Chapter 20
India: College Radio Tackling Participation and Social Inclusion
By Padma Rani

Radio is the main source of news and entertainment for most of India. The Government of India policy for community radio, places it within the framework of the Indian Constitution as a fundamental right. Therefore, it recognises the right of communities to express themselves, and community radio as a tool for the same.

Government of India in its policy to promote community radio gave licenses to educational institutions initially. M. O. P. Vaishnav College was the first educational institution to be granted a license in 2005. The M.O.P CRS 107.8 MHZ has been used since its inception to communicate with students of schools and colleges as well as women of the nearby slums. The programmes are made by the students of the college.

This chapter will discuss how MOP CRS has been functioning since its inception in terms of financial viability, programming strategy and technical support.

The Model

At the time of this study, MOP CRS has completed five years of active broadcasting and in these years it has become a model for various community radio station operators. The programmes are made both by the students of the college, as well as the community members of the surrounding areas.

In order to understand the working of the radio station and its impact, detailed interviews were carried out with the station staff, students of the college as well as students and women who were regular listeners of MOP CRS. An analysis of various news reports in the media about MOP CRS was also done in order to understand the impact of various activities of the station.

MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai is a women’s college which is only 18 years old; it has a reputation of being a progressive institution. MOP was the first nongovernmental educational institution to get a license to run a community radio station.

MOP CRS was started on 8th March 2005; the license for the station was given in January 2005. The basic criteria for giving the license to an educational institution to run community radio is that they have to operate the station from the same premises as the educational institution. To start a radio station one has to obtain permission from the defence ministry and it has to be at reasonable distance from any airport, so that there is no interference with aviation communications.

1 The process of licensing is such that one has to first apply to the state government. The state government then sends the recommendation to the ministry of information and broadcasting. The ministry decision is based on the recommendation of the state government. If the state government’s recommendation was very good, based on which they got their license.

2 Before the formal launch of the station they had prepared 200 hours of programmes.
The main thing in a community radio is that it has a compact area of reach about 5 km radius. The community radio regulation stipulates that CRS should have a transmitter of maximum 50 W and height of the antenna from the ground has to be 30 meters. Only two frequencies are allocated for FM they are 91 and 107. The highest frequency on the FM band is 108. The problem with MOP CRS is that its frequency at present is 107.8 MHZ, which lies almost at the top of the band and not many sets are able to catch this frequency. Earlier, it was given 91.8 MHZ, but a change had to be made as it was clashing with the frequency of a private station. Therefore while starting a radio station one has to be careful about the frequency allocation so that the frequency of one station does not clash with that of another.

Setting Up A Community Radio

To set up a community radio compact mini instruments are required - they can be operated from under a tree also - with the help of a transmitter, antenna and portable mike. MOP CRS has a Yahama mixer 02R with 56-channel input. The studio is on the ground floor and the transmitter as well as the antenna, are placed on the fifth floor. The transmitter is connected to the studio with the help of cables.

In terms of permanent staff for manning the radio station, they have a sound engineer, who takes care of the recording and transmission and small maintenance on a day-to-day basis. They have a programme co-ordinator to co-ordinate with various stakeholders and organise programmes. The third person is a media consultant who has more than three decades of experience in public service broadcasting. When the radio was started they had the distinction of having an experienced hand from All India Radio.

The location of MOP station is in the heart of the city at Nungabakkam. On the eastern side of the college is the sea just about 2km away so listeners on the eastern side are limited, while on the western side due to Isphani center - a commercial high rise building in front of the college - the reach of the signals is affected to areas located on the western side of the college like Kodambakkam, Ashok Nagar etc. North and south side there is proper transmission, sometimes there is a drop in the frequency due to the presence of a high-rise building.

A radio station can be started with an investment of about Rupees 600,000 (USD 13,507) and the maintenance cost is around Rs 200,000 per year. Maintenance is required for the maintenance of the transmitter, the position of the antenna has to be checked from time to time as they are displaced due to heavy winds or rain, sometimes rusting also happens due to the moisture content in the air. Annual maintenance contract for the transmitter has been given for Rs.25, 000. Since MOP has six media courses, the management has been magnanimous enough to provide all the funds required in running the station. The transmitter’s frequency has to be checked on a daily basis as sometimes it gets displaced and affects the quality of transmission.

Programme broadcasting happens three times a day from 6.30 am to 9.30 am then 12.30 to 3.30 pm and 5.30 to 8.30 pm. In the second and third slots the programmes broadcast in the first slot are repeated because listeners who are busy in the morning can listen to it in the afternoon and people who have missed it in the afternoon can listen to it in the evening. The content of the programme is a mixture of live and recorded programmes.

