Community Radios as a Tool for Bridging the Gap in Education: An Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Community radio is a form of radio service that is functioned, owned, and operated by the communities they serve. Community radio is non profitable and provides a means for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences, and in a media rich world to become active creators and contributors of media. This paper is a humble attempt to study the impact of CR in society and its outreach in meeting the global challenges in education. The result and discussion of this paper is based on a quantitative study conducted among one of the community radio station working in the country .The main objective of this paper is to share our experience which can be taken as a best practice for other countries. The study indicates that the community radios have created grassroots-level participation and parallel movement of ideas among the disadvantaged rural communities connecting the gap in education, which are necessary prerequisite to bridging the gap in education

Background of the paper

Radio was recognized as the most reachable mass communication tool for grass root public. Radio as a medium, can easily reach the rural heap in very short time. The technology is simple and easy to use. The concept of community radio (CR) is gaining momentum in the current scenario. Community radio is a process and it's not just about producing radio programme and to put on air. Community radio is giving opportunity for the people representation for different cultural, social and religious backgrounds and gender. The current concept of development gives emphasis to individual and community development does not end with financial progress only. For social development, empowering the youth at grassroots level and their capacity building is the major concerns. Community radio (CR) can emerge as a tool for rural development. Community radio is a platform for bringing responsibility of the development, eventually making the system more translucent and ensures good governance. Community radio ensures the contribution of the community, along with community ownership and power. The research for finding potential tools for rural development is unavoidable. Community radio will play a major role in identifying and addressing local needs and development by means of participatory communication.

The indispensability of radio as well-organized and successful means of communication in today's society is unquestionable yet, for this channel to be more practical, it has to be changed from being resources of transmitting to people but also of receiving from them.

Methodology

The main objective of this study is to understand the impact of Community Radio in bridging the gap inside Education. Education, especially for a developing country like India is always associated with curriculum but the fact is, this curriculum will not sever the right purpose of education i.e. the overall development of an individual. Hence it is necessary for us to explore alterative methods to bridge the gap in Education. As a result Community Radios made a tremendous impact in various countries like South Africa, Nepal, and Bangladesh and even in India. But the bottom line reality is that there is not much studies where conducted to understand the impact of these community radio programmes on people.

There are two main objective of this study one of the objective is to understand the impact of the community radio programmes on various domains of the respondents life and another objective is to identify the impact of radio programs on education among the respondents

Data was collected through interviews, which were conducted with about 72 respondents (36 girls and 36 boys). In interviews, open ended questions were asked in a casual approach. Questions were formulated on the basis of various sub issue earlier identified by the researcher. The study was conducted in Tamil Nadu in Sriperumbudur. Sriperumbudur village was selected purposively for the study, since it was the one of the village directly associated with the community radio station for the last 2 years. The data were collected by personal contacts with respondents with the help of the interpreter. The responses so collected were analyzed with the help of statistical methods.

Result and Discussion

Table 1 Distribution of respondents by place where they listen to the radio

| Place	Frequency	Percentage
Home	25	35%
Traveling	12	17%
School	24	33%
Workplace	5	7%
Other places	6	8%
Total	72	100 %

More than 35% of the respondents listen to radio at their home and about 33% of the respondent listens to radio while they are in the school. A very small percentage of the respondent listens to radio while they are traveling or at other places.

Table 2 Distribution of respondents by source of listening to Radio

source of listening to Radio	Frequency	Percentage
Local Radio	18	25%
Mobile phones	22	31%
Radio owned by the school	26	36%
Other sources	6	8%
Total	72	100 %

The table no.2 shows that nearly 36% of the respondents listen to radio by mobile phones. Nearly 36% of the respondent listens to radio owned by the school which is provided by the community radio station.

Fig 1 Distribution of the respondents having the impact on various domains of their life.
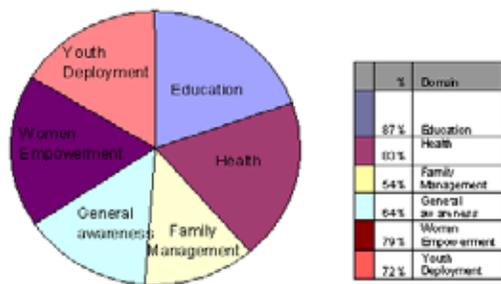
The above pie chart reveals the distribution of the respondents having the impact on various domains of their life through various community radio programmes. Most of the respondents (nearly 87%) felt improvement in education. About 83% of the respondent felt improvement in their health concerns. 79% of the respondents experience progress in women empowerment nearing to that around 72 % of the respondent felt that the progrmmes are also had an effect on youth development.

Impact of radio programme on education (N-72)

Domains of education	Indicators				
	Yes			No	
	F	% F			%
Students started going to school regularly	70	97.2% 2		2	2.7 %
Progress in scholastic activities	42	58.3% 30		30	41.6%
Improvement in communication skills	68	94.4% 4		4	5.5%
Students became more aware of global state of affairs	69	95.8 % 3		3	4.2%
Students became aware of various career options	66	91.6% 6		6	8.3%

Education as a dimension was measured vital since in the majority of school in rural areas face the problem of drop outs. Therefore whether the programmes have brought about changes in the society and motivated the students to go to school was analyzed.

97 % of the respondents have started going to schools regularly due to awareness created by the community radio programmes. About 80 % of the students agreed that they have been motivated to go outside their village for higher studies. The Community Radio programmes were also made an effort to make the students understand what is happening outside their society. About 96% of the respondent agreed that they became more aware about the global scenarios through the programmes of the community radio station. 94 % of the respondents have realized that their communication skills had a marked improvement.

Concluding Remarks

Radio is believed to have an advantage over print in terms of reaching out to the illiterate and to the rural areas and these community radios can be well utilized to empower such disadvantaged groups.

Community radio has been encouraging in India as more and more civil society organizations and educational institutions look at Community radios as a powerful communication means. The movement can get a boosted with suitable attention paid to economic, social and institutional stability.

A variety of communication researchers have over the years stressed that the key words in the successful operations of any community radio station are community involvement and participation, taking inputs from the community (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2003; HSRC, 2004). It is therefore the accountability of any community radio station to ensure that the needs of its listeners are well accommodated in its programmes to guarantee accurate development.

To conclude, "Long term, fieldwork rich studies" on Community Media are needed to reveal "subtle processes of social change" and "transformation of cultural codes", which ideally lead to the creation of public spheres where women's and men's voices are equally heard (Rodriguez, 2001, p.162 163).

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