

VOICE OF THE VOICELESS: Women Enlightenment, BOU and Community Radio

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INTRODUCTION

The Community broadcasting system is on the way to start in Bangladesh. The CR installation Operation and Broadcasting Policy-2008 has been announced on 12 March this year. The application for the permission of setting up community radio have been asked through advertisement since 18 March 2008. A total of 400 application form were sold and 178 applicants submitted to The Ministry of Information for the permission of the community radio set up, about 50 community radio station are expected to start soon in Bangladesh and then rest of the 66 station will get permission to start their CR station. Recently Bangladesh Government has approved the regulation of the community radio in Bangladesh To inform the general mass of the country, it has been published in the website of The Ministry of Information.

Since long run media based NGOs along with other NGOs and private sector were trying their best to introduce CR in Bangladesh. They have started advocacy in the policy making level. Many studies have been conducted based on the experience of other South Asian country to make it fruitful and more pragmatic to the people of Bangladesh. Total 116 institutions are expected to get this opportunity for two years pilot phase. Initially some of them will start broadcasting their programs for four hours; gradually they have a plan to broadcast their programs for 24 hours depending on the needs and feasibility of the community people. At present the frequency will cover 17 km radius.

OBJECTIVES

- How women will be benefited from the community radio.
- To acquaint women groups with the role of media and the significance of their participations.
- What will be the strategy to conduct an effective outreach programs for women.
- How Bangladesh Open University will incorporate this issue.

METHODOLOGY

Literature review, empirical studies and interview with the CEO of Mass Line Media (MMS), the renowned media based NGO in Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY AND THE PROSPECT OF COMMUNITY RADIO

Bangladesh is a land of only 55 thousand kilometer but has a huge number of populations. A good number of populations have no education or at least no proper education. In our country both public and private university are thinking to start CR station in their campus which is popularly known as campus radio. Most of the mobile phone sets FM technology to the broadcasters. The interactive radio is an effective tool for open and distance learning on their ability to use technology effective with cost effectiveness. Distance and open learning allow us to increase access to education, inclusive education, control the cost of education and also quality education. Radio is not a new generation technology for most of the learners as it is has existed in the developing countries for a long time. In CR what will be new and attractive to the learners is the opportunity of interaction, which will be more participatory and pragmatic.

Access to information is the basic rights of the people of any country. We know that knowledge is power and knowledge imparted through education is more powerful. In our country most of the people are devoid of their basic rights and they are considered as the disadvantaged group. The fruits of technology and modernity are the subject of enjoyment of the privileged class of the society. So the CR will be the bridge of information among the disadvantaged people based on their needs, culture, environment and economic status. Promoting CR is a crying need s especially in the context of Bangladesh where more than 60% of total population is illiterate and living below poverty line. Bangladesh Open University is the only University in Bangladesh which is imparting education through distance mode. Their main objective is to reach the unreached. From the empirical study of other countries, it has been found that women are benefited mostly from BOU. They are other disadvantaged groups of women who are economically, socially, geographically and culturally disadvantaged. So BOU could not reach up to that level with their present mechanism. If BOU could introduce community radio through its 80 local centre, it would be a revolutionary step for BOU to fulfill its target. Only CR can play a greater role to protect the rights of the people and facilities and freedom of expression.

NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY RADIO IN BANGLADESH

Community Radio is going to be the voice of rural people. For the first time in Bangladesh a national workshop on Community Radio Awareness was held on 02-04 March 2008 at BOU campus jointly arranged by Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) and Development Research Network (DNet) in collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning (COL) a d Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The workshop took place at the Media Centre in Bangladesh Open University at Gazipur, Dhaka. The workshop was inaugurated by the Honorable Vice Chancellor of the Bangladesh Open University, Professor Dr.Fariduddin Ahmed. He said during his speech "Our day to day life is now highly influenced by the technology, and this workshop is going to contribute a big stake in the social and economic development of Bangladesh. The delegates from the commercial phone companies who have established the internet outlet in the rural areas in Bangladesh have also joined.

