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Community Radio in South Asia: Technology for Community Benefits

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Abstract
Community Radio naturally adapts as the best oral medium for communication in South Asia. Its vast diversity in terms of languages and cultures and the existence of varied topography makes Community Radio an 'appropriate' technology for community communication and empowerment. The history of radio in most South Asian countries is at least half a century old but what is new is the practice of Community Radio, where dialogues flow rather than information. Community Radio is transcending the one-way characteristics of radio, becoming a two-way 'dialogue-based medium' where many different voices are not only heard but also respected through the access and participation of local communities. Comparatively low cost in terms of production, broadcast and reception, the technology used by Community Radio is an Appropriate Communication Technology (ACT) for information deprived communities in South Asia. This paper charts out the use and benefit of Community Radio as a medium for community benefits.

Key words
Community Radio, South Asia, Appropriate Community Technology (ACT), ICT, Community development.

Resum
*La radio comunitària sembla el mitjà de comunicació oral que s'adapta d'una manera més natural a l'Àsia del Sud. La seva vasta diversitat lingüística i cultural, i una gran topografia diversa, fan de la ràdio comunitària un mitjà "adequat" perquè la comunitat es comuniqui i es reafirmi. Fa més de cinquanta anys que la ràdio funciona a la majoria de països de l'Àsia del Sud, però la ràdio comunitària suposa una pràctica innovadora en la qual el pes del diàleg preval sobre la informació. La ràdio comunitària està canviant la naturalesa unidireccional de la ràdio per convertir-la en un "mitjà dialogal" bidireccional on la pluralitat de veus no només s'escolta, sinó que es respecta, deixant que les comunitats locals hi accedeixin i hi participin. La ràdio comunitària té uns costos de producció, d'emissió i de recepció comparativament molt baixos, i la tecnologia que utilitza per arribar a les comunitats més aïllades informativament de l'Àsia del Sud es coneix amb el nom de "tecnologia adequada de la comunicació" (*appropriate communication technology*). Aquest article analitza els usos i els beneficis de la ràdio comunitària com a mitjà per aconseguir beneficis per a tota la comunitat.*

Paraules clau
Ràdio comunitària, Àsia del Sud, tecnologia comunitària adequada (TCA), tecnologies de la informació i de la comunicació, desenvolupament comunitari.

Introduction

According to community media activist Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, development communication is "people taking into their hands the communication processes" making their "voices heard", establishing "horizontal dialogues" with decision-makers on matters affecting their lives to "ultimately achieve social changes" for their own benefits (Dagron 2009, 453-465).

Although planned and executed with good intentions, most development actions (for the marginalized and the poor) fail or meet with untimely collapse owing to a lack of acknowledgment of local cultures and the participation of local communities. He points out that, very often, most of the "powerful groups of institutions" are only interested in including "knowledge and savvy" components for the 'target communities' in their heavily funded projects. From his experience of over 30 years in the community development field, he succinctly narrates communities' own voices: "they – planners, funding agencies, aid organizations – will not allow us to do it, they will stop the funding, [and] they do not like to hear what we really think about their projects and programmes" (Dagron 2009, 453-465).

Similarly, if the communication process does not start with

questioning the internal democracy in a community, it will contribute to more inequalities rather than overcoming them. Free media provide a place for challenges, where free opinions are played out without any fear of coercion or control, represented as a true public sphere.

Jürgen Habermas (1964: 73) says "citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of the freedom of assembly and association and freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest". His concept of the public sphere envisions 'citizen media' or the media fully owned, controlled and operated by citizens for the free flow of ideas and opinions on the matters in their lives, by themselves, in a fully unrestricted environment free from either state or other influential power players in communities or societies.

An analyst of communication rights, Jean d'Arcy, within two decades of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, prescribed a review of the 'right to information' (Article 19) as "the right of man to communicate" (quoted in Beltrán 1979: 7). This clearly shows which is the dominant model of communication and media and also indicates that the generalized concept of communication predominated over a more limited view of information.

