

## Rural Radio on Mobile: The Highway to Social Development

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“The term ‘mass’ then is truly applicable to the medium of radio, for it more than any other media, reaches all groups of the population uniformly” (Friedson, June 1953) (Kendall, 1948)

Information can be a powerful tool. However, most technological means of information dissemination like television and the computers are often inaccessible to the socially and economically downward sections of the Indian community. Lack of knowledge about technology and technological advancement disproportionately affects the huge population of socio-economically disadvantaged in developing countries like India. Mobile phones are cheaper and easily procurable compared to other technological means of information. The growth in reach of mobile phone sets has far surpassed that of television, radio and print media. In this paper, I will argue that a free interactive participatory rural radio network utilizing cell phone sets can be a highly economic and sustainable method to ensure proper dissemination of information and overall social development in India.

While working in a private radio station in a small town in eastern India, I had the opportunity to understand the important socially-motivated functions of the radio in semi-urban and rural India. In my morning primetime show, I used to often get calls from both executive officers of multinational organizations as well as poor traditional farmers working in their fields without any modern equipment, even tractors. Yet they listened to radio on their mobile phones. Their enthusiastic participation in all debates was also an eye-opener for me, as I understood that all people in the society have a thought, a voice, and an opinion. Even the most downtrodden members of society get a sense of

empowerment when they get the right and the podium to state their views. Radio gives the people an additional advantage of optional non-identity. What can be the way to set up effective and sustainable rural radio networks which are cost effective, localized and easy to operate? The anecdotes from my professional experience I present in this paper will show that the proliferation of mobile phones that are embedded with FM receivers make it an ideal platform to deliver necessary information to the under privileged. It also ensures social interaction with the underserved population in India, providing an efficient and effective way to narrow the growing divide between the richer sections and the poorer under-developed parts of the tenth largest economy of the world, India. (IMF, 2014)

India has the one of the largest mobile phone subscriber populations in the world where mobile penetration amounts to 97% of population (Rebello, 2011), which is about 13% of the global mobile subscription population (Biz, 2014). Census 2011 shows one-sixth of the country, or 200 million Indians, do not possess any assets like a transistor or TV or motor vehicles or a computer (Shrinivasan, 2012). Mobile phones are slowly turning to be one of the most widely used powerful media. Combined with localized radio it has the potential to reach out to a major sector of the society which is unable to obtain knowledge or voice their opinion through other modes of communication. Owing to its cheap price and accessibility, mobile phones are said to be a luxury which 'poor' Indians can afford (Dossani, 2007). Interestingly, in India, people have greater access to cell phones than toilets (UN, 2010). Thus, mobile is a media that that has great importance and reach.

India is a country with a huge economic diversity. The economy of India is said to be the tenth-largest in the world by nominal Gross Domestic Product and the third-largest by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) (IMF, 2014). A 16 % increase in ultra-high net worth households (UHNHs) has been noticed in the last one year only. (KotakWealthManagement, 2014). Yet Human Development Report 2013 released by the United Nations Development Programme ranked the country at a low 136 among

186 countries on its human development index (HDI) (UNDP, 2013)—a composite measure of life expectancy, access to education and income levels. The number of poor people in India, according to the country's Eleventh National Development Plan, amounts to more than 300 million and of these, 75 % were in the rural areas (IFAD, 2007). Poverty remains a chronic condition for almost 30 per cent of India's rural population. More than 742 million Indians constituting 138 million households reside in 6, 38,365 villages (Census, Population Census, 2001).