In the workshop, the technical aspects, making studio designing and maintain, radio³⁶

station management and broadcasting everything is taught with tremendous care and practical demonstration.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNITY RADIO

Most of the people in Bangladesh think that the establishment of the community radio is expensive. It is totally a misconception. From empirical study it has been seen that any community could establish community radio. It is quite possible to do this. The machineries needed for the community radio and for its maintenance are both easy and cost effective. Initially only expertise is needed to set up its broadcasting facilities. The cost of overall set up with machines for community radio is worth 20 thousand US Dollar (Community Radio Handbook UNESCO 2001). Only 16 kilo weight suitcase size box is sufficient to put the community radio inside. With the help of the solar system the battery could be charged or electricity could be used for FM broadcasting. In which island UNESCO established transmitter in Cape Bardne with the help of local expert. They were so interested in community radio that afterwards they established transmitter in another two islands. They also introduce networking between three islands which are exchanging their programs everyday. (Louie Tabing, Manager of the UNESCO/Danida Tambuli Project, Philippines).

BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN STATUS IN BANGLADESH

The women of Bangladesh have made significant progress through their participation in areas like primary education, family planning, micro finance and readymade garments manufacturing. In spite of these advancements still women remain highly vulnerable to living in poverty. The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for men and women, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex and strives to promote social and economic equality. Article-28 states "women should have equal rights with men in all spheres of state and public life". But, practically, very few women can enjoy such rights and live a healthy and prestigious life.

- From social, cultural and religious point of view, women were leading stereotyping role and have a limited mobility scope outside the home. Due to that they are not getting sufficient information which will upgrade their knowledge and improve their lifestyle with good healthy situation. In such situation, active participatory discussions in the CR will help the women to motivate their male members to share household burden and also support the women in increasing their mobility in public places and community work.
- It could create opportunity for women to speak to women on HIV/AIDS, Family Law, disabilities of women have.
- The community based programmes could impart information relating their lives like HIV/AIDS and other vital community issues such as poverty, violence against women, micro finance, reproductive health and early childhood development.
- It could provide updated information regarding faming and poultry.
- It could provide information regarding market demand of the agricultural and poultry product. And could educate the women to become a self employed worker and earning member of the society.
- It could provide information for personal and family hygiene of the family.
- It could provide information to the women like bird flu or arsenic pollution.

- CR could educate the women regarding election process so that they become an independent voter, and vote the person according to their own choice.
- CR could act as an interactive radio and could find out the talent from women who are interested in any cultural participation.
- It could provide them basic education to write, read and counting.
- Finally Community Radio could help the women in the remote areas to empower themselves and live a happy and healthy life.
- Community Radio could be a very effective tool in mediating social change by promoting gender sensitivity for women development among the rural, especially among the poor section of the community.

Some mechanism could be suggested for the implementation of the above proposal:

- Awareness raising through distribution of information among the women and children regarding children rights, personal laws such as law of inheritance, dowry, polygamy, early marriage, divorce and custody of children.
- Sensitizing the community through dialogues and also providing updated information and prevention to reduce the incidents of trafficking, sexual harassment, exploitation by the family and society, any type of abuse and violence against women and children.
- Community Radio can give a positive example of successful women by interviewing them, so that it will create a positive impact on other deprived women and will encourage them to do the same thing.
- CR can be very effective tool in providing and monitoring the work done by union parishad's engendered services e.g., widow allowance, old age allowance, distribution of VGD card, birth, death and marriage registration, post disaster relief services. It will help to develop transparency among the member of the union parishads and hence developing democratic society.
- We know that in any crisis either natural or social, women and children get much more affected than the men. In Bangladesh like coastal belt, CR can sensitize community to take special care of the women and children.

A CASE STUDY OF A WOMAN

The woman named Josna Bishwas is benefited from the information centre in Rangamatia village arranged by Mass Line Media (MMC) a leading media based NGO. During the time of interview with the CEO of MMC, he told that this information can be substituted by CR with a wider scope for women enlightenment. Josna Bishwas says— Govt. is running by our money, so they could not make a law with their own information, those information should be shared with common mass. We like to get information.

This centre is providing newspaper, magazine (agriculture, health, public issue). There are many posters in the wall of the centre with important message like HIV/AIDS, bird flu, trafficking etc. A girl studying in grade 9 is surrounded by many people because she was learning newspaper loudly and everybody is listening to her because they could not read.