An all-encompassing communicating (or communication) element as a process was absent from the linear model of information from Harold Laswell's channel-effects theory to David Berlo's S-M-C-R model. The mass media's potential as a 'communicator' channel or a platform for 'communication' was smartly sidelined for the purpose of developing it as a persuasive tool to the benefit of Western corporate interests. Latin American scholars strongly criticized such a hegemonic role of mass communication and argued for the liberating potential of the mass media (Beltrán 1979).

Writing in 1979 for UNESCO, a veteran Bolivian critical communication researcher, Luis Ramiro Beltrán Salomón, said "the developing countries had realized long before 1970 that their economic and political life was dominated by the developed countries to such a degree that development was impeded. What is new is the full realization that such a situation of dependence also exists in the cultural sphere" (Beltrán 1979: 1). His famous writing on "horizontal communication" was, at that time, an alternative not only to the dominant paradigm of the linear model of media effects but also a valid proposal to claim against the media hegemony of developed countries.

A counter communication media, channelled to re-establish its "egalitarian" potential as a community media, is "implicated in an emerging global struggle for communicative democracy" (Howley 2005: 259). The recent debates on media and democracy have gone beyond the universal notion of the freedom of expression and towards specific attributes such as media reform, media justice, inclusive "mediascapes" (Appadurai 1996: 38) and the creation of alternative grassroots communication networks. Saima Saeed lists five key players in the process of "media democracy", these being the nation-state, the market, multilateral forums, local and global civil society movements (Saeed 2009, 466-478). We add one more to her list, namely 'Appropriate Community Technology' (ACT).

This paper is based on the broader scenario of the Community Radio movement in Nepal and India to argue for Appropriate Community Technology for community benefits. First, we will summarize, define and explain the practices of Community Radio, comparing and contrasting its use and benefits, and then define the concept of Appropriate Community Technology. The paper narrates in great detail how Community Radio serves the purpose of ACT in South Asia. We will compare experiences in the Community Radio sectors in Nepal and India vis-à-vis the 'appropriateness' of the technology. The paper ends with a conclusion drawn from the experiences of Nepal and India in arguing for Community Radio as ACT for larger community benefits.

A case for Community Radio

Community Radio is a well-acknowledged tool that supports participation and representation for the underserved and other similar communities to have their 'voice' represented through the medium of radio. Most Community Radio approaches use a FM radio broadcast technology to attain their goals. Radio is often quoted as a "poor man's medium" because of its cheap technology implementation both at the broadcasting as well as at the receiving end. Community Radio is a medium that well serves the communication needs of communities and groups that are not represented by the mainstream media for various reasons.

Kevin Howley (2005: 40) defines Community Radio as "at once a response to the encroachment of the global upon the local as well as an assertion of local cultural identities and socio-political autonomy in light of these global forces". We can deduce that technology is the element that allows us to extrapolate the benefits of Community Radio.

Mainstream radio uses a technology that requires technical know-how and understanding to be used as a broadcast medium. Community Radio is no exception but what makes it different is that it is more than just simple radio technology. The characteristically different ownerships and organization processes separate Community Radio from other forms of radio broadcasting (either public or private) and make Community Radio a tool for community participation and empowerment.

Community Radio is recognized by AMARC (World Association of Community Broadcasters) as a unique contribution to media pluralism and an ideal means of fostering freedom of expression, development of culture and identity, and active participation in local life.

Community Radio broadcasters from 20 countries of the AMARC Asia and Pacific region met in the Indian city of Bangalore in February 2010 to assess their past activities and

to formulate future strategies. The second Asia Pacific regional conference issued the Bangalore Declaration, calling for supporting initiatives to aid access to digital and other technological opportunities to enable community broadcasting on an ever-widening scale. The AMARC conference also highlighted the need to create spaces on the airwaves for diverse and marginalized voices, irrespective of caste, creed, race, colour, gender, sexuality, faith, and abilities or other differences (AMARC Asia Pacific).

