

COMMUNITY MEDIA AND DEVELOPMENT RHETORIC IN INDIA: IS IT ILLUSORY?

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ABSTRACT

The developmental functions of community media is widely recognised and well documented by a multitude of researchers around the world in the field of social sciences. Drawing from the functions of community radio, as prescribed by UNESCO, the paper examines the content and functioning of two community radio stations in South India. It examines the developmental aspects of community radio.

Ideally, a community radio station should serve the marginalized sections of society by giving them assurance to expression, encouraging their involvement. A voice based media assuredly has a greater impact, especially in rural areas with low literacy rates. In communities with low levels of literacy and poverty, the radio is the most effective and inexpensive medium with which to help catalyse social change (Girard, 1992; Dagon, 2001)

Compared with countries like Australia, Philippines and Sri Lanka, Community radio in India is still in its nascent stage. Does it really improve the lives of the community? Or does it simply mimic the mainstream media in its approach by disassociating itself from its identity? These are some of the questions, the paper seeks to answer. It attempts to measure the influence of the demographic characteristics such as 'gender', 'age', 'income', 'education', and 'occupation' of the community radio listeners on their perception of developmental functions of community radio, as outlined by UNESCO, while also looking at some of the challenges faced by community radio operators in South India.