

The Role of Community Radio in Women's Empowerment: Case Studies from Developing Countries

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Abstract—Radio, by its very nature, is ideal for reaching large, mainly non-literate, traveling populations, as well as for immediacy, portability, availability and affordability. It is one of the most popular media. It plays an important role in communicating the messages and in entertaining the audience. Radio has the power of distributing messages quickly to reach the audience and to influence them.

Radio programs can create awareness among women about various important issues. Nutrition and education is an important component. Awareness about women's rights – assets property and intellectual could be brought about through radio. Radio programs can be directed to teach an attitude and instill in women a sense of self respect, self reliance, economic independence and equality in status with men. Radio programs can educate women about the constitutional and legal rights and the special provisions made and measures adopted for their welfare by the government and other agencies. Radio programming can be designed to create the awareness about the violence against women, maternity rights and other aspects of law related to women.

The study focuses on community radio stations in developing countries and discusses how community radio is used as a tool to enhance the status of women in the society.

1. WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

After two world wars and a series of national liberation movements in the first half of the century, women had begun to find their own voices and seek a more active role in public and academic life. Modern-day women's movements began to take shape during the early 1960s in both developed and developing nations, in part through the work of United Nations committees concerned with improving women's status. A network of women's independent non-governmental organizations- some of them growing out of women's impetus to become involved in movements for determination - varied from place to place and person to person.

Women desired actively to participate in the national development and the inspiration came from the ability to develop a vision for their own and other women's leadership. (Ross & Byerly, 2006)

2. MEDIA'S ROLE IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Media will be used to portray images consistent with human dignity of girls and women. The policy will specifically strive to remove demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against women. Private sector partners and media networks will be involved at all levels to ensure equal access for women particularly in the area of information and communication technologies. The media would be encouraged to develop codes of conduct, professional guidelines and other self regulatory mechanisms to remove gender stereotypes and promote balanced portrayals of women and men.

3. ROLE OF RADIO IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Radio has been discussed as a female medium in terms both of the intimate relationship women have with it as listeners and of the program content that has been devised by/ for them. Radio is a medium which is women friendly, pertinent and accessible in terms of learning the production skills and techniques, working together to shape program schedules. And tell their stories to help them regarding the needs of information, education and pleasure through the wide range of programming forms. Women encounter to fitting in their personal lives and commitments around the exigencies of being involved in radio station and suggest ways that radio station operations and structures can be made more women friendly. Gender based radio training and community development are crucial to the survival and diversity of women's radio practice. (Mitchell, 1996)

4. COMMUNITY RADIO

Community Radio is a radio for the development of the particular community people within the geographical limits of that area. It is a non-profitable organization and the radio programs are volunteered by the community people. The

important role of community radio when it comes to inform, to give psychological support, to build solidarity and rebuilt the knowledge and behavior of the community people. It's a third type of radio broadcasting apart from public and commercial or private radio broadcasters.

The philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as voice of the voiceless and the mouthpiece of the oppressed people and as generally as tool for development. Community radio stations often reflect the gender stereotyping of mainstream radio stations in staff and volunteer roles, despite having aims and charters that support equal opportunities and it attracts the women as the volunteers.

5. CASE STUDIES FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

5.1 Africa

Africa is one of the most under developed countries. Hence, the Community Radio in Africa listed for these study.

5.1.1 Situation in Africa

Many women get infected with HIV/AIDS due to lack of information. Teenage girls are faced with high levels of teenage pregnancies due to lack of basic information about their health and sexuality and right of access to family planning information and facilities. The issue of professional negligence in the medical facilities across the continent has reached alarming levels. However, majority of women are not fully informed about their rights as patients.

Still, Cameroon has signed and ratified most of the conventions and international treaties which strive for the protection of the rights of women. These include:

- The CEDAW signed on 6 June 1983 and ratified on the 23rd August 1994 which in Articles 7 and 15 provide that women and men are equal before the law. It therefore outlaws all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child which hinder women's capacity to realize their full potential in life. Under Article 24 the government of Cameroon has the responsibility to ensure that all persons are aware of these rights and to take measures and all appropriate actions to ensure that the women of Cameroon enjoy the rights guaranteed in this Convention.
- Optional Protocol to CEDAW ratified on 7th January 2005 specifically provides for the right of access to the international justice system where all remedies at the national level have been exhausted. This means that an aggrieved person who has exhausted all remedies at the national level may invoke any Article in the Convention to demand for justice and protection under its provisions. To use this mechanism the aggrieved party has a right to information about this justice mechanism. The justice system in Cameroon has an obligation to provide this

information and an international or regional organization may represent the interests of such a person seeking for justice;

5.1.2. Revolution FM

Niger is a landlocked country in **West Africa**, on the southern edge of the Sahara. French is the official language spoken in Niger. Radio is a major instrument in the process of capacity development in the country. In a nation with more than 80 % illiteracy, the radio has become the main means of communication in homes, on streets and in the bush. Through the radio waves, the citizens of Niger are seizing the microphone and experiencing democracy. In Niger, they call it **Revolution FM** because radio is contributing to the strengthening of the young democracy and increasing public awareness about the Niger's economic and social progress.