Radio's community benefits have been well documented in its history. Radio was used by "exploiting the medium's ability to collapse time and space in order to enhance social interaction within and between communities" (Howley 2005: 239). This is radio's true democratic potential. On the other hand, some earlier critics such as those from the Frankfurt School argued that radio organizes its listeners not as citizens but as consumers and divides them into further fragments to sell them to the advertisers. Albeit never undermining its potential to be a liberator, provided its organization is weaned out from the clutches of profit-making corporations and hegemonic neo-capitalists.

Community Radio originates from the desire to encompass the communication needs of the most disadvantaged and minority communities, and is also one of the best tools for poverty alleviation. P. Sharma (2002) observes that Community Radio addresses "the issues of communities producing their own radio programmes, of regulation, of the negligible costs involved and of the importance they have for the community concerned", "used effectively, radio could make a real difference in the lives of poor, illiterate populations who can neither read a newspaper nor afford to purchase a television receiver". It is this empowerment of the community within the power relationship between the media and its audience that defines Community Radio.

Bruce Girard (2007: 3) lists five points to define Community Radio. They are community-based (location, ownership and control), independent (not relational but on influence and transparency), not-for-profit (but for sustenance), for the community (social, economic and cultural benefits of the community), and participatory (at all levels of programming, operation and finance).

Community Radio stations, especially in rural areas, provide an important social infrastructure. In Nepal, Community Radio has helped in conflict transformation and peace building by promoting human rights and a culture of peace through messages, awareness programmes and 'social narration'. In some cases it has even sustained injuries to help resolve conflict or at least reduce its intensity and by helping communities to cope with conflict by showing working alternatives to the conflict's victims.

Drawing from Michael Shipler (2006: 10), Community Radio can personalize an ideology or myth by giving them names and voices and making one side (in the conflict) more humane than the other (but conversely 'hate speech' could aggravate the conflict), in order to mitigate the negative effect of conflict.

The whole idea of Community Radio rests on the demystification of radio, which means demystifying the technology of organizing, producing and broadcasting radio. Demystifying technology could turn the Community Radio stations into community technology centres. Communities should be able to use and access technologies available with radio.

Some critics of the integration of new ICT with radio have taken technology as granted and unavoidable. One such critic, Eronini R. Megwa, asserts that new ICT is "inevitable", "indispensable" and has an "inescapable" impact on society (Megwa 2007, 49-66). Explaining the empowering aspect of technology, critics tend to accept the technological aspect as a given and seldom have they thought of the possibility of alternatives in technological choice and uses.

There is a need to define media beyond "technological message channels" and towards a consolidated analysis of media as a "complex *socio*-technical" entity (emphasis original). John Downing sometimes considers small and community media as "social movement media" (Downing 2008, 40-50) or recently as "nano-media" (Pajnik and Downing 2008, 7-16). Such a socio-technical aspect of Community Radio is worthy of analysis due to its community benefits.

Appropriate Community Technology (ACT)

The role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in community development has been well documented by many scholars. Lisa Servon (2002: 1) acknowledges that "the community technology movement which employs Information Technology (IT) to empower historically disadvantaged individuals and communities demonstrates the potential of IT to serve as a tool of social change." When communication technology adopts the IT component it is generally known as ICT. For clarity we will use ICT to define the technology that uses both new and old information technology for communication. In its simplest form, new ICT is the internet and the old is radio broadcasting.

Taking ICT's potential empowering role for the benefits and advantages of otherwise disadvantaged communities has been the subject for many research studies, both in developed as well as in the developing world for quite some time (Servon 2002). Recent attempts have been to combine the old form of ICT with the new one to address the communication needs of the community in many peri-urban and rural communities in Asia, Africa and South America. UNESCO has established 40 Community Multimedia Centres (CMCs) in 15 developing countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean (UNESCO 2006).

