

# **Innovations in Community Radio**

*With special reference to India*

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**Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
Government of India**

**Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia  
New Delhi, India**

## **Innovations in Community Radio**

*With special reference to India*

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## Preface

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*.....You do not have to look for them. They are there, 24X7, beaming like radio waves all around you. Put up the antenna, turn up the volume - snap... crackle... this just in, every person you talk to is a chance to change the world.....*

But, a chance is needed to innovate, an environment is needed to change, a voice is needed to listen. A decade back, a chance was needed to air the voice of the voiceless. Now it is there. Now the Community Radio (CR) needs new initiatives and innovations to become the most powerful communication medium in a democratic political architecture.

CR has its unique value in the society. It provides a platform where members of a community or communities can discuss their problems, issues and exchange views. It develops a sense of belonging among the members of a community. CR is already recognized as one of the most low cost media, especially suitable to reach remote communities and disadvantaged group of people -- the illiterates, the disabled, women, the poor, while offering a platform to intervene in the public debate, irrespective of people's educational, financial and social level. Being a participatory communication medium, CR can be instrumental in making the voices of the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society heard. CR has played a crucial role in creating awareness among people and informing citizens about their rights and entitlements.

This research explores the present status of the CR in India in the initial sections. But the main focus has been given on the innovative practices of the community radios scattered in nook and corner of the country. Emphasis has also given to classify the possible innovations in the sector and a list of areas on innovation has been identified. This endeavor would open up new paths to create a robust community radio environment in the country.

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## List of Acronyms

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CCFC	CEMCA Community Radio Facilitation Centre
CEMCA	Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
CR	Community Radio
CRA	Community Radio Association
CRF	Community Radio Forum
CRFC	Community Radio Facilitation Centre
CRS	Community Radio Station
FM	Frequency Modulation
DAVP	Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity
GoI	Government of India
MIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
TRI	Telecom Regulatory of India
WPC	Wireless Planning and Coordination

# 1. Introduction

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American writer Peggy Noonan stated "TV gives everyone an image, but radio gives birth to a million images in a million brains." For this unique feature, perhaps, radio became the most vibrant mass communication tool of the contemporary times. This medium became outdated in the late twentieth century because of the rapid expansion of the television or other electronic media. The new born FM culture has helped to regain its popularity in the rural as well as urban areas. But these entertaining FM channels are unable to discuss the local problems of a community in a common platform. Here the community radio comes in. The emerging broadcast sector with vast untapped potential facilitates democratization of the airwaves for a progressive societal change. Community Radio (CR) stands for radio broadcasting with the objective of advancing the cause of the community in the service area by involving members of the community in the broadcast of their programmes. It is a type of radio service that caters to the interests of a certain area, broadcasting material that is popular to a local audience but is overlooked by more powerful broadcast groups (Dutta & Ray, 2009, p. 4).

CR is already recognized as one of the most low cost media, especially suitable to reach remote communities and disadvantaged group of people -- the illiterates, the disabled, women, youth and the poor, while offering a platform to intervene in the public debate, irrespective of people's educational level. Being a participatory communication medium, CR can play a vital role in making the voices of the underprivileged and marginalized sections of society heard. CR has played a key role in creating awareness among people and informing citizens about their rights and entitlements. UNESCO says that as radio continues to evolve in the digital age, it remains the medium that reaches the widest audience worldwide<sup>1</sup>. This multi-purpose medium can help people, including youth, to become involved in discussions on topics that affect them. It can save lives during natural or human-made disasters; and it provides journalists with a platform to report facts and tell their stories.

## 1.1 Background

Community Radio has emerged as an effective medium to give voice to the voiceless at the grassroots level. Currently, there are about 170 Community Radio Stations<sup>2</sup> (CRS) on the air and it is estimated that more than 500 CRS are at various stages of processing. Experience has revealed that while CRS are able to manage their production and management aspects in different forms, there is pressing need for guidance and support relating to possible innovations in different areas of programme production, advocacy and delivery of those programmes. CEMCA with its intense engagement with the Community Radio sector in varied aspects ranging from policy interventions to practice is eminently suited to address this felt need. Towards this, CEMCA aims to assist the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to utilize the fund on CR innovation and help the CR stations

