

Community Radio: An Emerging Platform for Awareness and Empowerment

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Abstract: Community radio plays an important role in the communication of a certain community and is a form of public-service broadcasting. It upholds the principles of participatory communication. The present study was conducted to know about the role of Radio Dhadkan, a community radio, in sensitizing and empowering the Sahariya tribe of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh of India. Here mainly secondary sources of data have been used. There are some development gaps in meeting the needs of Sahariyas and other marginalized communities living in villages and urban slums of Shivpuri district. To fill these gaps, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in association with Sambhav Social Service Organization, has set up a community radio station – Radio Dhadkan. The present study reveals that Radio Dhadkan has been successful in promoting collective action through radio programs and has been instrumental in creating awareness and empowering the target communities. It has shown an extraordinary dynamism due to its diverse endeavors. It has really helped in connecting, entertaining and educating the Sahariyas in a way that was not possible through any other medium. It has also provided opportunity for employment generation and community capacity building. Thus, the Radio Dhadkan approach has potential applicability in achieving developmental goals.

Keywords: Radio Dhadkan, Community Radio, Participatory Communication, Awareness, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The communication process, technology and media together can help people gain a full awareness of their situation and options for change, and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to improve their condition. Community radio is the best example of this combination in which local people produce and broadcast their own programs and participate in the operation of the station.

Community radio plays an important role in the communication of a certain community and is a form of public service broadcasting. It reflects the culture, ideology, ideas, norms and values of a particular community. It has become popular as a specialized community media as it brings new opportunities for both media practitioners and grassroots people.

Community radio helps in availing utilities and facilities for various developmental aspects of our society such as education, health, water and sanitation, protection from natural calamities, addressing social issues at the community level and connecting the rural population with the government. It can be useful for the development of a particular target group like the elderly, women and children. Community radio helps to ensure people's right to information and community participation by expressing the voices and ideas of grassroots people in the development process [1].

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As community radio upholds the principles of participatory communication by emphasizing process over product, it places technologies and media at the service of development, where it enhances people's ability to manage their own lives [2].

The unique strength of community radio is that it is able to do what other media cannot - bring people together. In India, the license to operate a radio station remained the sole right of the government until in 2006 New Delhi allowed NGOs to operate community radio. Topics with an impact on politics are still considered off-limits, reflecting a reluctance on the part of the government to give up complete control over the media. [3, 4]

Inequality is common to all societies but is particularly problematic in the Indian context, where despite constitutional guarantees of equality to all citizens, many population groups are marginalized from the benefits of development. These include many tribal communities. One such group is the Sahariya tribe of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh. The present study was conducted to know about the role of Radio Dhadkan, a community radio, in sensitizing and empowering the Sahariya tribe of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh of India. Here mainly secondary sources of data have been used.

DISCUSSION

Saharia Tribe

Sahariya tribe is found in the North West part of the Madhya Pradesh, India. It is mostly found in the Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Shivpuri, Guna, Vidisha, Raisen, Sehore and Bundelkhand districts of Madhya Pradesh. The main inhabited area of Sahariya tribe is the forest of Shahabad, which extends from Rajasthan to the Guna of Madhya Pradesh.

Traditionally, the people of the Sahariya tribe are usually engaged in agricultural work. They either cultivate on their own farm or they are agricultural laborers in someone else's field. They are also dependent on food gathering and fishing. They collect herbs, honey and forest products to sell in the city markets to earn their livelihood. The Sahariya tribe is highly influenced by the Hindu culture. They worship many Hindu deities and also celebrate various Hindu festivals. The Sahariya tribe also believes in black magic and ghosts. The people of Sahariya are generally of dark complexion and of medium stature. The Sahariya tribe is highly influenced by the Rajasthani culture and this can be clearly seen in their dress and ornaments [5].

The Sahariya tribe comes under the special backward tribes of Madhya Pradesh. In the present scenario, Sahariyas are living in an intermediary stage between traditionalism and modernity. Their lifestyles, which include education, family structure, income, social and political awareness, cultural values, health practices and dress patterns, are slowly changing under the constant influence of modern society. Due to these socio-cultural changes, encroachment of forests and rapid urbanization, the Sahariya tribe is facing many problems and the government has taken some steps in this direction. But only a few government programs have reached them properly, as they generally avoid interaction with the modern world. Malnutrition, anemia, low birth rates and tuberculosis are commonly present in these people. Alcohol, tobacco, hard work in stone quarries and lack of food are part of their lifestyle. Sambhav Social Service Organization, a NGO, is working for their rights and better health.

