

The Role of Community Radio in 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 sociocultural and geographical structure of rural, remote people community radio has been found more effective and inclusive medium to provide unbiased information and knowledge among the masses (Gumucio 2001). The aim of this article is to analyze the contribution of community radio to the development of deprived rural people in various parts of world in general and Kenya 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. The article has also looked at the Community Radio ownership models in various parts of the world and made some policy suggestions for its sustainability especially in Kenya and East Africa at large.

Keywords: Community radio, democratization of communication, horizontal circulation, grassroots-level participation

1.0 Introduction

The rationale for Community Radio in Kenya is strong on legal/constitutional, social, cultural and development grounds. Kenya is multi-linguistic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious with more than 40 tribes and communities. If one considers village as a community then there are more than 0. 1 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 the dislocate ecosystems, cottage and small scale industries and local jobs and employment pattern in Kenya. The Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have been playing a significant role in the process of development in Kenya. 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 (Ambekar, 2004). 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. As Islam (2002) notes, 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 Kenya counters, radio can contribute a lot to the community to make their life better. Previous 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 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 Kenya. The paper is mainly based on a review of the empirical studies conducted by media professionals, author's personal discussions with researchers and grass roots level workers, and those who are exclusively connected with community radio movement in Australia, South Africa, East Africa including Kenya.

2.0 Case Studies from Developed Countries: Australia and South Africa

2.1 Australia:

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 (Pavalar, and Vinod 2003: 2166). As Ambekar, (2004) postulates, Radio media allows people to listen to its programmes without disturbing their household chores and other activities. For example you could listen to an educational programme on new fishing methods as you wash utensils in the kitchen. According to (Tacchi and Joe 2003) 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 on (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."

2.2 South Africa

The dawn of community radio in South Africa is one of the less publicized but direct outcomes of the country's shift to multiracial democracy in 1994. A few short years ago, community radio was virtually unknown in South Africa. By the end of 1999 there were already sixty-five community radio stations broadcasting in and to communities in rural, semi-urban and urban areas of the republic (Siemering, Fairbairn and Rangana, 1998). In addition, community radio stations whose license applications are under consideration may soon bring the total to a little over 250 (Siemering, Fairbairn and Rangana, 1998). With the sixty-five or more stations currently on air, South Africa now has the largest and most vibrant community radio sector on the African continent (Nell and Shapiro, 2001).

Before South Africa's transition to multiracial democracy in 1994, the minority white government's use of apartheid laws won global shame for separating citizens into geographical, social and political enclaves. For instance, the Group Areas Act of 1949 separated the different population groups into distinct geographical areas. The South African Defense and Police Forces secured the apartheid state and ascertained that all races remained separated and unequal as stipulated by the stringent laws. As a state monopoly, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) policed the airwaves and controlled the broadcasting industry. As Hachten and Giffard (1984) aptly stated, "the first radio service in 1927 was directed at the white English speakers and the first television service introduced in 1976 was for whites only. Through much of its media history, the "non-Europeans" have been eavesdroppers".

Eventually, the apartheid-era language policy codified and institutionalized nine African languages used in broadcasting services disseminated to the 'ethnic' groups identified with those languages. As Barnett (1999) noted, "broadcasting in South Africa has not been organized either culturally or technologically to provide a common space for communication, but has instead worked to reproduce notions of separate and distinct populations with their own separate cultures" (p. 650). In this way the structure of the South African broadcasting sector mirrored the socio-political cleavages of its context.

Notwithstanding the history of exclusion of and discrimination against the majority, the evolution of community radio stations in South Africa is not peculiar. The experiences of minority groups in Europe, Australia, North and Latin America showed that community radio has traditionally grown out of repressive socio-political experiences. Marginalized communities have typically adopted community radio as a tool for highlighting their fundamental rights. Such communities have used radio to raise and address issues unique to their experiences. In particular, minority groups marginalized by the mainstream media find solace in the capabilities of community radio. In Latin American countries, community radio, otherwise known as peoples' radio, became the voice of the poor and the voiceless, the landless peasants, the urban shack dwellers, the impoverished indigenous nations and the trade unions. Given the kind of populations to whom they are targeted, community radio outlets have also been used as tools for development

(Siemering, Fairbairn and Rangana, 1998).

The black, “non-white” and “non-European”- communities in South Africa share all of the foregoing factors with marginalized communities around the world. However, the evolution of community radio in South Africa offers its own peculiarities. In the first instance, the segment of the population that was politically repressed and marginalized by the mainstream media was indeed the majority, not the minority as the case may be in otherwise similar contexts. Using population figures available in 1984, Hachten and Giffard reported as follows: There are about 5 million “whites” of whom about 2.5 million are Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaners, and about 1.5 million are ESSAs (English-speaking South Africans). In addition there are about 1 million other “Europeans,” mainly recently arrived Portuguese, Italians, and Greeks, who are largely inactive politically. Among nonwhites or “blacks” are about 21 million Africans (Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, Tswanas, Swazis, Vendas, Ndebeles, Shangaans, etc.), 2.7 million racially mixed “Coloreds,” and 840,000 “Asians,” mostly Indians (p.ix). The foregoing demographic information is evidence that apartheid was, in part, government by the minority over the majority.