To combat this extreme situation, effective planning has to be made to support the weaker section of the society. Kofi Annan had said “information and knowledge are central to democracy; they are the conditions for development” (Annan, 1997). This view has been reiterated by many communication theorists including P. Thomas. In his journalistic articles, he states “participatory communication is essential for building a community, such communication needs to be based on a realistic and pragmatic understanding of the potentials and limitations of participation” (Pradip Thomas, 1994). In his article ‘Communication and the Persistence of Poverty: The Need for a Return to Basics’ Thomas argues that the worldwide poverty situation could be solved by participatory communication ( Pradip Thomas, 2008). Two such media that are characterized by their interactivity, mass as well as interpersonal nature are the radio and the internet. However, average rural literacy rate in India is 67.8% (Census, ILR, 2011). This lessens the scope of print and internet media in participatory communication for development. These statistics show that radio through cell phone is perhaps the best way to reach majority of the population. However, at present, there are only 148 community based participatory radio stations in India (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2013). Most of these community radio stations are located in or near urban developed areas. Such community radio stations are unable to reach out to the most impoverished part of the society residing far away from urban settlements. In order to develop the underprivileged rural interiors, there needs to

be a more organized and structured implementation of this platform. The structure of low power grassroots radio stations need to be easily applicable and economically viable for long term usage.

As a former radio presenter and host, I have come across certain major drawbacks and intrinsic characteristics of radio that come in the way of making it the truly sustainable and ideal medium of development communication. Through analyzing cases studies and their respective communication models, I will attempt to show that community radio accessible via mobile might be a solution to a major problem faced by most community radio developers in the extremely poor rural parts of the country. The growing income disparity between the rich and the poor is indeed a grave situation as economists predict massive adverse social, cultural, and economic impact of the same.

## **Radio and the Rural-Urban Divide**

The Indian society contains both the ultra-rich and the ultra-poor. The richest 10% of Indian society have seen the highest growth while the poorest 10% have seen the slowest increase in incomes (Verma, 2013). Statistics say India's growth has been led by the service and industrial sectors, with industry contributing 17%, services 66.1%, but with agriculture contributing only 13.7% (2013 est.). , India's unorganized sector accounted for over 94% of workers but created just 57% of India's national domestic product, which is about 9 times less per worker than the organized sector. (Kulsreshtha, 2011). According to Indian Planning Commission, the productivity gap and income rate sharply worsens when rural unorganized sector is compared to urban unorganized sector. Poverty rates are reported to be significantly higher in families where all working age members have only worked in the unorganized sector throughout their lives. On the other hand, with over approximately 267 million service led middle class with a rapidly growing income, India is becoming one of the fastest, and largest growing consumer societies and marketplace (NCAER, 2011).

Along with the socially privileged, most national newspaper and television channel offices are located in the cities. The content and language used are also mostly urbane. Though major problems relating to poverty, malnutrition, and under development occur in interior rural India, most regional offices are also located in small towns. Local connect with these mass media becomes rare and sporadic. The day to day problems of the rural parts of India are hardly ever focused on. Further, television is a one way medium in which knowledge is disseminated. However, the overall participation of the population in the discussions/ programming process is minimal. Further, accessibility of television is a major issue. A television requires a start-up cost of purchasing the machine. Following that, of course, are the recurrent cable charges and electricity charges. More often, we find that this medium is affordable only to the village elites. The poorer people of a village are not able to access a television on a regular basis. A recent survey conducted by a leading daily stated

The most striking results of the survey pertain to the extent of inequality in ownership of assets and access to services. The incidence of TV ownership in most villages, which appears to be high at first glance, reveals a completely different picture. For instance, in the two Karnataka villages of Alabaujanahalli (in Mandya district) and Siresandra (in Kolar district), where the incidence of TV ownership was generally high..... only one-fourth of Dalit\* households in Alabujahanalli, and a little over one-third of the households in Siresandra, had TVs.....Significantly, the gap between Dalit households and Other Castes in the ownership of radio is much narrower. Sixteen per cent of the 1,700 Other Caste households surveyed owned a radio, but 12 per cent of the 900 Dalit households surveyed also owned a radio. (Sridhar, 2010) \* Dalit is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchable (Webster, 1999)

Radio can be called a medium for the masses: a medium that can be enjoyed by the young and the old, the illiterate and the educated, the rich and the poor alike. Combined with cell phones, the reach and mobility of radio as a medium has increased turning it into an all-time companion. However, broadcasting policies of radio make the medium highly regulated in India. India is one of the few democracies where the dissemination of news and current affairs programs on radio remains a

monopoly of the government-owned broadcast. The growth and development of radio in India has been a very slow process. Radio in India can be divided into the following three categories.