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/unesco-house/?tx\\_browser\\_pi1\[showUid\]=27762&cHash=46172f02f1](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/unesco-house/?tx_browser_pi1[showUid]=27762&cHash=46172f02f1)

<sup>2</sup> As of May 1, 2014 as per MIB Website

to think on how a particular CR station can do some innovations in producing and delivering of the programmes.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014, there are 170 operational Community Radio stations in India, operating from different parts of the country, catering to diverse communities and under different situations. The Ministry of I & B has received a total number of 1348 applications so far since 2004 and issued the Letters of Intent (LOI) to 461 organisations, whereas 200 stations have signed the Grant of Permission of Agreement (GOPA). The Ministry rejected 667 number of applications and 220 number of applications are under process ("Facts and Figures of CRS", 2014<sup>3</sup>).

## 1.2 Objectives

The basic objectives of this study are to:

- i) Document the innovative practices of community radio stations of India
- ii) Identify the areas of possible innovations in the community radio sector in India

## 1.3 Conceptual Framework

For this study, there is no need to define the term 'community radio'. It is now well accepted term. Hence, there is one term that needs to be defined, i.e. innovation. The term 'innovation' is about finding new ways of doing something. The colloquial Hindi word for innovation is "Juggad".

The National Innovation Council has defined innovation as 'innovation today is increasingly going beyond the confines of formal R&D to redefine everything. Today innovation can mean new and unique applications of old technologies, using design to develop new products and services, new processes and structures to improve performance in diverse areas, organizational creativity, and public sector initiatives to enhance delivery of services. Innovation is being seen as a means of creating sustainable and cost effective solutions for people at the bottom of the pyramid, and is being viewed as an important strategy for inclusive growth in developing economies'<sup>4</sup>.

Professor Nirmalya Kumar of London Business School in his lecture 'India's Invisible innovation'<sup>5</sup> opined that there are basically two types of innovations. One is visible innovation, which stands for the new products or services for end users and the invisible Innovation. He has again categorized the later type into four: (a) Innovation for business, (b) Outsourcing Innovation, (c) Process Innovation, and (d) Management Innovation.

In the CR sector, visible innovations are very limited alike the Indian scenario of innovation. Only a few innovations happened in antenna, transmitter, renewable energy devices, software etc. But lots of invisible innovations are happening, which come under

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<sup>3</sup> As of May 1, 2014 as per MIB Website

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[http://www.innovationcouncil.gov.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=5](http://www.innovationcouncil.gov.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=5)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zodVSI0uShc>

process innovation and management innovations. We cannot ignore these innovations, which may not be visible, but helps in sustainability of CR stations.

We define innovation as the application of a new/better solution that meets the requirements (present or future needs). For the CR sector, it may be an idea, practice or method. An innovation is something original, new, and important for the field of CR, which breaks in to (or obtains a foothold in) the sector.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

The study followed a qualitative research approach, involving the use of the semi-structured interview as the primary method. It involves a preliminary descriptive examination of the perceptions and experiences of the community broadcasters, stakeholders and experts in the CR sector.

Three processes are blended throughout the study: collection, coding, and analysis of data. This approach encourages the kind of flexibility so essential to the qualitative researcher who can change a line of inquiry and move in new directions, as more information and a better understanding of relevant data comes in during the research.

Considering the nature of the work, the researcher collected data in three phases:

1. A select group of researchers and experts in the field of CR contacted to know about good initiatives on innovation in community radios in India and diaspora and to know the possible innovations in the sector. The persons are mainly associated with international and national organizations like UNESCO, Ford Foundation, AMARC Asia Pacific, Commonwealth of Learning, BNNRC, Community Radio Association, Community Radio Forum, Maraa, Ideosync Media Combine, Gram Vaani, One World South Asia and a few known community broadcasters.
2. During the 4th Community Radio Sammelan held on 13-15 of March, 2014 in New Delhi, a questionnaire, with open ended questions, was distributed to know the ideas on possible innovations from the community radio practitioners. On the last day of the Sammelan, about 11% questionnaires were received from the CR operators from different parts of the country.
3. To know the ongoing innovative practices of the CR stations the researcher sent a mail to all the functional community radio stations and received 14.3% of responses from the CR broadcasters.

Based on the collected data and three interviews with three organizations based outside the country, the analysis has been prepared. Secondary data and web resources have also been consulted to write the additional sections of the report. A bibliography of cited references in the APA 6th style has been used.

