A Voice for the Voiceless:
The Role of Community Radio in the Development of the Rural Poor

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Abstract
More than 850 million people in developing countries are excluded from a wide range of information and knowledge, with the rural poor in particular remaining isolated from both traditional media and new information and communication technologies, which would improve their livelihoods and development pattern (FAO, 2001).Considering the socio-cultural and geographical structure of rural, remote people community radio has been found more effective and inclusive medium to provide equitable information and knowledge among the masses. The aim of this article is to analyze the contribution of community radio (henceforth CR) movement for conscientization and development of deprived rural people in various parts of world in general and south Asia (India) in particular. The analysis indicates that the community radio movement has created grassroots-level participation and horizontal circulation of ideas among the deprived rural communities, which are necessary pre-conditions to democratization of communication and redistribution of power.

Introduction
The rational for Community Radio in India is strong on legal/constitutional, social, cultural and development grounds. India is multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious with more than 4000 castes, tribes and nomadic communities. If one considers village as a community then there more that 0. 5 million villages and hence communities. Today's era of cable channels and open skies, privatization, liberalization and globalization not only promote cultural imperialism but also threaten to dislocate ecosystems, cottage and small scale industries and local jobs and employment pattern in India. The Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have been playing a significant role in the process of development in India. Besides dealing with employment, agriculture, poverty, environment, water management, gender and socio-economic issues some of them have been also using media technology for communication of development messages and hence empowerment of deprived and marginalized communities. The global media has become a powerful tool for controlling people and has been developing as a profit sector where people's voices are often quite marginalized and neglected. The nature of communication is having a great impact on our life and livelihood. The role of controlled media is dominating the world where the poor rural people have least the access in the decision making process. Expression of their views and opinions are frequently left out of the development process. The influence of government over media also impedes and in that way, ultimately blocks the freedom of people's choices for expressing their ideas, views and ethos. But for equitable society, people's participation in the development process is considered as a major factor. Media systems have been commercializing and concentrating at a lightning speed, threatening to destroy participatory public-oriented media. Powerful commercial lobby groups are draining up international media laws and regulations, creating a new system that is even more self-serving. Traditional media, which is operated and controlled either by the government or corporate bodies, ensures little active participation of the poor and disadvantage groups. Considering the socio-economic and cultural condition and the motion of information and knowledge exclusion in the South Asian counters, radio can contribute a lot to the community to make their life better. Several studies (Pavarala et al, 2007; Islam,2002; Ambekar, 2004; Kumar,2003) clearly advocated that, community radio stations can play a significant role in increasing and promoting participation, and opinion sharing, improving and diversifying knowledge and skills and in catering

to health and cultural needs of the poor deprived rural communities, especially in the underdeveloped countries. The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of the oppressed people and generally as a tool for development (AMARC, 1981).

Thus, this paper attempts to examine various experiments in community radio/media used in different parts of the country as well as abroad for conscientization of the people and their development in order to draw certain pragmatic policy suggestions for the sustainability of rural community radio initiatives in India. The paper is mainly based on a review of the empirical studies conducted by media professionals and authors personal discussions with researchers and grass roots level workers those are exclusively connected with community radio movement in Australia, South Africa and Asia including India.

Case Studies form Developed Countries: Australia and South Africa:

Radio is an inexpensive medium, with comparatively simple technology, and more suitable for illiterate and peasant communities and societies characterized by oral and folk traditions. (Pavaral, Vinod 2003: 2166) Radio media allows the people to listen to its programmes without disturbing their household chores and other activities.

Community Radio has been successfully carried out in developed countries such as Australia and South Africa. Australia has a Three-tier system of Broadcasting for well over 20 years. The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) is the national representative and coordinating body for community broadcasters.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) lists down criteria for Community Radio such as:
a) Non profit motive.
b) Represent community interest.

c) Encourage members to participate and so no. (Tacchi, Joe 2003: 2183)

There are approximately 200 licensed community radio stations in Australia. They are not only well monitored, but also provided grants for maintenance. There are two types of stations: i) catering to the geographical community and ii) those serving the community of interests. The Community Radio center's try their best to be self supporting and reach the local people effectively. 'Radio Goolari' is an aboriginal radio station in Broome, Western Australia. Tachi (ibid:2186) observes: "The three main trends emerging through my recent research on community-based media in Australia can be described as enterprise development, diversification, and the incorporation of new technologies, the last often as a means of the first two."