1. All India Radio (AIR): Officially known since 1956 as *Akashvani*, this is the national public radio broadcaster of India. All India Radio is one of the largest radio networks in the world. According to the website of Akashvani the reach is stated as 99.19% of population. (AIR, 2014).

2. Private Radio Stations: A total of 245 private FM radio stations are in operation currently. News is not permitted on private FM. Private Radio Stations operate in only metropolitan cities and small cities. (NDTV, 2014).

3. Community Radio Stations: The total number of operational Community Radio Stations in India is 148. Community Radio Stations can be started by NGOs, educational institutions and agricultural institutions. Limited advertisement is permitted however program sponsorship has been banned. (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2013).

As private radio stations do not operate in the extreme rural areas and are not allowed any content on current affairs, their scope of development communication is limited. This leaves us with community radio as the most localized medium of mass communication. Although 148 community stations have been set up, majority of them are owned by educational institutes and are located in cities or small towns. Only a handful operates in the most backward rural areas. Development through participatory communication is the main goal behind setting up rural radio stations. But given the current scenario this very focus is getting disrupted. Recruiting well-trained huge groups of programming crew is difficult for such grassroots radio stations. Participation of the vulnerable sections of the community such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities, women, and children has to be ensured. All India Radio has the widest reach among all radio operators but has quite a few

drawbacks. Firstly, being a public broadcaster it is often looked upon as a tool of propaganda. Further, most of the content is nationally made and thus the local charm is lost. Though *KrishiVaani* (a farming community-oriented radio segment) and other efforts are laudable, lack of participation and localization of content make the approach more top down than horizontal.

This brings us to an interesting question as to which is more beneficial to development communication, top down or participatory approach?

### **Top, Down or Horizontal: Theoretical Perspectives**

There have now been over six decades of theory, research, foreign aid, and various paradigms and strategies covering initiatives in development communication. ... Yet the frustration and situation in the southern hemisphere continues to worsen. (McPhail, 2009)

The relationship between mass media and society has been translated into numerous mass media theories at different point of time. The end of World War II spurred communication experts to derive the dominant paradigm for the development of the 'third world' countries. The dominant paradigm derived from a worldview of dominance over one's environment where the communication approach is uni-directional, from the informed 'source' to the uninformed 'receiver' underwent far-reaching interrogation and criticism in the 1970s by scholars and practitioners across disciplines and from around the globe. Participatory approaches gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s and have evolved into a rich field standing in stark contrast to models and theories of the first development decades. In fact much work has been done on this paradigm by various scholars Ascroft and Masilela 1994; Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 1998; Mato, 1999; White, 1994. The participatory model sees people as the controlling actors or participants for development. Participation involves the

redistribution of power. Participation aims at redistributing the elites' power so that a community can become a full-fledged democratic one (Servaes, 2008).