The CMC concept combines old ICT with a new one. It has been established in those places where some type of community communication infrastructure already exists. CMC supplements Community Radio with a telecentre and a telecentre

with Community Radio. A telecentre is a public place where people can access computers, the internet, and other digital technologies that enable them to gather information, create, learn and communicate with others while they develop essential digital skills.

Community Radio, either combined with or without the new ICT, has been an effective tool for community communication through participation. As outlined at the beginning of the paper, ICT intervention failing to adapt to local cultures and allowing community participation has merely been technology in the communities per se but not 'community technology'.

Here we will draw on comparisons by Roberto Verzola (2004) on the benefits of Community Radio over the internet supported by communication initiatives to define the difference and suitability of Community Radio as Appropriate Community Technology (ACT) or, in our understanding, an 'empowering tool for disadvantaged communities'.

Verzola (2004) has taken a series of comparative indicators to differentiate the effectiveness, popularity and benefits of Community Radio over the internet. Although he is not interested in covering the combined technology of radio and the internet, we will explicate such a combination. Based on Community Radio stations in the Philippines, he bases his considerations on: "user onetime entry cost; recurring user costs; network server onetime entry costs; recurring network server costs; equipment life; impact on jobs; local culture; production of equipment; source of information; potential reach; best use; interactivity; advertising; information goods marketing; sensory demands; health issues; accessibility; gate keepers; default paradigms; new technologies; government attitude; development agencies attitude; NGO attitude; benefits to rich countries; and proposed alternative approaches" (Verzola 2004: 169). As he compares appropriateness between Community Radio (Appropriate Technology - AT) versus the internet (IT), we extrapolate AT to ATC (Appropriate Communication Technology), comparing some of the relevant comparable indicators drawing on South Asia.

Community Radio: ACT in South Asia

South Asia, which consists of the nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, is ethnically diverse, with more than 2,000 ethnic entities with populations ranging from hundreds of millions to small tribal groups. Many invading and native societies have produced composite cultures with many common traditions and beliefs in the region. But the traditions of different ethnic groups in South Asia have diverged throughout earlier times, sometimes giving rise to strong local traditions such as the distinct Nepali culture crossing across Nepal and India, the Bengali culture between India and Bangladesh, and the South Indian Tamil culture cross-bordering India and Sri Lanka.

The peoples of South Asia speak at least twenty major languages and if one includes the more important dialects, the count rises to over two hundred (Bose and Jalal, 2004: 4). South Asia today is strategically a vital part of the world which has significant implications for the international order at the beginning of the new millennium.

The three major countries in South Asia, namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, were an integral part of British India before its independence in 1947 owing to a general common culture including the commonly understood Hindi language. The remaining nations of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka are not alien to both 'commonly found culture' and the language.

South Asia, which accounts for 10 percent of the Asian continent, in contrast shares 40 percent of the continent's total population. The main differences between the countries of South Asia are in terms of geography and population, and that too only in comparison with India. India occupies 64 percent of the land mass and 74 percent of the population of South Asia.

In spite of India being the biggest and oldest democracy in South Asia, the credit for democratizing airwaves for the benefit of its people goes to one of the region's smallest countries and its newest democratic republic, Nepal.

As South Asia is diverse in terms of languages and cultures and the existence of predominately pre-literate cultures and more dialects than languages, Community Radio naturally adapts as the best oral medium for communication. Another advantage is that local, small-scale assembly of equipment is entire possible in Community Radio. The medium of radio and its technology is quite adaptive among the South Asian population. The history of radio in most South Asian countries is at least half a century old.

Now we will outline some comparable indicators in South Asia extrapolated from Verzola (2004: 169) to define Community Radio as Appropriate Community Technology (ACT) over Information Communication Technology (ICT).