South Africa

South Africa has also introduced community radio with more progressive broadcasting policies. 'ALX FM' and 'Radio KC' in Paarl, 50 miles north-east of Cape Town were doing fairly well and trying to tackle key social issues such as AIDS, crime and juvenile crime. Unlike Australia they do face financial problems. The lessons to be learnt by India are:

a) Recognition of the crucial role of funding for the community media centers and
b) Early establishment and licensing of University-based stations.

Tacchi (ibid: 2187) aptly concludes: "This in essence is the key lesson that India can take from experiences elsewhere. State support in terms of adequate legislation and funding, especially in the early stages of the development of community radio in India is clearly the key to the development of effective citizens' media."

Case studies from South Asia:

Various lessons can be learnt from the experiments in developing countries owned radio in south Asia such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Philippines.

In Nepal there are three types of radio organizations:

1)   Co-Cooperative model: Radio Lumbini, Butwal

About 100 share holders contributed about Rs.20000 each to set up the nation in 1998. The station is owned managed and operated by this cooperative. There are also 600 friends of radio Lumbini each paying Rs.100.Annually the station receives additionally funding from 71 village development committees in the area. A combination of paid staff and volunteers make the programme. With infrastructural support from DANIDA and UNESCO, they broadcast for about 12 hours a day. The schedule includes four local news bulletins a day and a range of programmes on health, agriculture, gender equality, children's education and good governance.

2)   Local Administration model: Radio Madanpokhara

Initially funded by UNESCO, the station is owned by the village development committee. The station went on air in April 2000 with the support of a trust fund constituted by 65 members, each of whom paid Rs.1000.It has also collected Rs.400000 to build a radio station, while running costs are met through donations from the VDC and from Tansen-Palpa District development committee, as well as through advertising, sponsorship and entry fees to the station. With a 100-watt transmitter, potential audiences of 400,000 people can hear the station in palpa and seven surrounding district. The station has been playing an active role in development, with programmes to improve forestry and farming and the environment as well as working to eliminate social discrimination, injustice, and superstition. 'Radio Madanpokhara' has enhanced the self respect and identity of rural people in Nepal.

 3) NGO model: Radio Sagarmatha, Katmandu valley

Owned and managed by NEFEJ (the Nepal forum of environmental Journalists), this station was started with the support of UNESCO and has been a source of inspiration to the community radio movement in south Asia. Described as an independent public interest radio station, 60 percent of its funds come from donors, 30 percent of it comes from strategic advertisement and 10 percent of it comes from other sources. It has a paid staff of about 30 and many volunteers. Since it started broadcasting in 1997, radio sagarmatha assume the mandate of covering and discussing issues of public significance. It provides a forum to discuss local ideas and culture, and is actively involved in social change. It also broadcasts programmes in minority languages and on folk and contemporary music as well as programmes for women, children, and semi-urban listeners. Committed to promoting community broadcasting in other parts of Nepal, radio sagrmatha and its pioneers have lent strong support for similar efforts elsewhere in the country.

Success of community radio in the America and Canada is well known, and in Nepal too this revolution began when radio Sagarmatha became the first community radio station to be established in the entire south Asia. Radio sagarmatha is run by a group of environmental journalist, and the success has spawned more than five community stations in different parts of Nepal. Sagrmatha itself means Mount Everest in Nepali, and continues to be on top of the world for its unique bearing in the field of community radio.

In Bangladesh, though the importance of harnessing ICTs for development is realized, yet Bangladesh coastal NGOs network for radio and communication trust (BGNN), complains that this medium gets step motherly treatment, It is feared that radio if used for building awareness among the citizens of this region, may create problem for maintaining the elite's dominance.