Communication leads to community (May, 1972). In his pyramid of communication, McQuail classifies interpersonal communication as one of the most readily occurring case (McQuail, 2001). Many researchers like Hovland, C. (1953), Freedman, J. L., Fraser, S. C. (1966), DeJong, W. (1979), Cialdini, R. B.(1975), Darby, B. L. (1975) believe that interpersonal communication has the highest influence on a person's perception. In the field of social reform and development, communication theorist John Whittaker has said, "Interpersonal helping offers to contemporary social work practice reinforcing the significance of small scale helping efforts with individuals." (J. Whittaker, 1989). But it is often impossible to solve individual problems through communication as it is both time and man power consuming. Mass communication takes prominence in this regard as it has control over a larger set of people, 'mass'. Mass media is a part of the structure of society, and its technological infrastructure is a part of the economic and power base... whiles the ideas; images and information influence our culture (McQuail, 2001). However a segment of communication theorists believe that the effects of mass media are weak or have limited effects. William J. McGuire writes, "The interim bottom line to which the existing research findings add up is that media effects can occasionally be detected statistically but are very small in magnitude" (McGuire, 1991). Perhaps the best route for development work can be found in the works of American activist Mary E. Richmond. She writes, "Individual and mass betterment need to go hand in hand" (Richmond, 1917). In terms of communication this can reflect the benefits of amalgamating interpersonal to mass communication.

Recent developments in technology have blurred the distinction between private and public, mass and interpersonal communication (McQuail, 2001). Two such media that are characterized by their interactivity, mass as well as interpersonal nature are the radio and the Internet. .However, in a

world where 781 million adults are illiterate (UIS, 2014) the use of internet for development of the truly underdeveloped region is limited. Radio is much more effective. When cell phone is used to spread the message of free rural radio to the farthest corners of the country and increase its interactivity, it becomes an epitome of a confluence of interpersonal and mass communication. This symbiotic relationship between the two mediums can lead to a stable and powerful platform for participatory communication for development.

However, communication theorists Arnst, 1996; Jacobson and Servaes, 1999 have criticized participatory communication as a concept as variable, misused and distorted. Ajit Chaudhuri states his belief, through an article in Economic and Political Weekly, that in a developing country the term participatory often invokes mistrust as “it is used so often for different reasons, ranging from synchronized nodding of heads” to “when it is liberally sprinkled in proposals for financial support” (Chaudhuri, 2013). Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann argued that people who think that they are a minority point of view, tend to keep quiet. They do so as they are afraid of being isolated. This is often known as the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). According to Arthur Asa Berger this spiral often leads to a part of society whose voice get muffled and their demands gagged known as the “silent majority” (Berger, 2013). Through my experience in radio, I have seen the potential of radio on cell phone to break this silence.

### **Participatory Communication in Radio**

The need for participatory communication in disaster risk reduction can be problematic since disasters demand a holistic response from various disciplines and institutional groups. According to Twigg (2004), and Anderson and Woodrow(1998), the affected community often has no dialogue with these various disciplines functioning within the respective community, which leads to a host of problems. Some of these problems include: fragmentation, lack of understanding, cultural

competitiveness, and insufficient humility in the face of a disaster problem (Twigg, 2004). The answer to this problem is participatory grassroots mass disaster communication. Due to its accessibility and technological simplicity, radio becomes an ideal choice for the same. I will attempt to demonstrate the points made above by referring to a few personal experiences as a radio host and producer.

On October 18, 2011, an earthquake occurred with a moment magnitude of 6.9, which was centered within the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (TOI, 2011). Official estimates say at least 111 people were killed in the earthquake. Most of the deaths occurred in Sikkim, with reports of fatalities in and near Singtam in the East Sikkim district. Several buildings collapsed and were damaged in Gangtok and in North Bengal. While the destructions of the cities were the first to be reported and attended to, the devastation of the hill side rural areas came to forefront much later.

The earthquake was felt in Siliguri (where I was stationed) at 18:10 IST. Three aftershocks followed. Though North Bengal is prone to earthquakes, an earthquake of this magnitude had never been felt before this. Instantaneously, all the major radio stations (Red FM, Misty FM and High FM) were thrown off air. All the power lines had also been turned off as a precautionary measure against electrocution. Hence, television sets were rendered useless. With the huge intensity of usage of mobile phones in the area, for about 12 hours the mobile network in the area was completely jammed.

I was fortunate to host the first live show to be on aired on Red FM after the earthquake. With many of our equipments damaged we continued the show with only one phone line active. Calls were flooding in. Many of our listeners called in to inform about the condition of their houses hoping the authority could be reached in the process. Most people were extremely scared and it was evident that they did not know what to do next.