There is virtually zero user one-time entry cost for Community Radio as even the most destitute communities in South Asia could afford a simple FM radio set that costs less than US$ 1. Looking at the mobile phone penetration among rural communities, the recurring cost also falls to zero, otherwise it would be the cost of two double-A size batteries every few months. On the establishment side, FM radio still has advantages over setting up internet-based telecentres due to high infrastructural cost (electricity, network server, subscription fees etc.). There is no recurring network cost except the occasional turnover of technical people and no connectivity cost. As FM technology is a relatively "mature and standard", a community benefits more from its sturdiness in terms of maintenance of both broadcast equipment and the receiver sets. All of these much lower costs for the user rightly justify Community Radio as a "poor man's medium".

Community Radio is best suited to the dissemination of local

information, for building local public opinion, and strengthening local community. In remote areas, where it is the only contact for isolated families with the outside world, a Community Radio that can receive phone calls from the outside has also been used to announce urgent messages to individuals/families. Say, for example, from a migrant labourer overseas to his/her friends and relatives back home. This has been practised in rural communities with the lowest telecommunication density.

In spite of radio being a one-way medium, due to its adaptability and existence in the local information ecology, Community Radio has high interactivity through the involvement and participation of local communities. Programmes in the languages of many marginalized and out of mainstream communities in Community Radio are good examples in Nepal.

It is interesting to note that, because it has no visual input, radio can actually encourage the use of one's imagination, thus directly contributing to the empowerment of disadvantaged communities by allowing them to reflect on their situation by 'making their voices heard'.

The countries in South Asia have ensured, either through court rulings or by sustained lobbying and campaign movements, that 'the radio spectrum is a public space'. Nevertheless, an inherent public right to use the 'airwaves' has been restricted by governments through exclusionary licensing requirements, based on arguments such as "the radio spectrum is limited, so its use must be regulated" and "national security requires the strict regulation of radio transmitters lest they be used for antigovernment activity". Consequently, the right to access Community Radio becomes a paradox of radio as a medium to develop the community. Interestingly, the radio's other gatekeepers are the communities themselves, so the issue of gatekeeping is minimal from the operation side. A technology called spread spectrum allows many stations to share a segment of the radio spectrum with minimal interference. This technology is the answer to the so-called scarcity of the radio spectrum.

The default paradigm of the Community Radio is local orientation, oral tradition, community-centeredness, local culture, and 'intermediate technology advocacy'. So it could serve as the Appropriate Community Technology for community development and empowerment.

Adopting new technology at first hand invites some uncertainty regarding our quality of life. The famous 'Diffusion of Innovation' theory also incorporates this point, when it segmented technology use into "five" different categories of technology "adopters" (Rogers 2005: 247). The development of new technology affects every aspect of our natural life and makes it a community practice. Naturally, such an authoritative element would be expected to be a part of debates and discussions within the community of its influence. But this is not found to happen; rather it seems mystifying and our sufferance in adaptation goes unheard. It is the culture of technology that the users and participants of the technology do not find themselves participating in forming opinions about its uses or misuses. We would be told of its misuse by the innovators at a stage where the repercussions have already cost us our lives. Uses and benefits of technologies are translated into its economic transactions.

Such a lack of broad participation in conversations about technology seriously impoverishes the ways technologies are brought into our everyday lives. One of the alternatives to this practice is to discover how more people can be more fully engaged in important discussions and decisions about technology for their use. One such platform is its demystification within the community.

According to Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day (1999), different batches of social and political thinkers, including those of Lewis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, Neil Postman, Langdon Winner, and Ivan Illich, have tried to understand "the interrelationships among technology and history, technology and social institutions, and technology and politics". They point out that nothing about tool use is fundamentally new to us as a species, but that our ability to absorb new tools and the different ways of doing and being that emerge with technological change are challenged by "the avalanche of innovation" we are experiencing. They point out that, ever since the publication in 1954 of Jacques Ellul's masterpiece *The Technological Society*, social critics have sounded alarms about the stress to the human mind and soul of having to adapt constantly to new technology (Nardi; O'Day 1999: 26-27).

