different aspects of social behaviour. It also brings out local Role Models from the community.

Community Radio also gives contribution in increasing self-knowledge and awareness. People listen the ideas of others about themselves helping them to see others' views. One great thing about Community Radio is that it gives confidence to people to share their experiences. People can also increase personal contacts with the help of community radio. There have been many incidences where Community Radio has helped and inspired persons to become agents of change. Many people draw surprising courage from it to perform actions which are necessary to bring reforms. On the whole, for individuals, Community Radio nourishes Self-Belief, improves Decision-Making, provides Valuable Information and makes people feel part of a Community, City or Country.

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