Secondly, given that the political tables have now turned in South Africa, the Afrikaans-speaking Afrikaners and the English-speaking South Africans have become the de facto minorities. Hence, a discussion of the historical growth of community radio in South Africa would be incomplete without the inclusion of the participation of white supremacist groups. There is in fact evidence that the evolution of community radio in South Africa owes its genesis to supremacist organizations such as the Pretoria Boerkammando and the Afrikaaner Volksfront (AVF), who “stole the airwaves” by setting up their own radio stations in some cases, without a license. Radio Vryheid, Radio Donkerhoek, Radio Koppies, Radio Volkstem and Radio Pretoria fall into the category.

Against the historical background of institutionalized and non-participatory conditions, the development of community radio in South Africa is particularly newsworthy. There is additional worth in examining its operational circumstances and the challenges faced by the mushrooming sector. As such, this paper places South Africa's socio-political context and the transformation of the broadcasting sector in proper perspective by: (1) Examining the radio broadcasting scenario in South Africa at the precipice of the country's transition to multiracial democracy; (2) reviewing the notion of participatory communication as a post-apartheid possibility and as a concept whose development is fluid enough to be contextually unique; (3) assessing the role of two community radio stations in enabling previously marginalized South Africans to participate in the new environment of multiracial democracy. In the process, the strategic roles of donor agencies that have assisted the growth of community radio stations in South Africa is acknowledged and critiqued.

A universal hunch connected all three objectives of this paper. We suspected that the apartheid history and notoriety of South Africa should present the adoption of community radio with challenges equal in magnitude to the peculiarity of the operative context. If there are indeed peculiarities in the growth of community radio and in the roles that they are playing in post-apartheid South Africa, we suspect that the experience may answer some of the perpetual questions about the sustenance of community radio and raise new ones. Both possibilities should be of interest to radio scholars.

2.2.1 Origin and categories of community radio stations

In the weeks following the first multiracial elections in 1994, the IBA determined that community radio was top priority and that the first few radio licenses would be issued to operatives in this sector. The first recipient of the IBA license was Radio Maritzburg in the Kwazulu-Natal Region. Quickly deluged with applications from prospective radio stations, the IBA had issued 82 community radio licenses by August 1995. At the beginning, only temporary licenses were issued. Each station with a temporary license was to renew every year. In 1996, the IBA introduced a four-year license for community radio operatives.

Also among the early recipients of community radio licenses were right wing radio stations that the IBA could not deny licenses. In the new democratic atmosphere, the latter development broadened the definition of community radio in South Africa to encompass four distinct types. In the first category are stations serving geographical areas. Examples include communities disadvantaged during the apartheid era. The development of early 'geographic' community radio stations was motivated by the efforts of donors and activists in the Non Governmental Organization (NGO) sector. Both Bush Radio and Radio Zibonele fall into the category of 'geographic' community radio stations. In the second category are campus-based radio stations that are active on college and university campuses. A good number of the stations in this category are daytime deejay booths in students' cafeteria. Examples of campus-based community radio stations include Radio Matie FM (University of Stellenbosch), Durban Youth Radio (University of Natal/Durban) and Rhodes Music Radio (Rhodes University, Grahamstown). The IBA also issued licenses to various religious stations. Most of these are evangelical Christian and Muslim radio stations. There are also a few Hindu stations.⁵ A fourth category of community radio stations targets cultural and ethnic communities. In this category is a strong network of

stations owned by Afrikaner communities. A wide range of radio stations also serve South Africans of Portuguese, Chinese, and Greek origin.

2.2.3 The notion of participatory communication

Many authors have noted that the concept of participatory communication lacks a definition capable of enabling a thorough understanding of the processes and outcomes involved. In her introduction to a recent assessment of participatory communication sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, Gray-Felder (2001) noted, “the most interesting work of a participatory nature can often defy the written word,” (p. 1). In the same vein, White (1994) observed, “the word 'participation' is kaleidoscopic; it changes its color and shape at the will of the hands in which [it] is held,” (p. 8). Neither the absence of an accurate means of capturing the essence of participatory communication nor the fluid nature of participation has reduced the realization that the varying forms of both appear to have become useful in contexts with histories of exclusion and discrimination. In many African, Asian and Latin American countries, participation and communication are often bedfellows in the movement toward engaging previously disenfranchised populations in social dialogue.