The same may be true when the new technology of communication is introduced in rural communities. Community Radio as a new technology might replace, supplement or contradict with the traditional technology of communication in a particular community. This will invite some unintended effects caused by new technologies. Some of these unintended effects will be fortuitous and some less so. It is both misleading and patronizing to suggest otherwise to people who will live with the consequences of change. If we expect such unintended consequences and rather examine and cope with them, the intended consequences of implementing the new technology might not suffer.

As in the case of Community Radio, we would discuss two scenarios from Nepal and India regarding the setting up of Community Radio. Although these two South Asian countries have commonalities in culture, language and even socio-political realities, the case of Community Radio is different. Nepal is the first country in South Asia to begin experimenting with community-owned independent radio from 1996 and has more than a decade of history of Community Radio with a significant number of Community Radio stations covering almost all its 75 districts. In India Community Radio came rather indirectly and community-owned radio broadcasts are quite a recent phenomenon, but India's first campus Community Radio was established in Anna University in Chennai as Anna CR in 2004.

Nepal: A pioneer Community Radio country in South Asia

In Nepal, the airwaves opened up gradually after the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 1990. The new constitution promulgated in 1990, in the changed political environment, explicitly guaranteed the fundamental rights of the people, including freedom of expression. As in the other countries with systems of democratic governance, the Nepali Constitution (1990) accepted the right to information as a guiding principle of state policy. It also guaranteed freedom of print and publication, which are believed to be necessary for human development. Although these constitutional rights did not explicitly mention the right to broadcast, this was inherent in the line of media and press freedom as set forth in the Constitution.

The formulation of the National Communication Policy and enactment of the National Broadcasting Act in 1993, in the spirit of the Constitution, paved a favourable way for the possible involvement of the private sector in establishing free and independent radio in Nepal. Moreover, the Supreme Court of Nepal interpreted that unrestricted and guaranteed Rights to Information were essential for a democratic system.

The overall political environment after the People's Movement in 2006 (which ultimately established Nepal as a republic, removing 230 years of monarchy) was favourable to the growth of independent Nepali broadcast media and so was the popular and cheap FM technology for radio broadcast. Radio became readily available to prospective private as well as community operators in Nepal. Progress has been slow over the period of ten years from 1996-2006 and somewhat difficult, for Community Radio as well as for democracy. But wherever it was established, it has become clear that community broadcasting can play a specific and crucial role in encouraging public participation, strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity and giving voice to the poor and otherwise marginalized groups.

With the establishment of Radio Sagarmatha in 1996 as the first Community Radio in South Asia, Nepal marked the transfer of control over broadcasting from the government to the people. But radio was based in the national capital Kathmandu, where people had access to many other media for education, information and entertainment. At the same time, independent radio was not available for the communication needs of the larger part of the Nepali population living outside the capital city, Kathmandu. After continuous struggles to expand access to the rural and peri-urban communities, independent radio stations were gradually established outside the capital. Within one year of commencement of the broadcast of Radio Sagarmatha, Radio Lumbini in the southern Terai district of Rupendehi and Radio Madanpokhara in western mid-hill district of Palpa were set up, away from the country's centre. According to the Nepal Ministry of Information and Communication, by the end of 2009 more than 150 Community Radio stations got broadcasting licences and 135 of them are broadcasting, making Community Radio available to almost all its 75 districts. Interestingly, Nepal accounts for a mere 3 percent of South Asia in terms of land and 2 percent of its total population. Nonetheless, it has huge numbers of private radio stations serving a variety of communities, cultures and geography within its area of operation. The total number of private radio stations (both community and commercial) currently stands at 325.