All three radio stations in the area instantaneously started to function as the connection between the authorities, the experts and the common people. I came to realize that during and after such disasters people start to panic and spread baseless rumors. A few of the rumors included those suggesting reoccurrence of the earthquake in a higher magnitude, wrath of gods and deities as the reason behind the disaster, and chances of flash flood due to dramatic rise in the water level of rivers Mahananda, Teesta and Balasan. To stop these rumors and help connect people directly to the authorities we ensured at least one interview per radio show of a weather or geological exponent or administrative leader. Our on-air guests included the North Bengal Development minister Goutam Deb, Head of Indian Meteorological Department Sikkim Dr. G.Raha, Head of Indian Meteorological Department Darjeeling, Mayor of Gangtok K.N Topgay, Mayor of Siliguri Gangotri Datta and scientists from National Institute of Disaster Management.

The next morning, we received a call from a traveler in a bus that had been stuck on the road due to a landslide in the Siliguri – Gangtok highway. This traveler said that quite a few villages in the hill area had been very badly affected and were still inaccessible. We set out towards the spot with just microphones, recorders and our mobiles as radio requires very limited hardware. We reached Mongpong around noon after climbing over the landslide that the local people had just started clearing. When we reached the ‘basti’ (nepali village) a bit downhill from Mongpong we could see the extent of damages in the vicinity. While many of the houses were precariously hanging from the edge of the slope, almost all the houses had huge cracks in them making them a very dangerous place to stay in. Seeing us arrive with microphones a lot of villagers immediately surrounded us and requested us to cover their situation. An old man speaking to me in Nepali and broken Hindi said, “No other person has come to see us. Please ask them to take care of us too.”

After a few live links (live radio feed) from the area, we recorded the statements of the rest of the villagers. We played these recorded pleas of help on our station with repeated intensity. We also went directly to the Mayor of the town with the recordings and requested them to send aid. The authorities assured us that steps would be taken at the earliest. Soon the rest of the media channels and authorities also covered the area. We received and played on air about five other distressed calls that came in from other affected areas.

After this experience, I actually came to know about the immense power of radio. While there was no electric power supply in major parts of the city it was only radio that was readily available in the mobile sets of people in town. J. Twigg had said “The communication of information to the public is central to risk management. Vulnerable people need to know about the hazards and risks they face, and the measures they can take to mitigate and prepare for potential disasters. Without such knowledge, they cannot easily mobilize to protect themselves.... Mass media communication is most likely to be successful if audiences can get involved (e.g. through community radio stations, audience feedback or competitions)” (Twigg, 2004). The high scope of participation, easy reach, technological simplicity, anonymity and speed makes community radio an ideal medium for communication in disaster situations. However Twigg has also written “Communications with poor and marginalized groups can be particularly challenging because they have limited access to standard media and information sources on account of illiteracy, language barriers, physical remoteness and poor transport, social isolation, and lack of televisions and radios. Projects should identify these differences within society and try to use the methods that are most suitable for reaching particular groups” (Twigg, 2004). Due to the high reach of mobiles as a medium in developing countries, localized participatory radio utilizing mobiles as a medium is an ideal medium for disaster management. This form of grassroots participatory media has the potential of breaching all six barriers mentioned by Dr. Twigg.

A systematic approach to proper dissemination of information to the people in disaster prone areas and also proper training of radio personnel for coverage and management of disaster areas is necessary. During or after a disaster, cell phone radios are the only mode of communication that can give updated information without the usage of direct electricity source, money and can be used from any location. My personal experience has shown me that radio can serve as a very powerful medium for dissemination of helpline and rehabilitation instructions. As stated by Parker and Lusignan in a World Bank report, what is needed is a radio system that can be designed to serve both telecommunication and broadcast purposes (Parker&Lusignan, 1977). Radio on mobiles can serve just that purpose. However another equally important factor that makes radio an ideal podium of the weak is its anonymity.