Zara Moussa or ZM, Niger's hip-hop sensation, addresses social evils in her music. She campaigns for women's rights and works to bring hope to women who have always been marginalized in Niger's society. She inspires young people to shed old mindsets and embrace new ideas for development. Her music also speaks about the problems and confusion facing youth in Niger today.

In **Uganda**, the Uganda Media Women's Association established a radio programme – **Mama FM** – where women can actively participate and learn about development issues such as, among others, human rights, children, governance, nutrition, health. The UNDP telecenter project in Ukraine applies ICTs to agriculture and farm management to support women farmers, who identified lack of information and networking tools as the major obstacles to their becoming successful entrepreneurs in a new market economy.

5.1.3. FIDA-Federation of Women Lawyers

Cameroon does a lot of sensitization on women rights and other legal related issues which hinder the realization and enjoyment of women's human rights. This is mainly done through training, advocacy initiatives for policy and law reforms, lobbying for increasing the number of women in leadership and decision making, provision of legal aid, conflict resolution and enabling women to access financial support. The organization practically promotes the right of access to legal information for the ordinary woman in Cameroon. However it has not been involved in the campaigns focusing on reforms to facilitate FOI that is in the custody of government.

FIDA Cameroon is not unique in this situation. The **Association Femmes FM Mbalmayo** in line with its slogan "Let the voices of women of the centre region are heard!" also works to promote women's rights through provision of vital information, awareness raising and also creating space for women to express themselves. The women's voices are heard through a community radio station (Radio FM Mbalmayo). It is situated at about 50 km from Yaoundé, which is the political

capital of Cameroon. The support of technical partners namely UNESCO contributed to its registration in November 1998. It is worth saying that establishing a radio station is not as easy as registering a voluntary association because operating a radio station is governed by the law on freedom of expression. The radio station has to have a license which is renewed periodically.

FM Mbalmayo has undertaken 4 very important actions within the framework of FOI.

- It has promoted women's participation in the electoral processes through provision of relevant information
- It has publicized educational programs on women's inheritance rights (including those in cohabitation)
- It has explained the concept of Violence Against Women (VAW) and the ways in which women can seek for protection including how VAW affects women's access to land.
- Campaign for establishing the system for provision of birth certificates.

These activities aimed at solving problems related to:

- Poor representation of women in the electoral process as candidates, observers and/ or voters
- Denial or abuse of women's inheritance rights;
- Failures of women to recognize or acknowledge that certain situations/conditions they are subjected to are forms of violence against women.

Strategies used by the reporters of the FM radio station include discussions with civil servants working in the towns, testimonies of victims, and support of resource persons from different organisations collaborating with the radio station. Some of the programs are **Women, know your rights** presented in 5 local languages and an interactive live programme "**J'ai mon mot à dire**" (My opinion counts).

However, despite the positive developments the radio station has faced numerous challenges. The challenges mainly relate to the fear of reprisals (backlash) against women who publicly speak out against violations of their rights thus exposing their family problems. The use of local languages which make it possible for the information to be accessible to many people is always a challenge for the station to find the appropriate personnel who can effectively communicate in these languages.

There is also the risk of public violence targeting the staff members usually after presenting programs that are considered too "emancipated" by some people. The officials interviewed however stated that they are motivated by the partnership between administrative services in charge of social affairs, the Ministry for Women Empowerment and Family Protection and the auxiliary justice system. Some civil society

organisations have also collaborated with the radio station in order to realize the radio programs.

Administrators of Radio FM station presented some of the results of their intervention to include the legalization of marriage certificates by mayors before the obligatory payment of bride price; the recognition of children born to parents that are cohabiting; the recognition of the radio station as a platform for increasing public awareness about women's rights and breaking the silence about the problems they face; and increasing awareness among women about services available for them to seek redress against different forms of violations of their rights.

5.2 Case studies in India

In India there are 176 community radio stations run in various regions of the country for the development of community people. The community stations are run by Non Governmental Organization (NGO), Educational Institutions and some of the women associations. There are many community radios run for the development of women in India. In this we are going to discuss about the few community radio stations run for and by the women for their community welfare.

5.2.1 Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

- SEWA was established formally in 1972, as a trade union, by Ela Bhatt, a labor organizer and a lawyer.
- Prior to SEWA's formation, the women's wing of the Textile Labor Association in Ahmedabad (in Gujarat) took up the cause of women belonging to the households of mill workers by teaching them skills such as sewing, knitting, embroidery, and spinning.

SEWA ACADEMY

- SEWA Academy is the focal point for all of SEWA's capacity building, communications and research efforts. SEWA Academy functions as SEWA members' University, providing them with their first introduction to a formal learning environment.
- It is the organizational wing responsible for member education, leadership training, literacy, print and audio video communications and research.
- The SEWA Academy provides skills and knowledge training through eleven courses, including leadership training, conversation training, worker training, and research training.

