

Communicating Health and Education through Community Radio: An Exploration of Practices and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a vision for transforming the earth into a sustainable habitat. Achieving these goals requires effective dissemination and implementation strategies. To transform the socio-economic status of a community, it is essential to start at the ground level and take step-by-step actions for overall development. Community radio is a hyper-local medium that engages with specific communities, making it a valuable tool for information and communication. Due to its localized nature, community radio can effectively communicate the Sustainable Development Goals at a regional level.

To facilitate the better dissemination of these SDGs, UNESCO and CEMCA have developed a 'Toolkit' designed to assist with the planning and execution of initiatives through community radio. This article focuses on the communication of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3-health and well-being, and SDG 4- equal and inclusive education—through the medium of community radio. While examining execution practices, it analyzes the challenges and limitations community radio faces in the public domain. The research is set in Uttarakhand, a state located at the foothills of the Himalayas, and centres on the community radios Mandakini Ki Awaz (90.8 MHz) and Henvalvani (90.4 MHz).

The methodology employed in this study includes semi-structured interviews with the director, content creators, program producers, and field reporters working for these community radios. Additionally, participant observation is utilised to gain a deeper understanding of the core operations within the community. The study is framed theoretically by Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy and participatory approach.

Keywords: Health, Education, Community Radio, SDGs, Practices and Challenges, UNESCO, Toolkit

INTRODUCTION

A robust and sustainable societal structure thrives on the foundation of inclusivity, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to participate and contribute. By embracing the diverse strengths of all human resources, we foster a community that is not only equitable but also resilient and thriving. In 2015, the member states of the United Nations adopted “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” to accomplish this highly ambitious idea of an equal and inclusive world. To achieve this goal, the world aims to develop smaller units and ensure this objective reaches every part of the globe. UNESCO's principle of inclusivity and

constant endeavours for the execution of this ideology of “leaving no one behind” shape the world for a sustainable and positive future. (UNESCO)

Community radio serves as a medium of communication to foster the development of communities that share common geographical, cultural, and social characteristics. Community radio operates at the grassroots level, addressing the real issues within the community. It is often referred to as "radio by the people, for the people" (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001). Its goal is to meet the community's needs for information, awareness, and education. The institutional framework of community radio primarily works on a 'participatory approach', which Paulo Freire, in his book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', posited as a conscious decision-making based on dialogic communication. (Freire P. , 1970). The community's participation has a catalytic effect that adds to the dynamics of the community's growth and results in socio-economic transformations in the society. This participation needs a basic understanding of local issues, critical thinking and an inclusive pragmatic approach to execution that will lead the community in a transformative model of development. (Mezirow, 1991)

Regarding the communication of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNESCO has developed a toolkit titled "Communicating Sustainable Development Goals: A Toolkit for Community Radio," released in 2020. This resource was prepared by Archana Kapoor, the Founder and Director of SMART, and Pinki Chandran. It establishes a framework for community radio work in this area. The roadmap has been established to explore and implement how Community Radio can be used as a tool for communicating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level. Drawing on references from this book, this study will focus on the role of Community Radio in Uttarakhand, specifically addressing SDG 3-health and well-being, and SDG 4-equal and inclusive education. The primary focus of the study addresses the challenges and limitations that community radios face during their execution practices.

The Community Radios (CR) Mandakini Ki Awaz (90.8 MHz) and Henvalvani (90.4 MHz) are set as the centre of this study. Both community radios are situated in the Garhwal region of the state of Uttarakhand, India. Most of the people in the region speak the native language or dialect 'Garhwali'. Driving from different districts in the state, the commonality that the regions share is the linguistic and cultural ethos that is rooted mainly in the hilly terrain of Uttarakhand state. The Community radio- Mandakini Ki Awaz (90.8 MHz) is situated in Bhanaj village, Rudraprayag district and Henvalvani (90.4 MHz) is situated in Chamba, Tehri district, in Uttarakhand state.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore how a toolkit facilitates communication in health and education via community radio.
2. To identify the challenges and limitations in communicating health and education through community radio.

LITERATURE AND RESOURCE REVIEW:

According to “The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters” (AMARC), “the historical philosophy of Community Radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally as a tool of development”. (Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

Community Radio is a regional service based on the participation of the community that works for their betterment and development. Community Radio is developed as a medium of information and communication that empowers a group of people that combine to form a community that shares a common cultural, economic, and social ethos.

“Community radio is defined from three aspects that characterize it: as a non-profit activity, the community has the control over the property and is characterized by the community participation”. (AMARC International).