Two questions appear fundamental to our understanding of the notion of participatory communication as it relates to community radio. One, in what ways do the roles and association between political actors, the mass media and the public change in a participatory communication environment? Two, what should the notable dividends of participatory communication be? Generations of mass communication scholars (see, e.g., Bogue, 1979; Ezrai, 1990; Gumucio Dagron, 2001; Habermas, 1989; Katz, 1996; McQuail, 2000; Melkote, 1991; Olorunnisola, 1997) have considered the foregoing questions. Their contribution to our understanding of participatory communication is useful in the current exercise. Undoubtedly, the introduction of the notion of participatory communication to a context that has had South Africa's level of institutionalized disenfranchisement deserves critical examination.

3.0 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 shareholders contributed about Rs.20000 each to set up the station 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 districts. The station has been playing an active role in development, with programmes to improve forestry, 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 sagarmatha 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 journalists, and the success has spawned more than five community stations in different parts of Nepal. Sagarmatha 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 Kenya 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 Kenya 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, EI Salvador, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Madagascar, Tanzania and elsewhere.

4.0 Rural community radio in the Kenyan context

The way forward for community radios in Kenya and the ensuing publication was held within the current broadcasting landscape in Kenya, the challenges and the confusion thereof with the vernacular radio stations. Since the post-election violence in Kenya, there has been an ongoing debate on the role that vernacular FM stations played. A lot of them have been accused of having fanned violence. Some people have called for their reigning in, while others like the retired President Moi have urged the government to ban these stations. Moi's concern is that the vernacular stations are creating tribal chiefs, and

disseminating divisive politics and messages, and therefore could incite anarchy. While contributing to this debate, some people have referred or confused vernacular stations as community radio stations. However, there is a distinction between vernacular radio stations and community radio stations. When people talk about community radio in Kenya, there is a tendency to equate this with a tribal organization or set up.

There are several definitions of community radio, but they all have in common the idea that community broadcasting is not for profit; is aimed at particular communities and is intended to communicate socially useful messages of benefit to the community. The vernacular FM stations, which predominantly broadcast from the city and some urban areas are purely commercial enterprises. The difference between these and those broadcasting in Swahili or English is that they broadcast in vernacular. This aspect has been confused that way because they are addressing a particular community say the Kikuyu or Kalenjin in their own language qualifies them as 'community' radios. Examples of such vernacular language radio stations in Kenya include Inooro, Kameme, Kass FM, Murembe, Egesa, Ramogi etc. Community radios are only a handful in this country. They include Mang'etele in Makueni, Radio, Maendeleo in Rarieda, Koch FM in Korogocho, Pamoja in Kibera, Ghetto FM in Pumwani. Others that are on the test stage are Koinonia in Dagoretti, Shinyalu in Kakamega and Mugambo Jyetu in Meru North. Another unique category in this is the Migori Clan which is a wheel barrow station. Plans are also in top gear to start community stations in Samburu to be managed by Reto Women. The historical philosophy of community radios is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, and the mouthpiece of oppressed people, or by communities that have not been served by conventional communication structures.

5.0 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 East Africa in general and Kenya in particular:

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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).

5.4. 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.

5.5 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).

5.6 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 form crucial parts of the capacity to run a sustainable and effective community radio station.

5.7 Technical support:

The need is for adequate pre-on-going 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 equipment 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; staff should be undergone through relevant training.

5.8 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 radio model).

5.9. 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 gaps and errors that would be an essential pre-request for any sustainable process.

6.0 Conclusion

Across many countries and in different regions, community radio stations foster community participation and create an appetite for transparent and accountable governance, even in challenging regulatory environments. Good governance and effective leadership, especially in impoverished communities, are collective processes, which depend on the development of an engaged, analytical, informed, and robust civil society. Community radio in particular has proved to be a sustain- able and interactive medium for poor and marginalized populations to be heard and informed, shape knowledgeable opinions, learn the give-and-take of informed dialogue, and become more decisive agents in their own development.

Good practice demonstrates that support for community radio includes the development of capacities in programming, credible local reporting, station management, and resource mobilization. According to the World Bank (2003) a needs assessment must be undertaken before larger support programs for the community radio sector are developed. This preliminary assessment may help to clarify how best to support the participatory planning and establishment of community radio, how to enhance the capacities of its staff and volunteers, and the likelihood of station sustainability. The World Bank's community broadcasting activities have been varied, with a focus on

providing robust, ongoing vehicles for people—including the very poor—to influence decisions at local and national levels, to voice their individual (and community-based) concerns, and to hold government institutions accountable. There is also a strong focus on analysis of the enabling environment of policies and regulations for information and voice, to enable the Bank to support policy, legal, and regulatory improvements. Further areas of involvement as Gumucio 2001; Tripp and Warren 1996 include facilitating networking among community radio stations and support to national community networks, and provision of technical assistance to help station personnel produce better radio content, diversify their sources of revenue, interface with complementary ICTs, and play a proactive role in the development of the communities served in Kenya and East Africa at large.

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Biographic material

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