

COMMUNITY RADIO & SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP (A regional Research Initiative)

16th May 2014
Hotel LALIT VIBE
FARIDABAD, NCR of Delhi



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



CEMCA

BACKGROUND

Community Radio has been recognized as a third tier of broadcasting with an enormous potential for contributing to development outcomes through enhancing participation of marginalized communities in democratic and governance processes. The key principles of community radio that have been recognized by international bodies such as AMARC and UNESCO include its not for profit structure, community participation and ownership, centering the voices of marginalized communities and enabling a diverse and pluralistic media environment where multiple perspectives on social economic and development issues can be amplified.

Community radio has been supported through a policy in India and in Bangladesh and for several years through an open media environment in Nepal. While the key pillars of sustainability have been well articulated internationally as social sustainability, institutional sustainability and financial sustainability¹, there has not been enough research in South Asia to explore how the everyday practice of community broadcasting and the operational realities within which Community Radios function in the South Asian region in particular, can inform and deepen our understanding of parameters that support or challenge the sustainability of community radio in the long term.

Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in collaboration with Ideosync Media Combine has initiated a participatory research process to explore the parameters that impact the sustainability of Community Radio in the region.

Ideosync Media Combine is a communication for social change organization with over fifteen years of experience in innovation around development and participatory content creation, media rights advocacy, and participatory communication research. With reference to Community Radio, Ideosync has been working on capacity building for more than a decade, creating training tools, materials guides and processes that enable knowledge sharing and learning in the CR sector. In partnership with several international donors, Ideosync has developed and implemented long-term in-depth community radio training programs, and has hand-held more than ten community radio stations across the country to establish participatory content creation and broadcasting processes. It has also developed a technical manual on CR (for UNESCO) as well as a training manual for CR (for UNICEF), apart from creating ethical and self-evaluation guidelines for the sector.

CEMCA implements Commonwealth of Learning's mandate in eight countries. Over the last few years, CEMCA has explored issues around CR sustainability in India – and has requested Ideosync to explore this subject further as part of this joint initiative

As a first step, a validation workshop was convened on the 16th of May 2014, at Hotel Lalit Vibe, Mathura Road, Faridabad. This report captures the outcomes of the stakeholders meeting.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the Stakeholders Validation Workshop were:

- To present the findings of the desk research and receive feedback on the quality of the desk research undertaken
- To present the research methodology and receive feedback on the methodology proposed

¹ Alfonso Gumocio Dagron, 2001

PARTICIPANTS & ARRANGEMENTS

A total of twenty participants attended the validation workshop. Participants included regional partners from Nepal. Unfortunately participants from Bangladesh could not attend due to visa issues. Nominated participants from the two key Community Radio associations of India namely CRA and CRF also attended the validation meeting.

The validation workshop was a one day event which included presentations as well as structured discussion and debate.

SESSION REPORT

Mr. N. Ramakrishnan, Executive Director Ideosync Media Combine welcomed all participants and thanked them for making the time to discuss an important issue faced by the Community Radio sector in the region.

Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, in his opening remarks outlined the critical reasons why a research based process was essential in order to create indicators for sustainability and ensure that the sector had a valid process by which Community Radio stations could judge themselves on a sustainability scale.



Dr. Sanjay Mishra gives his opening remarks

Ms. Venu Arora provided a context to the meeting and explained the process that had been followed to undertake the Desk Research and to design the methodology for the participatory research that would be undertaken during the course of the initiative.

SESSION - I

CR Sustainability: Experiences and Expectations

This session included presentations by experts from the CR community who have had previous experience of engaging with the question of Community Radio and sustainability.

Ms. Jayalakshmi Chittoor spoke about her experience of undertaking the *Abiding Voices* research. She spoke about the lack of long term approach and 'project mode' thinking by larger NGOs and institutions supporting CR stations. In terms of the gaps that were not addressed under the *Abiding Voices* initiative, she spoke about the need to explore the financial aspects of Community Radio Stations. She also spoke how the instruments used in the *Abiding Voices* research had a fair amount of subjectivity and suffered from a lack of time and diversity of CR team members who were spoken to during the course of the research.



Ms. Pinky Chandran representing CRA and Radioactive

Ms. Pinky Chandran spoke about the experiences shared by CR stations during the national peer review 2014 supported by the I&B ministry and noted that sustainability was an overriding concern for all community radio stations. She also spoke from her own experience with managing Radioactive – an operational CR station in Bangalore and raised sustainability issues like payments to volunteers, technology self-reliance and equipment insurance, need for diversifying funding. She also spoke about issues of transparency especially in terms how the CR station accounts are maintained and who has access to them.

Dr. Kanchan Malik from University of Hyderabad spoke about the learning from the assessment undertaken by them of the CR stations supported by UNICEF. She spoke about the detrimental effect of heavily funded project support to CR stations that do not plan for funding withdrawal. The UOH study also revealed volunteer attrition and need for greater systemic structures to create a cascade effect for creating a larger pool of volunteers. She also spoke about challenges with regard to reach and engagement with listeners.



Participants at the CR and Sustainability Research Validation workshop

While sharing experiences from Nepal, Mr. Chapagain raised some extremely pertinent philosophical issues like *what it is that we wanted to sustain- the sector or the individual CR station? What are the values that we want to sustain?* He spoke of CR as heritage. He also emphasised the need to clarify and draw out the distinction between the third tier of broadcasting and mainstream media thereby enunciating its strength. Mr. Chapagain dwelt on the CR PAS and the hexagonal framework where values were assigned to each variable of sustainability.

A lively discussion followed Mr. Chapagain's presentation where many of the points he raised found resonance with the participants. Mr. Pavarala pointed to the essential dissonance in the expectations of the Community Radio sector that has to function in a non profit non commercial manner and yet become self sustaining quickly. Mr. Ashish Sen spoke about the need to look at relevance of the CR

station if it has to remain sustainable as well as look at linkages with other movements that support and can provide succour to the CR movement.

SESSION - II

CR and Sustainability: The Initiative

Ms. Venu Arora and Ms. Leonea Fernandez presented the desk review undertaken over the past four months as well as the research methodology that would be used to undertake the research

(Desk Research and Research Methodology presentations are available at CEMCA Slide Share page)



Feedback on the desk research was extremely positive and participants commended the ideosync team for having undertaken a comprehensive process and brought out succinct gaps in the existing literature that can be filled by the current research initiative.

Ms. Venu Arora guides the discussion for feedback and recommendation on the research methodology

Feedback and recommendations:

On the Researtrch methodology there were a few comments and recommendations and these were as follows:

- Re visit the CR selection so as to make the selection more geographically representative. Mr. Vibodh Parthasarathy however questioned the validity of the geographical representation given that it did not impact the research's key questions
- There was overall agreement with the participatory framework of the research however some sceptecism was expressed as to the difficulty of managing data coming in through open ended diaries
- Explore issues of ideological sustainability and the kinds of compromises that CR stations are making in order to 'sustain'
- Explore the frameworks within which the CR stations were created
- Explore perceptions by undertaking perception mapping – do the CR stations consider themselves sustainable when broadcasting 2 hours or when broadcasting 6 hours etc
- Create policy monographs to link sustainability to the regioanl policy environemnt
- Explore relationships between the CR station and its community
- Draw up a tighter Hypothesis for the research. May be useful to go in with a particular definition of sustainability rather than have the research explore it