## 2. Innovative Practices in Indian CRS

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The following are a few innovative practices of about 25 community radio stations of the country. These are the opinions of the stations who have participated in our email interviews. Also we would like to incorporate a few visible innovations made by other stakeholders like Nomad, Gram Vaani etc. We often confuse between the invisible innovations and experiments. The functional CRS are always experimenting in programming, community involvement and sustainability. An innovation is a successful experiment, and therefore, the invisible innovations also need to be considered in a broad framework. Such innovations are at local level in process or in management, it may not be useable always as product or service for the end users, but without these in process and managerial innovations, the sector could not grow and sustain. Therefore, we have added a few invisible innovations as well, which were received from the participated CR stations.

### 2.1 Visible innovations:

- Establishment of mobile studio in creating content generation in the local areas.
- Innovation of very low cost FM radio antenna
- Radio streaming open access software, such as GRINS
- Concept of wireless community, such as Airtime, which helps community radio stations to collaborate with each other or with other community media groups on real-time bases to create radio shows.
- Radio on Cloud that helps to narrowcast.
- High performance FM transmitter, such as NIN100
- Renewable energy devices to generate sufficient electricity for the CR
- Using pigeon hole at market place for audience feedback
- Converting the text book materials into audio format

### 2.2 Invisible Innovations:

- Skill development training to community women to start their own small enterprises
- Recording, broadcasting and preservation of different folk performances, folklore, folk art, folk games, folk fairs, festivals and establishment of the identity to the folk artists
- Use of Community Radio as a consumer helpline
- Use of CR for citizen audit of government schemes
- Programme that helps community to assist and locate the auto rickshaws
- Development of own course to train the local youths to develop and broadcast the programme
- Involvement of community in Programme Committee to promote community participation and ownership in radio programmes

- Use of CR by the police department for sorting out disputes, solving petty crimes etc.
- From street to studio- street singers as radio singer
- Recording of historic novels using drama
- Broadcasting of 'live c lassroom' to aid students in learning.
- Involvement of municipal authorities and legal advisors to address community issues
- Internship at CR for youths
- Involvement of all staff and their families in educational institution based CR
- Involvement of senior citizens in radio programmes to relief loneliness of aged citizen (E.g. 'Second Innings Ko Salaam')
- Involvement of families of farmers in agricultural broadcasting

## 3. Areas of Innovations in Community Radio Sector

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As per the methodology, the researcher collected the primary data from three different ways and consulted a considerable number of secondary sources of data. Based on the data and the practical experience of running four years a CRS and a decade in the media education, the researcher tried to categorize the possible innovations in the CR sector into five areas. These are: policy, technology, sustainability, programming and community participation. The innovations listed are indicative, and can't be claimed to be comprehensive.

### 3.1 Policy

#### 3.1.1 Creating an enabling environment to autonomy

Like the Prasar Bharati Act for autonomous public service broadcasting in India, there is a need to prepare a Community Radio Bill and place before the Parliament, which will ensure all the rights of the community broadcasters and cover other policies related to community broadcasting. The United States also have a separate CR Act. The 'Local Community Radio Act', a broadcast law passed by the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States after five years and four versions on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2010, explicitly authorizes the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to license local low-power broadcasting in the FM broadcast band (LPFM)(111<sup>th</sup> Congress of USA, 2010). Similar kind of acts may encourage a robust community radio sector and create an environment to provide autonomy to the sector in India.

#### 3.1.2 Reservation and Sharing of Airwaves

- a) The Uruguayan Law on Community Broadcasting protects reservation of one third of analogue and digital spectrum for community broadcasting<sup>6</sup>. To encourage the CR sector, a reservation on the total spectrum may be protected exclusively for the community broadcasting.
- b) The researcher has conducted a desktop research among 122 CR stations of the country with the help of the Community Radio Compendium, 2014, which reveals that 68.9% of CR stations utilize 10 hours or less for broadcasting through their respective stations. About 50% of the CR stations utilize only eight hours or less for broadcasting. Only 9% CR stations utilize the spectrum for more than 20 hours. On the contrary, a considerable number of applications have been rejected because of non-availability of frequency. The concept of sharing a same frequency can be adopted by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It will not only help in

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<sup>6</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002150/215097e.pdf>

utilizing the natural resources properly, but also in making the stations financially sustainable.<sup>7</sup>

### **3.1.3 Transforming CR to the Community Multimedia hub**

UNESCO initiated the Community Multimedia Centres (CMC) as a community-based facility offering both community radio broadcasting and telecentre services (access to Internet and other information and communications technologies - ICTs). CMCs, established in different countries promote community empowerment and address the digital divide by combining community broadcasting with the Internet and related technologies<sup>8</sup>. The CRS in India can plan to embrace the concept of CMC and serve the local community.

