

Disaster Response Management Through Community Radios in India

Sudeshna Das

Research Scholar, DOS in Journalism and Mass Communication, University of
Mysore & Asst. Prof, REVA University, Bangalore, India

Dr. B.P Mahesh Chandra Guru

Professor, DOS in Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Mysore, India

Abstract

A disaster is a grave disruption that causes extended loss in the lives of a community or society and requires external assistance. Disaster Response Management can be described as a sequence of events or phases, consisting of different and specific actions and this cycle can be divided into three main group of actions: (1) Prevention, preparedness and early warning (2) Disaster impact and needs assessment and relief and emergency response (3) Rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery. In this context of Disaster Response Management, media has played a vital role in all three phases of action in order to mitigate the circumstances. Community Radio is seen as the New Media for isolated, rural communities in the wake of the Community radio movement in India. This study highlights the efforts of two Community Radio Stations in disaster coverage and management in the Northeastern and Southern states of Assam & Karnataka respectively in India. Here, the researcher would like to present the case study of Radio Brahmaputra, a Community Radio Station situated in Dibrugarh in Assam and its contribution to tackle the presently ongoing flood situation of July 2019 and Krishi Community Radio Station, Dharwad, Karnataka that is constantly dealing with various man-made disasters in the agricultural sector. Through these case studies, the researcher wants to establish the scope of Community Radio as an effective tool for Disaster Management at the grass root level.

Keywords- Community Radio In India, Disaster response Management, Karnataka, Assam

I. INTRODUCTION

Preamble

A community radio station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. The community can be territorial or geographical - a township, village, district or island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory. (AMARC, The Right to Communicate: 4th World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters, 1991) (AMARC, 2007) Consequently, community radio can be managed or controlled by one group, by combined groups, or of people such as women, children, farmers, fisher folk, ethnic groups, or senior citizens. What

distinguishes community radio from other media is the high level of people's participation, both in management and program production aspects. Furthermore, individual community members and local institutions are the principal sources of support for its operation. (Pavarela & Mallik, *Other Voices: The Struggle for Community Radio in India*, 2007)

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Evolution of Community Radio in India

Community radio is the third tier of radio broadcasting in India – the first two being public service and private broadcasting. Thus, community radio is that sector of radio which is owned by localized geographical communities, wherein participation, ownership and daily management of the radio station is by the same community the radio seeks to serve. A typical community radio station is characterized by programmes which are produced by local people, in the local language or dialect, and talks about locally relevant issues. It is different from public radio because public service radio typically caters to a much larger audience, and most of the programming is done by broadcasting professionals. (Pavarela, K, & Venniyoor, 2005) The campaign to legitimize Community Radio in India began after the Supreme Court of India gave a landmark judgement on February 1995 that 'Airwaves are public property'. This crucial judgement promoted Community Radio stakeholders to initiate a declaration advocating the establishment of third tier of broadcasting that is Community Broadcasting, which was later, signed as Pastapur Initiative of 1998. (A Report by Ministry of I & B, 2002) Sustained advocacy with the Government of India resulted in the first Community Radio Policy in 2002, which allowed educational institutions across the country to set up small-scale local radio station. Supported by several international agencies such as UNESCO and UNDP, civil society organizations and government functionaries continued thrashing out revisions to the 2002 policy, which was only partially enabling. This resulted in the revised CR Policy Guidelines of November 2006, which allowed registered civil society organizations also to apply for CR licenses; and which forms the current framework for CR in India. (Das, 2010) At present, there are about 201 functioning community radio stations in India. At present Delhi and Tamil Nadu have maximum number of community radio stations and the numbers are slowly increasing in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Of the 201 functional CRS, 76 are operated by NGOs, 110 by the Educational Institutions and 15

by SAU/ KVKs. There are many community radio stations that are broadcasting only fresh content on a daily basis, but majority of them are repeating content from the same day or previous day broadcast. (A Report by Ministry of I & B, 2002)