The Supreme Court of India ruled that 'airwaves' are public property, denying ownership rights to any party, agency, or the Union. Government over it. This landmark decision birthed the existence of the Community Media movement in India. Afterward, “In December 2006, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) of GoI had taken things to a new high by announcing that even NGOs and voluntary organizations with a good track record would be allowed to apply for a license and set up CRs” (Bora, 2012). Since then, Community Radio has worked to create a valuable space for small communities to unite for their improvement and has begun a new chapter of ‘peer learning’ through participatory communication.

Community radio exemplifies inclusivity and peer learning by relying on the voluntary participation of community residents to achieve common goals. Pavarala and Malik (2007) describe community radio as "a unique tool that employs media technologies for the development and empowerment of marginalized rural communities." They also emphasize its special significance in economically disadvantaged areas, which often experience high levels of illiteracy and a lack of attention from both the state and mainstream media regarding the challenges they face. (Pavarala & Malik, 2007, p. 248)]

Sharma and Kashyap (2015) focused on the community radio (CR) module for empowering rural women. They concluded that the” CR program had helped rural women enhance their knowledge about women empowerment issues through information, education, and communication (IEC) activities.” They also recommended that” providing need-based scientific information on various aspects of women empowerment—specifically social, economic, and psychological—would be effective for rural women when utilizing a participatory community radio program approach.” (Sharma & Kashyap, 2015)

Community radio aims to effectively inform and communicate with people about the importance of education and health awareness. In Uttarakhand, two of the oldest community radios- Mandakini ki Awaz (90.8 MHz) and Henvalvani (90.4 MHz)—have been working

tirelessly to create a 'social space' for their communities to participate and share the challenges that require progress.

Recognizing the importance of communication during the pandemic, community radios in Uttarakhand collaborated with communication agencies to inform the public in their respective regions. They broadcast essential information and awareness programs to support the community during these critical times. In certain research, it has been noted that Community radio played a significant role in health communication. Pavarala and Jena (2020) on the role of CR during the Covid-19 pandemic in India said that participatory media such as CR, produced and managed by local communities, are proving to be a vital tool in times of disasters and crises.

Sapna M.S. and Rakesh C. (2020) in their paper 'Community Radio as an Alternative Media for Disaster Management During Covid-19' asserted that as a part of the programming on COVID-19, the teamwork with various CR stations across the country have committed themselves to delivering the essential information to their communities. "Providing them with accurate and timely information about COVID-19, analyzing and documenting their daily concerns, identifying false information, countering rumors, curating songs and skits in their local dialects, hosting quiz programs related to Corona, running various initiatives on schooling, nursing, combating domestic violence and so on" (Sapna & Rakesh, 2020).

Pathak (2019) discussed the challenges and opportunities of Community Radio (CR) in India, noting its significant potential as a development tool in rural areas. CR can help create awareness, disseminate information, and facilitate communication. However, it is important to recognize that Community Radio in India is still in its early stages of development." (Pathak, 2019).

In his article "Community Radio 'Under Progress': Resuming a Paused Revolution," Pavarala (2015) summarizes that for sustainable community radio to thrive in South Asia, several key elements are necessary. These include "the strengthening of participatory and deliberative democracy, fostering a vibrant civil society, and protecting community radio from the risks associated with NGO-isation. Moreover, it is important to move beyond the conventional development paradigm to embrace the concept of communication rights."

Additional recommendations include "lifting restrictions on content (while adhering to an established broadcasting code of practice), prioritizing 'media-dark areas', and utilizing community radio for conflict resolution and peace-building. Establishing autonomously administered public funds to support community radio and promoting a culture of self-assessment among community radio stations are also essential for its growth and sustainability". (Pavarala, 2015)

Community radio has played a significant role in raising awareness in various areas for its audience. In this discussion, we will specifically focus on its contributions to education and health awareness. Additionally, we will address the varying levels of implementation of

education and health communication supported by the Toolkit, as well as the major challenges encountered in this process.

METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory research study that focuses on the working patterns of CRs in communicating education and health awareness. To gain a deeper understanding of the communication process, it is essential to consider the perspectives of those directly involved—specifically, the community members who form the core team responsible for creating, producing, and broadcasting the main content to the audience. To understand the roles and working patterns of the core team, a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews has been adopted for this research study. The core team consists of the Director, Station Manager, Program Officers, and Field Reporters.

The primary data was collected through the interviews of a total of 11 core team members, including the station directors, depending on their availability during the interviews conducted at their respective community radio stations - Mandakini ki Awaz located in Bhanaj Village, District Rudraprayag, and Henvallvani in Chamba, Tehri District. Both CR stations are situated in the Garhwal Mandal of Uttarakhand state. Apart from semi-structured questionnaires, participant observation enabled the researcher to capture the subjective nuances of working patterns, challenges, and audience understanding in the context of group discussions during field activities.