Researcher Bruce Gerard and Jo Vander Spek, examined potential for community based radio in

strife-torn Afghanistan where more than 70% are illiterate, 85% among women.

Afghanistan's infrastructural facility of basic amenities for its 37,000 Villages is poor. Hardly 4% for household have electricity and even in big cities the telecommunication infrastructure is also poor.

Under the above conditions, Community-radio can be effective means for entertainment, Communication & nation building.

One of the latest observation by BBC shows that only 1 out of 4 persons in India listen to radio. It is true that there have been cases of measure of radio in Sri Lanka by LTTE and broadcasting in urban, yet India has been very slow in its communication radio programme.

In Thailand, communities cannot set up station because parliament has not yet passed laws.

In Philippines, there are over 328 AM and 317 FM community radio stations fairly. They cater to different communities. There are also successful cases of radio used for development in other countries such as Colombo, Bolwa, El Salvador, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Madagascar, Tanzania and elsewhere.

Development of rural community radio in the Indian context: Mixed reactions

Popularly known as "Radio Farm Forum" was one of the earliest efforts in the use of radio for the development of rural peasants in India. The experiment was carried out from February to April 1956 in five districts of Maharashtra state by All India Radio (AIR). Rural listener groups were organized, who would listen to radio broadcasts twice a week at 6.30 p.m. for half an hour. " The group then stayed together for discussion of what they had heard, the discussion lasted usually, about half an hour, seldom less, frequently more" (Neurath et al1959:7). The summative impact evaluation indicated positive outcome of radio rural forum. Impressive knowledge gains as a result of radio

listening were reported across illiterates and literates, agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists, village leaders and others. However, over a period of time the project withered away and could not be operationalised for large-scale implementation in one form or the other. Lack of political will and indifference of bureaucracy killed the rural development project even before it could help poor to take advantage of radio broadcast (Agrawal, 2006:5). Thus, later more than 50 years there is no any single experiment was carried out in this direction. But after a long time once again the history is trying to operationalise in a more vibrant and democratic way. Several non-profit development organizations and media-activist groups in India campaigned for more than 10 years for the right to set up low-cost local radio broadcasting facilities to support their community development work essentially in rural and tribal area. In November 2006, the union cabinet finally cleared the community radio policy marking a much delayed, but well-deserved victory to communities and civil society groups that have been waiting patiently for the right to broadcast to be extended to them (See Pavarala and kumar, 2001; Kumar,2003 and Pavarala et al, 2007).

Present Status
 By 30 November 2008, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, had received 297 applications for community radio licenses, including 141 from NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSO's) 105 from educational institutions and 51 for 'farm radio' stations to be run by agricultural universities and agricultural extension centres (Krishi Vigyan Kendra's). Of these, 107 community radio stations have been cleared for licensing through the issue of letters of intent. 13 Grant of Permission Agreements (GOPA) has been signed with license applications under the new scheme. By November 2008, there were 38 operational community radio stations in the country. Of these, only two are exclusively run by NGOS/CSO'S and the rest (36) by educational institutions. These two community Radio

stations are 'Sangam Radio' Andhra Pradesh, the second was 'Radio Bundelkhand.',Madyapradesh Later Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has also issued license to 'Mandeshi FM Tarang-Community Radio',Maharashtra State (see chart:1).

1. Sangam Community Radio, Andhrapradesh.
Sangam Radio is India's first community radio, entirely owned and run by members of women's groups or Sangams as they are known formally started on the occasion of World Rural Women Day October 15, 2008. These Sangams are supported by the Deccan Development Society that has been working for the poorest, landless; Dalit women of Zaheerabad for the past 25 years helping them reclaim their lives from the relentless forces of globalisation. This was achieved through regaining their control over food production, seeds, natural resources and management, the market and finally over the media.During an informal interview of one of active marginalized women peasant listener, said: "Our radio is our friend. When we come home after a day's hard work our minds are full of problems we switch on our radio and are revived. With the radio by my side I feel my dost (friend) is there at home, that conveys messages in my local dialect ". Sangam Radio started in 1998 with UNESCO's help. After receiving formal license from MIB it has created lot of changes in a traditional rural society.