5.2.2 Samudhayik Rudi no Radio – 90.4 MHz

- In April of 2005, SEWA began its first community radio programme, entitled Rudi no Radio (Rudi's Radio), a weekly 15-minute programme produced and broadcast by employees of SEWA for a rural audience.

- In each episode, Rudiben(sewa women) has a talk with local members of the village about things that affect them as women and as labourers. The programme is symbolically named after our first member of SEWA who worked to spread our association's wings to rural areas.
- In that spirit, the programme extends to the Ahmedabad-Vadodara area on All India Radio-Ahmedabad (AIR-Ahm.) airwaves, and gauging from listener response, we estimate that 500,000 listeners are tuning in weekly for the show.
- The response and success of Rudi no Radio motivated SEWA to initiate Community Rudi no Radio Station (CRS).
- The CRS, initiated on 26 November 2009 from SEWA Academy's Manipur, Sanand Taluka, is broadcast on 90.4 Frequency and reaches 40 villages within 10 kms radius.
- The program is broadcast from 9 am to 1 pm and 4 pm to 8 pm daily. The radio station is the voice of villagers and women. The CRS is run and managed by a team of community women.

5.2.3. Sangam Radio -90.4 MHz

Sangam Radio - India's First Community Radio Station in Rural India- completely owned and managed by marginalised dalit women. It is on air daily between 7 and 9 pm. The program content is a mix of interviews, discussions, songs, folk tales and plays. Transcending their barriers of non-literacy, the DDS group of women have produced successful programs by themselves the women have also established a Community FM Radio Facility, controlled and operated by themselves. Born from the collective aspiration of the women to own an alternative medium of expression the content and the form of which they can control, the DDS FM Radio is five years old and has canned nearly five hundred hours of programs.

Deccan Development Society (DDS) is a grassroots organization working with Sangams (village level groups) of poor women, most of who are Dalits. The Society has a vision of consolidating these village groups into vibrant organs of primary local governance and federate them into a strong pressure lobby for women, poor and Dalits. The Society facilitates a host of continuing dialogues and debates with the public, educational and training programs to try to translate this vision into reality.

On October 15, 2008, Sangham Radio was launched at Machnoor village in Medak district catering to numerous villages around Pastapur. Its 50-Watt transmitter covers a radius of nearly 25 kms dotted with 100 villages and housing 50,000 people. As of now, the station transmits programmes from 7 pm to 9 pm. Plans are afoot to start an early morning transmission for an hour and also add new programmes on diverse issues to their schedule. By 2007, Sangham Radio had 700 hours of audio production in its kitty.

Back in October 2001, these Dalit women had got DDS set up a Community Media Trust to ensure that their concerns are broadcast in an otherwise indifferent media scenario. Though semi-literate, these women seem to be a discerning audience who refuse to be swayed by the mainstream media.

5.2.4. Mann Deshi Tarang Vahini-90.4 MHz

Mann Deshi Tarang Community Radio Station started in the year of November 2008 by Mann Deshi foundation an NGO organisation in Mhaswad near Satara, Maharashtra. The dialy on- air duration is about 4 hours .

The objective of this station is to improve the well being of the community in and around Mhaswad through useful and relevant programming which will enrich their civic and cultural life. The station is operated under the guidance of the Mann Deshi Foundation, but is owned by the Mhaswad village community and surrounding coverage areas.

The most important objectives of the station are:

-To provide a trusted, sustainable and vital communication system of very high quality to Mhaswad's community

- To promote economic, social and cultural development through targeted programming in a wide range of relevant topics, including health, agriculture, financial literacy, education, rural livelihoods, capacity building, the environment, self-help group support, and any other issues of local relevance to promote social development
- To impart training and capacity building, especially amongst the non- and semi-literate community who cannot use print media, and continue the oral tradition of communication which is a crucial element of rural life
- To provide a creative outlet for expressions of local culture such as folk and religious music.
- To utilize skills and ingenuity within the community and use them productively to promote, sustain and document local heritage, indigenous art and culture for future generations
- To provide open opportunities for direct involvement in the operation and programming of the station by hiring local staff, fostering a large volunteer base, and running internship programs for students interested in radio programming.
- The broadcasting topics are mostly based on Forming an effective farmer's cooperative, Microcredit Programs ,How to Prepare a Home First Aid Kit, Children need vitamins – where to get and how much to give, Green Leafy Vegetables are Healthy Foods, HIV/AIDS awareness, Young Peoples' risks on a farm, Women, Property and Inheritance, Land ownership rights: Why Women Need Equal Access to Land and Understanding each other: The Importance of Listening to Youth and Children

6. FINDINGS

- Community Radio stations created awareness about the law and the articles related to women by their community people, programmers and sources.
- The radio programs bring various changes and created more awareness among women.
- The community radio stations has improved the standard of living of women in the society.
- The involvement of the women in the CR stations gave their status equal to women.
- For the developing countries, women empowerment through radio is a big step development in communication.

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