Community Radio as a tool for Disaster Management

It has been long observed that radio stands as the best medium of communication in times of disaster. During times of natural calamity where other regular facilities like, telephone, television, internet, print media become inaccessible, radio stations on the other hand can operate on basic mobile phones or battery run transmitters and provide relief as a sole medium of communication. Along these lines, CR has gained popularity as an essential communication tool in disaster relief due to their specific reach in geographical terms and ease of content in local language. (Government of India, 2018) Community Radio has proven to be an effective disaster management communication tool in several instances across the world. They have aided to spread awareness and strategies so that disaster effected communities are better prepared and participate more actively in disaster management. (Kyoto University, 2012) One such instance is of Community Radio Lintus Mirapi of Indonesia which has consistently spread awareness and information in reducing risk from disaster as Mirapi is a active volcano and the people living in it's proximity always face the risk of living through a potential eruption. Lintus Mirapi has been playing a proactive role in addressing emergency situation in times of natural disaster like earthquakes, heavy rain fall, volcanic eruption etc. (Birow, 2010) Similarly, FMYJ was setup as a disaster radio station after the 1995 Great Hanshin – Awaji earthquake in Japan and later developed into a community radio station which has worked tirelessly in sharing their knowledge of providing relief in disaster situations with other local disaster radio stations. (Kyoto University, 2012)

Community Radio and Disaster Management in India

During 2004 tsunami, Anna Community Radio in the southern India played a huge role in assisting effected communities at times of distress & lend their support to the victims. The community radio station served as a platform for victims to voice their grievances and also broadcasted information about relief material and likely outbreaks of epidemics. On observing the effectiveness of Anna CR in disaster management, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting extended its services in

Nicobar Islands, one of the worst hit by the tsunami. This set the tone for CR stations in India to address various issues under disaster management. (Jethwani, 2012)

III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Development communication as a sub field of mass communication emerged in the years subsequent to the II World War as newly independent Asian, African and Latin American countries ventured out to become progressive, self-sustaining and industrialized. (White, Nair, & Joseph, 1994) The use of the term 'Development' became associated with themes like modernization, nationwide economic growth and technological diffusion leading to centralized planning, large scale industrialization and the expansion of basic communication infrastructure. The mainstream empirical social scientists in the Euro-American tradition postulated various theories under the dominant paradigm with the shared assumption that development necessitates the replacement of traditional structures by modern, economic and social organization. (Servaes, Jacobson, & White, 1996) This wisdom could be gleaned from the theory proposed by theorists like Daniele Learner (*The Passing of Traditional Society*), Everett M Rogers (*Diffusion of Innovations*) and Wilbur Schramm (*Mass Media and National Development*). But, disenchantment with these postulates led to the dependency debate which played an important role in the movement for a new world information and communication order from the late 60s to the early 80s. Third world news networks were established and people from developing countries wrote articles about themselves from their own perspectives. The dominant paradigm of development was shunned and newer approaches on development promoted one common standpoint where in social change must be 'Bottom Up' and aimed at self-development of the local community. (Kumar, 1994) With this shift in focus of development approaches, the participatory communication model emerged that sought to transform the elitist, vertical and top-down character of the dominant paradigm and incorporate democratization and participation at all levels in the planning and production of the media content. (Servaes, Jacobson, & White, 1996) 'Another' communication favored multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalization, inter-change of sender-receiver roles in horizontal communication links at all levels of the society. This philosophy of participatory communication forms the cornerstone of the functioning of the Community Radio station in a developing nation like India. Community Radio can promote receiver centric media

system at grassroots level enabling rural people to manage their own development and to exert control over the developmental process through self-management. (Pavarela & Mallik, 2007)

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study has been a part of the PhD work undertaken by the researcher to look into the aspects of usage, impact and effectiveness of community radios in the states of Karnataka and Assam in India. The review of previous literature has established that the concept of community radio has been diffused to a great extent in Karnataka, one of the fast developing states in India with the capital city of Bengaluru known as the IT city or Silicon Valley of India. Karnataka as the state stands as a pioneer of the birth of CRS namely the Namma Dhwani Station. On the other hand, Assam situated in the Northeast part of India, still struggles with progress and is one of the backward regions in the country riddled with rampant unemployment, slugging industrial sector, illiteracy and so on. Similarly in terms of CRS, it is still struggling to fully benefit from this phenomenon as only three radio stations have been successfully conceptualized in the state and under immense adversities are working hard to make a difference.