### **3.1.4 Innovation in process of licensing**

In the licensing process, some innovations suggested by the stakeholders are:

- a) Revisit the eligibility criteria to include other stakeholders.
- b) Creation of a single window system for processing of license and reduce the time of setting-up CRS.
- c) Renewal of CRS license need to be made easier.
- d) Frequency allocation can follow the West African model of open and transparent system, including public hearings.

## **3.2 Technology**

### **3.2.1 Innovation in software**

- a) To reduce the costs of a CR station, open access software should be used. Instead of spending huge amounts in purchasing costly software, Open Source software must be utilized for all the activities of the station<sup>9</sup>.
- b) Lots of software can be developed for different activities of a CR station. Recording, editing, final mixing, mastering, logging, archiving, telephony etc. are the areas, where innovative software designing can be possible.
- c) Considering the number of mobile phone users in India, mobile technology may be utilized in a greater way in community broadcasting.
- d) While web streaming of CR is possible with available Open Source technology, more innovation needed to make these user-friendly for the CR sector.
- e) Development of mobile application in android, windows and iphone for CR sector.

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<sup>7</sup> Community Broadcasting Law Uruguay and Argentina allow equitable sharing of the airwaves for Community Broadcasting Sector.

<sup>8</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=1263&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1263&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>9</sup> For example, Audacity is user friendly software for both recording and editing purpose.

### 3.2.2 Innovation in Hardware

- a) Innovations are possible to improve the low power FM transmitter, antenna, dummy load, noise reduction mechanism, broadcast console, telephony, mobile broadcasting, microphones etc.
- b) Common streaming of CR stations may be a good innovation, and setting up a web server facility like GISS.tv<sup>10</sup> would be useful.
- c) The sector needs creative technologies to measure listenership through appropriate innovation.

### 3.2.3 Innovation in renewable energy devices

A cost effective technology can be developed for the required power supply of a CR station. It will help the rural stations during frequent load shading and illogical power cuts.

- a) Use of small wind mill power supply technology<sup>11</sup>
- b) Use of Solar power technology<sup>12</sup>

## 3.3 Programming

### 3.3.1 Innovation in pre-production of programmes

- a) Crowd-sourcing of an idea bank on the innovative programming can be developed. A digital repository of innovative programmes and ideas can be created, where the process of programming, script, sound effects, community participation etc. issues may also be incorporated. The community and any individuals will also have the right to contribute to the platform.
- b) A community radio should play a role to bridge the public servants and community. This practice is going on in some CR stations, but how this will be scaled up in the sector should be a priority. This effort will help in a tri-partite way. The community people will be able to know the public policies and if they have any grievance or query they can utilize the CR as a platform. Secondly, it is the duty of all public servants to work for the people and the messages should be properly communicated. Thirdly, the CR station can get funding, advertisements etc., from the public departments. The CR stations also create a rapport, which may be utilized for the listeners in any adverse situation.
- c) Profiling of listeners for production of programmes.

### 3.3.2 Combining new media technologies

- a) There is enough scope to integrate new media, including use of social media for CRS.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://giss.tv/>

<sup>11</sup> Yeralavani 91.2 FM is using this small wind power mill.

<sup>12</sup> *Waqt Ki Awaaz* established 6 KW Solar Power technology

- b) Use of telephone for programme production beyond phone-in programming, can be done to improve interaction and community participation.
- c) Creatively using content sharing platforms like EDEA<sup>13</sup> and Manch<sup>14</sup> for encouraging dialogue, debate, discussion, and diversity in community engagement.