Sambhav Social Service Organisation

Sambhav Social Service Organization, a non-government organization registered in 1988 under Madhya Pradesh Societies Registration Act 1973, works on the issues of women empowerment, violence against women, education and health. It also works towards capacity building of communities for their organization especially of Sahariya tribal group and urban slum dwellers. Sambhav mainly works in Gwalior, Bhind, Sheopur, Shivpuri and Dhar districts of Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh. Sambhav opts for a program based approach to its interventions, where programs are led by their specialized coordinators, followed by field level personnel. Community based organizations such as women's groups, self-help groups, adolescent groups and like-minded individuals that enable processes of dialogue at the grassroots are the next level of support groups in the organization. Presently the organization is engaged in several interventions and Radio Dhadkan, a community radio, established in Shivpuri district, is one of them [6].

Shivpuri

Madhya Pradesh is a tribal dominated state of the country. Shivpuri is one of the most backward districts among the tribal dominated districts of the state because of its poor health and education status as compared to the state and the country. It is surrounded by some districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. According to Census 2011, the district has an area of 10,066 sq. km. and the total population is 1,726,050 which includes 321,515 (18.6%) Scheduled Castes and 227,802 (13.2%) Scheduled Tribes. The Sahariyas form a significant segment of the tribal population of Shivpuri [7].

Set Up of a Community Radio Station – Radio Dhadkan

The development of community radio in the tribal areas of India has been important for the development of information flow in the areas. The medium, though long neglected by the central government, can now broadcast programs covering topics such as maternal health and livelihoods in local languages, providing an important source of education.

There are some development gaps in meeting the needs of Sahariyas and other marginalized communities living in villages and urban slums of Shivpuri district. To help address these gaps, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the Sambhav Social Service organization, established a community radio station - Radio Dhadkan - in 2008 that has a wide range. Since its inception, it has covered a population of more than 170,000 in 51 villages and some urban parts of Shivpuri district. Of this population, about 20.3% are scheduled castes, 8% scheduled tribes and 43.67% are other backward castes. It aims to empower the underprivileged communities of Shivpuri, especially the tribal women of Sahariya by helping them to create, access and use information relevant to their local development needs. Radio Dhadkan is broadcast on 107.8 FM community station in Shivpuri [8, 9, 11].

There were several challenges in the implementation of this community radio initiative. It was a very difficult task to ensure the active and continuous participation of the community especially the Sahariya women, as they were busy with their daily schedules. It was not easy for him to take on responsibilities related to community radio and participate in narrowcasting sessions. In addition, technical constraints, including a lack of audio clarity in broadcast and limited technical capability in the community, have been significant operational challenges [10, 11].

At the institutional level, Radio Dhadkan has sustained partnerships with local self-governing bodies, other NGOs and legal and regulatory authorities. Apart from UNICEF, it maintained close ties with the Department of Women and Child Development and the Department of Health and Family Welfare. It also attracted attention among other government departments such as Panchayati Raj and Tribal Welfare. Often, it has partnered with these stakeholders in special programs [10].

Functioning of Radio Dhadkan

Training and capacity building was provided to the staff of Radio Dhadkan to form a pool of trained persons from the community to manage the radio station. They were trained in script writing, recording, editing and other technical aspects of radio. The Radio Dhadkan staff consists of a core team of several members including station in-charge, program coordinators, supervisors and community journalists and other staff members from tribal and scheduled caste communities.