On 16 December 2012, a 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern, Jyoti Singh Pandey, was beaten and gang raped in a private bus (IBN, 2012) in Delhi, India. The gruesome episode shocked the entire country. Candle light marches and protests were organized in almost all cities. All major TV channels covered the issue at hand with the best of experts and eminent people.

The very next day after the event, Red FM hosted a show on women and safety. In India, broadcasting news without governmental regulation is not allowed on FM radio. News-based information is often presented as an entertainment after a time gap to make sure that the radio station does not get penalized for legal incorrectness. During the show, we had our expert panel consisting of a member of a nonprofit social reforms organization and a psychologist. But as the show progressed, the ire of the people could be well felt. While many women called in to share their personal experiences, a lady called up with detailed records of a molestation case that had been filed by her but had not been attended to by the authorities. Perhaps the most shocking of them all was the call of one of the neighbors of a girl who had also been gang-raped and set afire in North Bengal. This incident

had not been highlighted by the national media though it happened one day prior to the New Delhi Rape case. Much of the content had to be edited and censored and the political angles cut out during the airing of the story. Two days later, this story was covered by a national daily (PTI, 2012). This incident showed me the power of radio to channelize public opinion. While the show was only an ‘infotainment’, the huge number of call in-s showed people’s interest on being heard.

### **Establishing Community Connections through Community Radio**

The two experiences above attempted to demonstrate the importance of localized participatory radio. Community radio can be initiated by an individual or a corporate. Raghav Mahato has been widely reported in national and international media as the owner of the cheapest radio station in the world, the one dollar radio station (Tewary, 2006). Raghav Mahato started the community FM radio using a fifty rupee technology device. The transmission kit was fitted on to an antenna attached to a bamboo pole on a neighboring three storey hospital. A long wire connected the contraption to an old homemade stereo cassette player in Raghav's shop (turned radio station). Three other rusty, locally made battery-powered tape recorders were connected to the stereo with colorful wires. What completed the setup was a cordless microphone.

Mahato and his RJ (Radio Jockey) friend Sambhu started an innovative Rural FM service for the villagers and the local community of Mansoorpur village in Vaishali District of Bihar. The programming structure of the radio station included announcements and entertaining messages that touched upon their health, educational, trade, commerce and entertainment. In this radio station, there was no caller-in system. Instead, song requests were hand delivered via courier service. Alternatively, people made calls to a nearby public booth. This community FM served community needs using an innovative knowledge enhancement and awareness-driven simple technological platform. The station

could be said to be truly for the community and by the community, driven by the needs and demands of the community.

However, after four years of running successfully Ragav FM what shut down as he did not have a license. His small shack-turned-radio station was raided by police officials. Police ceased all equipments. Mahato was saved from being arrested by a friendly police official in his village, who was a fan of Mahato's radio channel.

Community radio has been legalized in India in 2006. However the structure, working and legal framework of the radio is termed by many critics at best as half baked. According to the government guidelines, community radio stations can be owned and operated by only non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and agricultural institutions. Since such institutions are located mostly in urban areas, most of community radio stations also operate in urban or semi-urban areas. Unfortunately, rural backward regions which are inhabited by people who are deprived of conventional modes of communication need community radio stations most. UNESCO's guidebook on setting up community radio states that the initial cost of a cheap basic community radio set up is more than 25,000 \$ (Estrada, 2001). This amount comes close to around 1.543 million Rupees. For the truly economically backward areas, raising this huge a sum of money is extremely difficult. As autonomous community sponsorship is not possible the only source of funding that might be available is external private investment. Yet, such private investments may have some clauses or conditions that might not be good for the community. Marxist theory too posits a direct link between the economic ownership and dissemination of messages (McQuail, 2001). Another possible source of funding is the government. Although public ownership of such broadcasting units remain a viable alternative to private media (Raboy, 1996), it has been highly criticized from a Marxist perspective for being another tool of the state. It has also been condemned as a possible weapon of propaganda and

manipulation (Chomsky, 1988).