Jingles, PSAs and station announcement are recorded and played again and again. Various shows are produced and broadcast on wide ranging topics from education to
entertainment like book reviews and travel and many others. The main programming areas of MOP CRS are in the fields of health, education, entrepreneurship, environment, women empowerment, activities in schools, upbringing the children, community development programmes and so forth.

The programmes are educational and informative but they are broadcast to the listeners in an interesting format such as jingles, story time, plays, interviews and PSA’s (public service announcements). In between the programmes they have PSAs such as VIP voice like the Chennai traffic police requesting the people to obey traffic rules, global warming and some tag lines.

In the month of March-April 2010 they have started a live show with doctors, which is broadcast between 2 to 3 in the afternoon. The doctor talks about some common ailments and diseases prevalent in the area. The callers can also pose questions directly to the doctor, which are answered by the doctor on air. Callers for this programme are from right across the station’s signal range. They do get letters and phone calls from listeners to repeat certain programmes, they usually repeat the programmes informing the listeners that it has been requested by other listeners. A programme on SHGS (self help groups scheme) was broadcast and it was very popular with the women listeners, thus it has been repeated a number of times at their request.

Around 15,000 students have been trained in radio broadcasting in the last five years. Women empowerment has been the main plank of MOP CRS. It is providing media education at no extra cost. Most of the DJs of MOP CRS are the first choice for the private radio channels. They are the leading DJs in all the radio stations of the city - Chennai has about 8 private FM radio station in addition to the AIR.

Broadcasts To The Slums

Though the college is located in the heart of the city there are slums in the five km radius. Badri Karai and Allai Amman Koil are two slum clusters adopted by MOP CRS for social inclusion. A survey was conducted in these clusters. Both the areas have about 1000 households. Programmes on women and sanitation, social entrepreneurship, crimes against women, aimed at marginalised section of the society were broadcast. The community volunteers of MOP CRS help to co-ordinate with the community for various programmes, provide with feedback about the programmes, as well as make the station aware about the needs of the community.

Confederation of Indian Organisation for Social Ddvocacy (CIOSA) has about 200 NGOs among its members, and through MOP CRS, they talk about their activities and also get the beneficiaries to talk about it. This is basically used to create awareness in the minds of the public that they can seek professional help in case of any need.

The Department of Science and Technology is supposed to carry out certain activities for the propagation of science and they chose MOP CRS for two programmes to impart knowledge to the masses. One was the “Science for women through campus/community radio” and the other was “Planet Earth”. Science for women programme is known as “pennai aruvai”, these programmes were broadcast for a year. The project is an attempt to empower women through optimum use of radio as a means of infotainment. As a part of the project, a capacity building exercise in radio production was organized at the MOP Vaishnav College for Women from August 7, 2007 to August 12, 2007.
Since its commencement on March 12, 2005, this radio service has been very popular and has effectively served as a means of women empowerment by reaching out to around a million women listeners within a local radius of around 15 kilometres.

**Identifying Community Broadcast Talent**

Amongst other things, the workshop was intended to identify from amongst the girl students and residents of the communities potential radio anchors, producers, scriptwriters and reporters. Programmes for the community radio can only be meaningful for the audience if they carry local flavours. The right kinds of themes for such programmes could be chosen only by those who thoroughly understand the lifestyles of the local communities. That been the case, who could be in a better position to choose the programme genres and subjects other than the locals themselves? However, it is not as easy as it sounds. A bare quantum of technical knowledge is also essential for deciding on the format and the kind of programmes.

That is why identification of local talent is required to be followed by appropriate training. With a view to teaching the requisite skills of radio programming the participants were given training on radio programme appreciation, formats of radio production, formats of radio presentation, art of interview, studio recording, outdoor recording through flash recorders, elements of editing, mixing, participatory radio programming and interactive radio programmes, like phone-in, phone-out and SMS. The leading professionals of the trade efficiently handled the wide spectrum of the areas covered for training.

A composite picture of radio programming was presented so that students could view the entire process as a single whole. The holistic approach of the training programme also helped one stream of specialization to understand and appreciate the roles of other spheres of specialization in the production process. It was ensured that the training catered to all practical needs of the trainees apart from imparting the requisite theoretical knowledge. This was done by way of practical sessions following the theoretical discussions. The practical sessions were such that each student got to have a clear first hand feel of the equipments and the production process. Understandably, a radio programme entails a lot many other facets apart from the pure production process like planning, deciding upon the target audience, broadcasts etc.