The instances of radio in the community opened up many avenues for its members, mainly young ones. As radio was with them, they also went with radio. Many young people got themselves trained in the technological aspects of radio production, editing, and broadcasting. Some were trained under the 'capacity development' programmes of a variety of national and international aid agencies, but many got themselves signed up with a 'few months package' training, either in nearby cities or in the capital. And others, though in very small numbers, got 'on the job training'. This clearly shows the 'appropriateness' of the technology used by the media of their community.

In a country afflicted by long-running and violent conflict and a dwindling economy, all the trainees were unemployed young workers. These youths were accepted on these training courses in anticipation that they would get those jobs readily available in the Community Radio stations. This was quite clear as the numbers of new Community Radio stations rapidly grew over a matter of a couple of years in Nepal. Young hopes were boosted by the end of the more than a decade long armed conflict on the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (in 2007) between the government and the militant Maoist party. But the use, availability and anticipated benefits of the 'appropriate technology' have created an undue pressure on Community Radio stations. The situation in Nepal invited a 'latent hostility' between young hopefuls and the radio stations in their community.

The other unintended consequence of 'appropriateness' is the very high turnover among radio technical staff. In many personal interviews with authors, many Community Radio managers, mainly from the rural areas of Nepal, complained of the difficulty in retaining their technical staff in all the fields of production, editing and studio control. They felt incapacitated by the high technical staff turnover. This was a major problem for the in-house categories of trainees. After getting trained and getting to grips with the technology, young hopefuls get lured to the town/city based jobs on audio production, or to 'attractively paid' jobs at rival commercial radio stations. The station managers felt cheated in their 'good intention' of training up such 'volunteers' and were grossly unhappy to find their radio stations becoming 'a training centre' rather than 'a community service centre'.

India: the paradox of the largest democracy

India being the world's largest democracy (in terms of population) and having a sustained democratic governance of over

six decades, it has had its struggles to establish community-owned radio stations (Pavarala and Malik 2007). Only in 2008 a 'real Community Radio' started its operation in South Asia's giant democracy.

The state-owned All India Radio gave up its monopoly in 2001, with a decision to issue licences to private parties to start radio stations. This follows the Indian Supreme Court's ruling of 1995 declaring the airwaves as public property, to be used for promoting public good and ventilating a plurality of views. It noted that Indian broadcasting was being governed by archaic laws.

Despite a clear mandate to serve as the community ('public') utility, Indian radio broadcasting shifted from being a government monopoly to highly-commercialized broadcasting. In July 2001, India's first privately-owned broadcasting station went on air in Bangalore. In fact, it is owned by Rupert Murdoch's Star network. The irony was that the government had opened up airwaves even for foreigners but it had been hesitant to allow community radio that involves people's participation.

On an experimental basis, India's first community radio was launched at Orvakallu in Kurnool district of the state of Andhra Pradesh in October 2002, as part of the communications programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Woman members of the Mandal Ikya Sangham spent Rs. 25,000, (about $500) more to set up the radio station, named Mana Radio. The radio station was located in a small room in this village. The Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) provided technical support and gave training to the women in running the station. It broadcast 45 minutes of programming every Monday from 6 to 6.45 pm. Radio signals were being broadcast at FM 90.0 MHz. But later the government closed downed this radio station saying that running such a station is illegal.

After a lot of delaying tactics, the government passed a Community Radio policy in 2002, which came under immense criticism from grassroots radio activists in the country. A public petition to the Prime Minister 'Urging the Inclusion of the Right of the Communities within the Community Radio Policy' noted that the 2002 policy was 'discriminatory towards communities'. The policy holds that only well-established educational institutions or organizations can apply for a Community Radio licence. So, what has been given in the name of Community Radio is in reality campus radio (Saieed 2009).