It is possible to develop cheap community funded radio stations for the benefit of people in rural India. Mahato used land-line for his radio system. Instead a microphone attached over a mobile phone in loudspeaker mode can be used to cut down costs in a grassroots radio station. It will be possible to take calls from the rest of the community and those can be broadcast. This can be a simple, accessible, and cheap mode of developing community radio.

A recent movement in India has shown how the interest and investment of corporates can hasten the process of setting up grassroots mobile radio stations in the most backward parts of society. India's largest consumer goods, Hindustan Unilever (HUL), has come up with a free radio-on-demand service to reach out to villagers in remote areas. KanKhajuraTesan, which translates to "ear worm radio channel," is an entertainment-on-demand, mobile-based initiative. To tune in to the mobile radio station, mobile phone users make a missed call to the station and the station calls them back and plays songs, jokes, and advertisements in 15 minute segments. The service is free to all mobile phone users. The 'the centipede station' or KanKhajuraTesan is solely an advertising and public relations initiative. KanKhajuraTesan, has already acquired more than 11 million subscribers (Gangal, 2014), and interacts with about 0.1 million consumers everyday making the largest radio station in Bihar. Vice President of HUL Priya Nair says, "Areas that were otherwise termed to be 'media dark' are now 'entertainment-enlightened' with 'KanKhajuraTesan' ... We developed the idea to address a business problem of reaching consumers in deep rural markets. Creating a mobile based radio channel has brought entertainment to consumers who have almost no access to traditional entertainment" (HUL, 2014). While Mahato's radio station was an example of the activist potential of radio in community, corporate involvement and investment in community radio efforts can make setting up of community radios easier.

## Conclusion

Traditionally, we think of the radio as a one way mode of mass communication and also as a source of entertainment. The ever evolving radio has shown huge potential to be the medium best suited for development communication. To attain its development goals and to become a true participatory medium, radio needs to be readily accessible. In India, it is important that radio be accessible to people of all economic standards. An interactive system of communication which depends on immediate feedback has significant advantages. Radio in this strategy operates more like a telephone system but with multiple interconnections (Saxena, 2011). Merged with India's fastest growing medium – the mobile phone, radio can surely bring about immense change in the development scenario.

The stories from my professional experiences that I related above show that radio can be utilized effectively in providing a way for common people to voice their needs and opinion. Localization of the radio is crucial in order to do that successfully in India. Due to advertisement sourcing, cost reduction, and talent recruitment often most of the radio stations are located in urban developed areas. However, it is essential to have more radio stations in the underdeveloped parts of the country. My experience has shown me that while national broadcasting is more popular for public radio stations, shows/ channels never get adequate response if the content is not customized according to the temperament and emotional framework of the community. While speaking, a lot of anecdotes are necessary to help listeners relate radio to their own lives. That way, they connect better (Michael, 2014).

The downtrodden part of the society is often dominated by the political and social opinion leaders. In such a situation, voicing one's opinion on controversial issues can lead to social boycotting, adverse political pressure, and even assault. Radio serves as a safe podium for anonymous voices. To

make a radio participatory and motivated towards development issues, radio needs to be financially sustainable. The running price of such grassroots radio stations (community radio) needs to be minimal. Also, there needs to be a constant source of advertising/ income for the station.

Raghav Mahato's radio station is a perfect example of optimum usage of the radio with minimum initial and running costs. It shows us a way towards a cheap and sustainable technology for rural radio setups for promoting participatory platforms for local voices. Some initial corporate investment (like HUL radio) can create a stable and sustainable model for community radio. This medium can then be used effectively for development as well as entertainment purposes, thereby making it an ideal medium for participatory communication and a highway for social development.

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