The qualitative data were further analysed using thematic analysis in NVivo 12 software. The systematic coding was done where health communication (SDG3), Education awareness (SDG4) were considered among the initial nodes under the theme of community radio and information dissemination. Alongside, one more theme was added in the present study that covers women's empowerment alongside education (SDG 3). The present article is a part of a broader study, and two of the themes were specifically chosen for this research article.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An important aspect to consider when studying communication Radio (CR), including its role and effectiveness, is the model of participation being utilized. Jan Servaes (1996), in his article titled "Participatory Communication (Research) from a Freirean Perspective," identifies two major approaches to participatory communication that are widely accepted today. The first is Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy (1970, 1983, 1994), and the second encompasses the concepts of access, participation, and self-management as articulated during the UNESCO debates of the 1970s.

Paulo Freire's Dialogic Pedagogy

This study majorly underpins the relevance of the 'dialogic pedagogy' of the participatory approach of communication developed by Paulo Freire while touching on the postulates of democratic participation theory.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's (1970) defined dialogue as "an encounter between men, mediated by the world, to name the world" (Freire P. , 1970). He emphasized that dialogue with critical thinking can have the capability to create critical communication, which can lead to true education. He argued that critical thinking in man can eventually transform and emancipate the world. (Freire P. , 1970)

Freire's perspective on the participation model is grounded in the idea that the fundamental purpose of humanity is to break free from both material and psychological oppression. He emphasizes the importance of rejecting imposed patterns of life and highlights the need for individuals to be actively involved in processes of change. (White, K.Sadanand, & Ascroft, 1994; Freire, 1970).

Freire emphasized individuals' capacity for decision-making, conceptualizing, and planning social change as rooted in consciousness and action taken based on that awareness. described this as dialectically related. Freire's theory of 'dialogical participation' is influenced by Buber's concept of dialogue within the community.

Community Radio is an alternative communication system based on the concept of 'democratization' and 'participation'. It aims at the development of a small community by direct and indirect participation of the community people and nurturing each other through dialogue and information dissemination. Freire's dialogic participation lays down a strong theoretical foundation for research based on community radio and its working pattern.

Both theories help this study to explore the role of dialogue in fostering community participation and understanding local issues and challenges. Both theories contribute to understanding that using a dialogical model relies on the conscious participation of community members and creates an environment for coexistence and interrelationships.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study is mainly based on the primary data collected on the basis of interviews conducted with Mr. Manvendra Negi (R1), Station Director of 'Mandakini ki Awaz' (90.4 MHz), and Mr. Rajendra Negi(R2), Station Director of 'Henvalvani' (90.4 MHz). Along with this program officers of both CRs provided their inputs about functioning and challenges individually which have been used as findings in this research.

The major findings are:

Both Community Radios (CRs) have been trained in a similar geographical and regional context. The station directors have confirmed that the road distance between these villages is greater than the aerial distance for the radio signal frequencies. Due to the geographical structure of both regions, the population is scattered across various villages, which are socially divided according to caste. The population primarily consists of elderly individuals and women, as their male counterparts and the younger generation are not residing here due

to education and job opportunities elsewhere in the state. Sometimes, this geographical distance proves to be a challenge for the core team members to reach out to the public.

The directors of both Community Radios assert that financial management remains a considerable challenge, as their operations are predominantly reliant on government advertising revenue. They strive to achieve a balance by leveraging local advertisements while also securing assistance and donations from external agencies. One major challenge they face is the declining interest of audiences in radio and the increasing use of new media technologies. The radio audience is largely limited to local information and entertainment content.

Health Communication through Community Radio

Health communication primarily serves as a means of educating individuals about human health, medical knowledge, new medical practices, and potential dangers, along with necessary precautions. This education can occur through interpersonal communication or mass communication channels.

Community media offers an alternative approach to development communication through participatory strategies, creating a parallel source of communication for remote and hard-to-reach populations. Community radio is one such medium that provides information and raises awareness about health, connecting communities to broader social networks.

According to Manvendra Negi from CR Mandakini ki Awaz, the health system in the higher altitudes of Uttarakhand is in a dire state. They are working to improve this situation by connecting their audience with health professionals and doctors through their program, "*Doctor Didi ki Salah Par*," which is aired twice a week on Sundays and Wednesdays. In this program, doctors discuss general health topics, as well as awareness about certain diseases, including their prevention and precautions. The programs primarily focus on general health, women's pregnancy, childbirth, seasonal illnesses, and information about government schemes and policies.