Volunteers are selected from each village who are well versed in the activities and objectives of Radio Dhadkan. They help build community interest and trust in community radio. The specific role of these volunteers is to help journalists facilitate meetings during narrowcasting. For narrowcasting, Radio Dhadkan conducts regular listener group meetings to find out the problems faced by the community and after recording their opinion through the recorder, a radio program is created. Regular narrowcasting sessions enabled Radio Dhadkan to practice an all-inclusive approach, so that people in the community could participate in program content creation and provide feedback for further revision after listening. Radio Dhadkan has started adolescent girls' groups to provide a platform for teenagers which includes adolescent girls from villages and urban Shivpuri. It serves as a tool for their education and information while creating a pool of potential volunteers and field journalists. The community has always been involved in the decision making process regarding program subject selection, program development and program finalization. The programs have holistically focused on the issues in terms of their content and presentation. The daily broadcast includes both fresh programming and replays. The repetitive broadcast strategy ensures that broadcast programs are able to reach the maximum number of listeners, as they can choose to tune into the most convenient time slot for themselves. Radio Dhadkan has used the relatively new concept of podcasts to share media content online. It operates virtual media through its website - www.radiodhadkan.podbean.com [8, 10, 11].

The continuation of the community radio initiative is essential to the best interests of the community. To be successful, it must be socially, institutionally and economically sustainable. Although Radio Dhadkan has taken some steps to generate revenue such as identification of customers for monetary support and charging for public service announcements. It is also adopting additional revenue generating measures including soliciting and airing commercial radio ads for a fee, and applying for a franchise to conduct training courses on radio jockeying, commercial radio production, editing, advertising, etc. The sustainability of its improved and diverse broadcast has been fueled by a greater focus on volunteer capacity building, along with efforts to tie up with various local, national and international agencies [10].



Picture 1: RJ Ramvati, a Saharia Woman, in the Radio Dhadkan Station in Shivpuri [4]

Radio Dhadkan as a Tool of Awareness and Empowerment

Community radio maintains the ideologies of participatory communication as it emphasizes process over product. It uses technologies and media for development purposes as it enhances the ability of people to manage their lives and is able to bring people together which is its unique strength. Here, Radio Dhadkan is used as a major communication tool as it throws light on the prevailing issues among the targeted communities in Shivpuri district, especially in Sahariya. It generates discussion about issues and initiates conversation. The working strategy of Radio Dhadkan is based on the principle of social marketing. It provides information and encourages communities to adopt education, health, sanitation and other life-saving behaviors and advocates for good practices and healthy life choices. It also increases the awareness and outreach of the various government programs going on in the community. Radio Dhadkan provides information and programs to the Sahariya community in their local dialect, thereby helping to preserve and promote the Sahariya culture. Also, it helps in creating continuous dialogue and awareness in low literacy areas in and around Shivpuri. Since the staff of Radio Dhadkan is selected from the community, the staff members understand the issues and problems facing the community and are able to design the content accordingly. It is an effective way of providing voice representation to vulnerable and marginalized communities who desperately need it [10, 11].

Radio Dhadkan has had a positive and constructive impact in reaching and connecting the community and it continues to grow. It generally encourages performances that highlight the importance of community participation and contribute to increasing the achievement of community radio. It prioritizes ensuring the relevance of what is being communicated to the target communities. The performance of Radio Dhadkan shows that a community radio works most successfully when it relies on community participation and inclusion. It gives voice to the members of the community, especially the marginalized. It facilitates dialogue between different sections of the community, supports a healthy lifestyle and creates a desire among people to use community radio as a platform to advocate their agenda. Radio Dhadkan has increased awareness and practice among Sahariya women about various lifesaving practices like hand washing with soap, exclusive breastfeeding, vaccination etc. In addition, it played an important role in increasing the willingness of the community to use Radio Dhadkan as a platform for social change [4, 10, 11].

CONCLUSION

India is committed to various development goals. The present study advocates that the Radio Dhadkan approach may have potential applicability in achieving some of these. Radio Dhadkan plays a vital role in empowering the target communities. It is successful in encouraging collective action through radio programs as it inspires the formation of women's groups to campaign against various social evils. Its replication elsewhere offers promising benefits. In a short span of time, Radio Dhadkan has portrayed extraordinary dynamism due to its diverse endeavors. It has really helped in connecting, entertaining and educating the Sahariyas which was not possible through any other medium. It has also provided opportunity for employment generation and community capacity building. Although Radio Dhadkan has been successful in achieving its goals so far, there is always room for progress. Therefore, to sustain this success in the changing scenario and to further improve its activities and impact, Radio Dhadkan will need to develop innovative ways of revenue generation, capacity building, awareness generation and communication.

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