Therefore, the trainees were briefed at length on programme planning, need analysis, baseline studies, programme scheduling, repeat broadcasts, presentation, radio counselling, value-added services, feedback and archives. As such, all the facets of radio programming right from the conception stage through production process to broadcasts and other related tasks were covered during the workshop. Another objective of the capacity building workshop was to encourage the students into forming radio clubs and groups.

The ‘planet earth’ is a programme for creating awareness about global warming and the programme is currently being broadcast, everyday for 15 minutes - it contains a variety of topics from energy conservation to animal protection. The content of these programmes are created by the listeners i.e. children from the schools adopted by MOP CRS.

**What Is Contributing to MOP CRS Success?**

Some of the factors that have contributed to the success of the MOP CRS are as
follows:

- Involvement of students, that lends freshness to the programmes.
- All the students of the college are involved in the production of programmes; it is done by giving them broad areas to prepare and record the programmes.
- Involvement of the community, especially people belonging to the lower strata of society.
- Involvement of children from the neighbourhood corporation schools - the students listen to one hour of radio in the school.
- DJ workshops were held for the school students to train them in the nuances’ of broadcasting and they are encouraged to produce programmes.
- Good quality equipment and its proper maintenance.
- A few experienced and qualified staff is involved in the station.
- Most of the programmes are broadcasted in the local language.
- Content of the programme caters to the needs of the community.
- Content of the programme is authentic, so that listeners trust whatever is broadcasted.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the sustainability of MOP CRS depends upon three main things:

1) Student involvement  
2) Community involvement  
3) Quality of programmes and transmission signal.

Conclusions

Community Radio is required to present, what cannot be offered by any other radio station; its content should be local with a local flavour. To sum up, community radio is by the people for the people of a particular geographical area. The element of proximity is what will hold listeners to a particular community radio station. People will be eager to listen to what is happening in their area - both about people and events - on a daily basis, may be even on an hourly basis.

The Government of India in order to involve the community in development and social change has evolved a policy for community radio. The Government has given license to a number of institutions but only a few are functional in the true sense.

From the case study of MOP CRS we can draw certain inferences. Some of the things that needs to be given special attention in order to run a viable and sustaining community radio station are as follows:

- **PROGRAMME**
  - Has to have variety and produced in an interesting style.
  - Content of the programme should be authentic.
  - Most of the programme should be in the local dialect.

- **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**
  - Conduct a survey to understand the needs of the community.
  - Women and children should be involved in the making of the programmes.
  - Target children as listeners.
STUDENT PARTICIPATION
- Make content youth oriented.
- Awareness about community needs
- Increase employability.

LOCATION
- No high rise building in the area.

FREQUENCY ALLOCATION
- Affects the reach and popularity of the programmes - this is a decision of the government, not much can be done about it.

As far as community radio is concerned requirements like space, equipment and finance are not that huge. As mentioned earlier, community radio can be operated from under a tree also. In a 500 sq ft of area one can have all the facilities of a commercial FM station. Minimal equipment is required for CRS - a mike, transmitter and antenna. As the station gets established one can add recorders, mixer, transistor etc. As far as the Government policy in India is concerned, funds are not be given by the government to establish a community radio station, it has to be done by the institutions themselves.

From the case study I wish to conclude that MOP CRS has the best of the infrastructure and technical knowledge as far as a radio station is concerned. But the success of MOP CRS is due to the variety of programmes it broadcasts depending on the needs of the community. Since the community is also involved and trained through various workshops their involvement is increased and it has lead to the success of the station.

References

- Aleaz, Bonita (2010), Community Radio and Empowerment; Economic and Political Weekly, April 17, 2010; Vol XLV No.16.
- Iyer, Kala (2007), Capacity building exercise in Radio Production for the RVPSP sponsored project “Science For Women”; Consultant CEMCA; New Delhi.
- Kumar, Kanchan (2005), Community Radio in India; Communication Initiative, August 25, India.
- M.O.P.Vaishnav’s Community FM touches lives of slums in India-30 April 2008, DECCAN HERALD.
- Policy Guidelines for setting up community radio station in India; Ministry of Information & Broadcasting; Government of India; http://www.mib.nic.in
- www.globalcommunity.com for MOP CRS on Net.
- http://www.mop-vaishnav.ac.in/mopcrs.htm
- Saving Planet Earth-A Community at a time; http://www.mop-vaishnav.ac.in/ysfirst-dec09.pdf.
- Sur, Snehasis (n.d), Make a successful community radio in India:- www.eindia.net.in/communityradio
- Venniyoor, Sajan (2008), A Chronology of Community radio in India; http://www.becil.com/story/2008/5/1/23129/54846