2. Radio Bundelkhand, Madyapradesh
Radio Bundelkhand has been launched by the Society for Development Alternatives, on October 23, 2008, at Taragram, Orchha, in Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. The Society is a Delhi based NGO and is the first to establish, maintain and operate a Community Radio under the new policy. According to the officials, "The purpose of setting up Radio Bundelkhand, as identified with the help of our communities in the radius of the radio station, is to work along with them to use this communication medium to create awareness, give information, participate in local self governance and provide entertainment – all

based on requests and feedback from the community. The audience includes the communities in the radius of the broadcast range – with special attention to women, youth and the marginalised groups".

3. Mandeshi FM Tarang-Community Radio, Maharashtra
Mandeshi Tarang a community radio running at 90.4 MHz was started in 16th December'08 under the aegis by Mann Vikas Samajik Sanstha a NGO working for the empowerment of rural and marginalized women in Satara District of Mhaswad and Hubli & Dharwad in Karnataka. Main aim of the Radio Station is to become an effective medium for the rural remote people to share views ,showcase talent ,gain knowledge and increase awareness ensure overall social; economic and cultural growth of the area(Ray,Anuradha,2009:2).

However, without waiting for the formal license from MIB there are some individual groups, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations involved in running community radio institutions within the prescribed legal framework. 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 initiative in Bhuj, Gujarat that used the medium-wave broadcast channel of All India Radio (AIR). 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 all India Radio (AIR) channel. Namma Dhwani, the VOICES initiatives in Budikote, Karnataka, cablecasts programmes, made by the rural community members themselves, right into their homes. Some of the most recent community radio initiatives include, Charkha's Pechuwali Man Ker Swar in Ranchi, Self Employed Women's Associations (SEWA'S) 'Radi no Radio' in Gujarat and Agragamee's Vjjala' 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 underdeveloped rural regions and the states like

Orissa, Bihar and Rajasthan. At present more than 200 applications are under consideration of the MIB whereas 28 CRS are functional. But most of the functional CR's (35) are established by different educational institutions and universities, whereas need of community based radio stations are in emerging need.

Conclusion and Policy Suggestions:

In summary, the idea of community radio as it is understood and implemented in India and other parts of the world encapsulates the following:

A perspective of the marginalized as active actors in the process of development communication;

A tool of communication as a structural process which helps excluded, poor, and marginalized women especially rural marginalized to analyze historical oppressive environment and to strengthen their methodologies to resolve further excludization;

A framework that provides a platform for rural women to communicate in a more vibrant and inclusive communication environment with their traditional counterpart and a communicative ecology that recognize and promotes grassroots-level participation and inclusive dialog among the community members for horizontal circulation of ideas that are necessary pre-conditions to consentization and democratization of communication and redistribution of power.

From the above discussions it is clear that promoting awareness of issues, protecting cultural diversity of communities and peoples and motivating them to participate in the planned development programmes can be enhanced effectively on a mass level through the community radio, only if the state shows a more liberal political ideology and commitment for a Developed India in the 21st century.

Policy Suggestions:

On the basis of inputs received by scholars and grassroots level workers and earlier studies (Kazi, 2007, Pavarala, 2007, Ambekar, 2004, Patil, 2009) on community radio following suggestions have been made, which would be vital for the sustainability of community radio movement in south Asia in general and India in perticular.

1. Community Ownership:

Community ownership is one of the important components of sustainable development. Hence, a strong community ownership should be at the core of the CR set ups. When the community feels that this is their station to which it provides producers and stories, where it assists in overcoming financial problems, and where it prevents theft by all being alert and protective, only then would a station in rural ambience have a chance of survival.