Josna Bishwas says ---before coming to this information centre, we do not know about good farming about harmful insects for the plants good fertilizer etc. Sometimes the community people arranged courtyard meeting to discuss on different important issues related to everyday life.

Some expert from local community come and share their opinion with other women on the topic like women's health, reproductive health about pregnancy about healthy delivery, nutrition during pregnancy and post-natal care,. She says that if anybody knows that these women are from Rangamatia village, they show there respect because they are enrich with information. They are also get benefit from the advertisement of jobs publish in the newspaper. Three people already got job in abroad by getting information from this centre. Josna Bishwas says with pride that information can change the life of anyone and our life is changing towards development.

The Milan declaration on Community and Human rights passed at the 7th World Congress of the World association of community Broadcasters in Milan, Italy in 1998 called for International recognition of the community broadcasting sector as an essential form of public service broadcasting and a vital contributor to media pluralism and freedom of expression and information.

The Declaration emphasized that:

- Community n media can play an important role in strengthening cultural rights, and in particular, the rights of the linguistic and cultural minorities, indigenous peoples by providing access to the means of communication.
- Access to the means of communication must be supported by education and training to assist a critical understanding of the media and to enable people to develop their media and communication skills.
- The market economy is not the only model for the shaping of the communications structure. People must be seen as producers and contributors of information and not be defined solely as consumers.
- The democratic participation of women in communication media should be guaranteed at all levels.

Recommendation

- Initially, Bangladesh Open University could introduce Community radio through its 12 regional centre, and in the long run through 80 local centers.
- Ensure training of the local officer or appoint new people by giving training to them on community radio.
- Conduct research programs based on the need assessment of the women nearer to the locality of CR.
- Ensure the cooperation of the local people and especially the influential people.
- Ensure direct and active participation of the deprived and disadvantaged women community.
- Ensure participatory and interactive communication of women in CR. In that case mobile phone which is cost effective could be the best media. A group of women could use one mobile phone for this purpose.
- Emphasis should be given on local norms, culture and values.
- Conduct an active and effective outreach relevant for the women. This is because many traditional methods like leaflets, meeting does not easily reach women as men.
- Ensure physical accessibility. If the station is located remotely it will be hard for women to have an access.

- **Strategy should be taken to build confidence of the women. There is a stereotyping belief that women are born for private field not for public field and they are not competent for community work and technology based work. Voice should be raised of the voiceless.**
- **In order to avoid all the barriers there is a need to engender. CR should build awareness of both men and women so that the male counterpart could help them for empowerment.**
- **To set a community radio station is not a matter of high technology and skilled manpower and high cost, what is needed are—commitment to the society, and positive attitude.**
- **Bangladesh Open University could go through collaboration with any NGOs or private sector. Both will be benefited by using each other are set up.**

CONCLUSION

The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of the oppressed people (be it on radical, gender or class grounds) and overall for a tool of development. Community Radio is defined as having three aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and control community participation.

It should be made clear that community radio is not about doing something for the community but about the community doing something for itself, i.e., owning and controlling its own means of communication.

Over the years community radio has become an essential tool for community development in different countries of the world. People can recognize themselves and identify with community radio, in addition to communicating among themselves.

In most of the developing countries, women do not have voice but actually they have marvelous voice of their own, which is suppressed due to many social causes. CR could give a voice to that voiceless who are not necessarily educated and devoid of their basic rights. Bangladesh essentially needs community radio, and it is based on liberal creed—that all men are essentially equal.

The mandate of BOU is to reach the unreached. Among the unreached, women in the remote areas are the most vulnerable groups in Bangladesh.

So Community Radio is the easiest way for BOU to reach those vulnerable groups with their mission and vision. BOU has good infrastructure, strong ethical basis, skilled manpower, so it could do anything for the general mass.

As we know, Democracy is for the people by the people and of the people. Community Radio is also for the people, by the people and of the people, irrespective of sex, gender and race. So, BOU could have the golden opportunity to democratize its education through CR especially to enlighten and empowered the women of Bangladesh.

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