### **3.3.3 Inclusion of contents in programming**

- a) In programme production, thematic issues may be highlighted and more emphasis can be given. For example, Science for Women, Radio Mathematics etc.
- b) Considering the popularity of recent television reality shows, the format of this programming can be adopted by the CR stations for the local talent hunt. It will help to develop an archive of local artists.

### **3.3.4 Preservation of local art, culture and music**

One of the important objectives of a CR station should be to create an archive of the local art, culture and music. This archive not only helps the community in preserving their folk performances, but also helps to make it alive among the community in a competitive world where Bollywood and western music is gradually becoming popular.

## **3.4 Community Participation**

### **3.4.1 Participation through Community Learning**

Community Learning Programme<sup>15</sup> is based on communication for development strategies, blending outcome-oriented learning design with process-oriented dialogue and stakeholder participation. This model of learning based radio programming helps in huge community participation in programme production.

### **3.4.2 Involvement of community in management**

- a) Innovations can be incorporated towards community participation in the decision making mechanism of the radio station.
- b) Community radio should be a medium of social change and social audit.
- c) If community members can participate in the management, more particularly in the agenda setting level, then the objective of a CR station would be fulfilled. Innovations are possible in this context and a few models can be developed to engage community in decision making stage in the real sense.

### **3.4.3 Accountability and encouragement**

- a) Grievance redressal mechanism needs to be developed, both at the level of the CRS and at a central place (such as a website for consumer complaints).

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<sup>13</sup> <http://edaa.in/edea/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://manch.net.in/adda>

<sup>15</sup>

<http://www.col.org/progServ/programmes/livelihoods/healthyComm/Pages/CommunityLearningProgrammeModel.aspx>

- b) Contributions of community volunteers need to be compensated through innovative approaches to continue their support and engagements with the CR sector.

### **3.5 Sustainability**

#### **3.5.1 Financial sustainability**

- a) Decentralized programme production through mini-listener clubs to sustain programme development.
- b) Collaborative programming will help in decreasing the expenditure level in some special programmes like drama, feature, magazine or any research on programming etc. among two or more CR stations and between a CR station and other community organizations.
- c) Denmark's strategic public funding mechanism for community broadcasting supports the earmarked portion of the household tax for public service broadcasting and with this funding is provided for both operating costs and programme making. Fund is administered by an independent regulatory body<sup>16</sup>. An amount for the operating cost to all CRS may be considered by the government for initial five years.

#### **3.5.2 Social sustainability**

- a) Different membership cards may be issued by a CR station, such as yearly or life time and collect a small fee. It will help the station in generating an amount for their expenditure and the members would also feel that they became the integral part of the station. This model helps more in social sustainability than financial.
- b) Developing a sense of belongingness amongst the community for the CRS.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002150/215097e.pdf>

## 4. Concluding Remarks

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Innovation helps a growing communication media to convert it to a robust sector of dissemination of information and a platform to share peoples' thought. For Community Radio, it has more importance as it is a local and communities' instrument to preserve their culture, discuss their problems, get information, education and entertainment, share ideas, and finally help themselves to grow in a democratic political architecture.

Due to constrain of time, and lack of clarity of innovation in the CR sector, it was not possible to get a complete picture in this study. But the researcher believes that this endeavour on the innovation of community radio will increase further thinking in this direction.

There is enough scope to innovate in the area of community radio technology. Particularly, for the hilly regions and cities, where high risers create lots of shadow areas, technological innovations can solve the problems. So many CR stations always experiment with programming, sustainability and community participation. But for the technological aspects, the stations are unable to experiment because of the financial constraints or organizational barriers. But innovators are everywhere. If a remote station like Henwalvani can think on technological innovations and experimentations, then we can easily assume that so many broadcasters, activists, experts and technical connoisseurs are there who have so many ideas, but could not utilize because of the aforementioned reasons. The efforts of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to include innovation in the Community Radio support fund have been widely appreciated by the CRS.

The Government of India has been placing special emphasis on innovation through the National Innovation Council<sup>17</sup> and National Innovation Foundation<sup>18</sup> (set up by the Department of Science and Technology) to provide institutional support to grassroots innovators. Connecting MIB initiative to these national platforms would be further welcome and useful to the sector.

*We conclude with the statement that "Necessity is the mother of invention" ..., and let thousand innovations flourish in the Community Radio sector.*

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<sup>17</sup> <http://iii.gov.in/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nif.org.in/>

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