A similar program called "*Swasthya Charcha*" is offered by CR Henvallvani, as stated by Rajendra Negi. This phone-in program connects doctors from various parts of the state to discuss seasonal diseases and the necessary precautions and prevention methods. The programs are predominantly conducted in Hindi and the regional dialect- 'Garhwali', allowing the audience to engage more effectively and benefit from the information shared. One of the program officers, Sangeeta(R3), shared information about a specific initiative called "*Gar ki Dawa, Apnu Gyan*." This program focuses on the medicinal use of herbs and '*jadibooti*' within the Indigenous knowledge system, providing quick remedies for seasonal illnesses such as coughs and colds. Sangeeta explained that the team primarily visits their respective communities to understand their needs and requirements, and they tailor their programs accordingly.

Education Awareness through Community Radio

Education remains a key area where awareness needs to be raised among underprivileged and marginalised communities. According to Manvendra Negi, 'Mandakini ki Awaz' (90.8 MHz) features programs focused on educational awareness, particularly in areas such as career counselling, girl child education, adult education, and discussions with educators from various schools and universities across the state. The station visits schools to engage both students and teachers, fostering a participatory and constructive learning environment. Their programs, including 'Potli' and 'Gali-Gali Sim-Sim', are designed to promote this collaborative approach. The program 'Bahu Siksha' presented as a play, gained popularity due to its focus on adult education and continuing education for women even after marriage.

Station Director Rajendra Negi emphasized that CR Henvallvani (90.4 MHz) implements a similar program format to ensure that every student has the right to education. The station has also spoken out against instances where children in their area are not receiving an education. They have successfully encouraged many parents to ensure their children attend school. Additionally, they collaborate with educational professionals to engage with parents through their programs. The 'Baal Jagat' and 'Antakshiri' programs aim to enhance education and encourage student participation in building a strong society.

The 'Toolkit' as a Framework and its Limitations

The 'Toolkit' developed by UNESCO serves as a framework to enhance awareness of Sustainable Development Goals among communities. However, in Uttarakhand, community radios perceive this approach as a limitation or challenge. According to core team members from their respective community radios, they have participated in a workshop focused on the implementation and execution of this 'Toolkit' as a framework. However, they noted that their programs were already structured similarly. The organization's structure and working patterns align closely with the toolkit's framework. They fully understand the structures within their program formats. Instead of viewing the 'Toolkit' as a guideline, they aim to address all the necessary issues it highlights. For many of them, following the guidelines feels more like a limitation or challenge.

They mentioned that, since they belong to the same communities, they often struggle to understand certain guidelines due to the use of English as the medium of communication. While they recognize the importance of using a universal language for community radios worldwide, they find it to be a constraint to use it for their own community needs. If these guidelines could be translated into Hindi or their language, it would be more helpful. Additionally, their regional and geographical needs differ, so their primary focus is on creating programs that meet those specific needs. For instance, the seasonal illnesses mentioned in the 'Toolkit' do not exist at the higher altitudes of Uttarakhand state. They noted that there may be additional dental and gastrointestinal health issues in the region beyond those mentioned in the 'Toolkit'. Therefore, it is essential to address the specific needs of their area.

CONCLUSION

Community radio serves a critical role in upscaling the quality of health and educational awareness within communities. Its efforts are fundamental in disseminating vital information and cultivating an informed public.

The community radio stations 'Mandakini Ki Awaz' and 'Henvalvani' operate in the hilly region of Uttarakhand. The geographical and social structures of these remote mountainous areas differ significantly from those found in other regions of the country. Consequently, the specific needs of these areas, particularly concerning education and health awareness, necessitate targeted approaches to address local challenges effectively.

The limitations and challenges they face are more closely related to the geographical distribution of the dispersed public than solely to the dissemination of information. In the realm of health communication, it has been noted that the public possesses limited education and openness, particularly concerning women's health and hygiene issues. This presents a significant challenge, as there is often a disconnect between effective communication and the actual implementation of these essential health messages. The implementation of community radio in remote areas is currently confronted with a substantial financial crisis. Additional challenges may further hinder its capacity to operate at its full potential.

There exists a notable discrepancy between the actual participation of the community and the awareness initiatives developed by the station. The content primarily emphasizes raising awareness rather than facilitating the practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the aspect of inclusivity is largely contingent upon the voluntary participation of community members. Additionally, the recommendations outlined in the 'Toolkit' tend to limit a pragmatic approach to execution, as they are exclusively presented in English. This linguistic constraint hampers the Toolkit's effectiveness and limits its full utilization.

Upon careful examination and discussion, it can be concluded that the broad recommendations and guidelines outlined in the 'Toolkit' may inadvertently limit the fundamental objectives of Community Radio. This medium is designed to cater to specific communities and address their distinct needs for education and awareness. It is important to acknowledge that, despite facing numerous challenges, community radio stations in Uttarakhand remain committed to their fundamental purpose of educating and raising awareness within their communities.

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