This new trend of campus Community Radio has been tried out with licences for Community Radio issued to premier education institutions since 2004 as a poor substitute for giving licences to communities themselves. Of course, non-governmental organizations too have started getting license since 2008. The new community radio policy announced in November 2006 allows civil society organizations, NGOs and other non-profits to apply for community radio licences making 'citizen radio' a reality. The policy will not only open up community radio to NGOs, self-help groups and other community-based organizations, but it will also allow them to become self-supporting through advertising revenue.

Some grassroots organizations (NGOs) in India had initiated radio projects to support their work on community development. Vinod Pavarala and Kanchan K. Malik (2007: 109) list four such initiatives in great detail. The three of them namely Alternative for India Development (AID) project in Daltonganj (Jharkhand), Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) project in Bhuj (Gujarat) and Deccan Development Society (DDS) project in Pastapur (Andhra Pradesh) use leased out time from the regional broadcast of state-owned All India Radio to broadcast produced by local communities. The fourth one, the VOICES project in Budhikote (Karnataka), notably uses cable as a medium for broadcast. But all of them are forerunners of NGO community radio in India.

In 2001, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) proposed 40 radio stations named Gyan Vani in its study centres located in various colleges across the country planned for extension and training. Now Gyan Vani is a network of 44 FM community radio stations operating as educational community radio. The original idea of starting Gyan Vani as Community Radio was that, in principle, 40% of the content should have community programming. But vaguely defined "communities" in such radio are largely student communities. These stations are mainly for educational radio, though they also cater for community needs. With a programming breakdown of 60 percent education and a 40 percent community-based content, Gyan Vani is India's precursor to community-campus radio. But being controlled by educational institutions, such initiatives can usher in community participation only to a limited extent.

Conclusions

As Langdon Winner (quoted in Nardi and O'Day 1999: 41) suggests, the real issue about control is that of unintended consequences, or what he calls "technological drift". We cannot possibly expect to predict or steer all of the results of innovation. In non-technological areas that are not so saturated with visions of progress, we probably understand this better and would not expect to stay in complete control. The rhetoric about technological change tends to ignore the possibility of either unknown or negative side effects. This rhetoric inhibits our ability to examine our circumstances with a reflective eye.

In contradiction to the aspirations of some (technically trained youths) in the community, Nepal's Community Radio stations are not in a position to give employment. Even though in a very latent state (as reflected in interviews with community station managers and radio board members), a confrontation with potential community volunteers might cost Community Radio the price of both 'identity' and 'existence'. A fundamental principle of Community Radio is to mobilize

(potential) volunteers from the community. Volunteers represent the communities inside the radio station and it is a quite crucial mechanism for enabling meaningful community participation in programming, operating and financing that is the essence of Community Radio. Sans volunteers, a legitimate question of 'Who does radio represent in the community?' stands tall and difficult. This was a completely unintended consequence of initiating Community Radio in Nepal and was propelled more by a technological aspect of Community Radio.

Similarly, the appropriateness of the technology in attracting youths in providing jobs for Community Radio has been a paradox. On the one hand, Community Radio stations raise a hue and cry about retaining trained technical staff and, on the other hand, there are several 'technically trained' young people awaiting an 'induction call' for 'paid jobs' rather than volunteer service. It is a matter of principle rather than practice that Community Radio stations wait for a 'volunteer solution' to this problem. In many situations this stagnancy has brought such an infliction that some rural Community Radio stations have used their 'network partners' to save them from misery, which sometimes mean a compromising contract, even with commercial station.

In India, as the technology for Community Radio lies within an education institution, the immediate broadcast community (other than the student community) finds it problematic to use it for larger community benefits. Equally important, there is a danger that the world's largest democracy, with cunning bureaucracy, will limit the expansion of community radio by exerting 'technology' control and falsifying the notion of community.

Without these little deviations in practice, which could be overcome through proper planning and execution, by and large Community Radio is a technology for community benefits. Its positive impact on fulfilling the communication needs of the marginalized and other communities at a disadvantage cannot be overstated.

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