2. Community Participation:

According to Bortolt Brect (1930), "Radio could be wonderful public communication system, imagine a gigantic system of channels- could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting, but also of receiving listener not just to hear but also to seek, not isolating but connecting them". This no doubt calls for community participation per se. Thus, community participation in management of local community radio stations or production centres should be encouraged.

3. Radio Listeners groups:

Establishment of farmer driven radio listenership groups where farmers identify their needs and programmes are made for them. These programmes are then listened to, discussed upon and recommendations are made for community action (see Neurath et al, 1959).

4. Community Mobilization:

Development is a broader process, it takes some time to create community ownership and for making CR a public communication system. The need is for a short and medium term mobilization before arrival of CR, which would absorb all interest once in place. Here, the need for social mobilization process, carefully identifying in each community the many sub-communities within, ensuring information to dialogue with and mobilization of all of these is critical.

5. Training:
Besides these initiatives, effective training would need to be organized, facilitating that the farmers, the school teacher, the accountants, school children, mothers in brief: the community, could run the station effectively in terms of management and community relations, programming, administration and technical maintenance (see for instance 'Sangam Community Radio', Andhrapradesh).

6. Capacitation:
Capacitation is a core part for sustaining CR, in order to create their own radio station; communities have to start from scratch in partially all areas that from crucial parts of the capacity to run a sustainable and effective community radio station.

7. Technical support:
The need is for adequate pre-ongoing technical planning in order to have a sustainable technical system. Technical sustainability includes effective and relevant responses at the different levels of support needed. Right kinds of equipments have to be in place so that problems of end-prices, replacement and repair are not frequent. Technical man power support is another vital component after equipment they should be undergone through relevant training.

8. Financial Viability:

Financial sustainability is another important question for the sustainability of CR. Once the station starts it is necessary to run the station regularly. Majority of CR's in Asia face financial problems. Hence, some of them have adopted co-operative/NGO model. Experiences suggests that Government should provide seed money as well as permit to use some air time for socially/community based advertisement Government can also give Government public advertisements through community radio. However, if Government, CBO's and community works jointly then the financial problems can be managed effectively (see Australia, South Africa and Nepal's community ratio model).

9. Monitoring and Evaluation:

In order to ensure a continued, coherent programme profile development and mutual, continued training, CR stations must have a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system. The monitoring and evaluation process keeps the station updated and shows its lacunas and errors that would be an essential pre-request for any sustainable process.

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**Chart 1: Rural Community based Community
Radio (CR) initiatives in India**

CR's with Broadcasting capacity and license from MIB	Year of Establishment and Operational Area	Types of Group and Reach	Key Areas	Language/ Broadcasting Method	Funding Agency/ Initiator
Sangam Community Radio, Andhra Pradesh	On World Rural Women Day. 15th October, 2008. Medak District of Andhra Pradesh	Mainly for deprived rural women. Covers around 75 villages within 30 km radius	Women empowerment, micro finance, livelihood issues and issues related to poverty alleviation	Telgu with local language. Broadcasting through own radio station with 100 watts transmitter	UNESCO, Deccan Development Society (DDS), Begampeth, Andhra Pradesh
Radio Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh	15th August, 2008, Rural Area of Taragram, Orchha, Madhya Pradesh	Mainly for rural people (young, unemployed youth, women, peasants etc.) It cover around 5-10 kms area with 25 villages and approximately 15000 population	Education, Health, Agriculture, micro credit, rural development issues etc.	Hindi and local Bundelkhand language. It has 100 watts effective radiated power transmitter with Gramin Radio Internet Working System (GRIWS)	Development Alternatives, (DA), NGO, Delhi
Mann Desi Tarang Community Radio, Maharashtra	December, 2008 Mann Taluka Mhaswad, Dist. Satara, Maharashtra	Mainly for rural women and peasants near about 18000 listeners of Mhaswad region	Dairy, Agriculture, Self Help Group, Health, Education, etc.	Marathi and local language. Broadcasts through own FM radio station	Man Deshi Sanstha, Mhaswad, Dist. Satara