In this context, disaster management being one of the primary areas of focus of CRS, both in Assam and Karnataka, CRS has shown immense potential as a communication tool that can aid in mitigating the adverse impact of disasters in both the regions. In Assam, the case study is of Community Radio Station Radio Brahmaputra and in Karnataka, Krushi Community Radio, Dharwad has been taken as part of the study. Qualitative Research approach consisting of the observation method on the disaster management activities of CRS have been analyzed and presented to understand how CRS in India are transforming and acting as effective Disaster Management Tool from the perspective of Participatory & Alternative Communication for development.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Case Study of Community Radio in Assam- Radio Brahmaputra CRS

The foray of starting CR stations in North East India, started in the state of Assam with the first Community Radio Station, 'Jnan Taranga' established by the

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The main purpose of this CR is to disseminate knowledge as well as to provide a platform for further learner-teacher interaction, discussion on important issues and development in the field of education and society or community.

Assam has always been prone to natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, landslides, cyclone and occasional draught. The population of Assam is subjected to perennial floods, landslides and environmental degradations. The Government of India being equally concerned formulated certain Guidelines (DM Act. 2005) to be followed vigorously in order to reduce vulnerabilities in the areas and look after the Disaster related activities of the entire state.

In this scenario, content of information is formulated for disaster radio stations according to phases of disasters-1. Immediately after disasters to evacuation shelters, information on people's safety and contact, information on infrastructure directly related to people's everyday lives such as electricity supply and telephone services, i.e. Relief phase related to people's everyday lives, entertainment. 2. Rehabilitation/Recovery phase Information for recovering normal life, recovery plans of the region, and events for recovery, entertainment and lastly 3. Disaster reduction / disaster prevention phase Knowledge for disaster preparation, disaster experiences.

Brahmaputra Community Radio Station (BCRS) popularly known as Radio Brahmaputra is based at Dibrugarh, very close to where the mighty river flows by at Maijan Ghat. The station is unique in that it caters to the needs and aspirations of people belonging to as many as five communities residing around the area in as many local languages – Shadri (dialect of the tea tribe community), Assamese, Bhojpuri, Bodo and Mishing. While BCRS seeks to reach the most marginalized groups on fourteen islands and thirty tea plantations and more than 180 villages in Dibrugarh district, its footprint reaches across the Brahmaputra to other districts as well. Today it broadcasts for eight hours every day on FM 90.4 from Dibrugarh and can be heard in three districts along and across the Brahmaputra.

Recently, a population of 42,921 in eight of the 33 districts of Assam were affected by floods on 9th August, 2019. In this flood, the low-lying areas based on the riverbank considered to be flood prone zones requires extensive preparedness to deal with the floods each year. Dibrugarh district in Assam is one such flood prone zone wherein the problems are multiplied keeping into account the demography, which is mostly rural, backward, and poverty stricken especially the tea garden communities.

In the recent flood of 9th August 2019, the nearby area to the CR Brahmaputra known as the North Line Maijan faced severe flood situation.

India has a Disaster Management Act 2005 and under DM act, Community Radio Stations also promptly act on any disaster in all three phrases - Pre, During and Post Disaster. In the per-disaster phase includes Prevention, Mitigation, preparedness During-disaster phase in generating information about relief measures, addressing distress calls, keeping the channels of communication open and In post Disaster phase - Response, rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery.

Pre- Flood Disaster Management Activities of Radio Brahmaputra - Even before the floods, Radio Brahmaputra team had been working in different phases and segments to built awareness regarding the necessary measures to be adopted to deal with flood situations in that area. In terms of Prevention, preparedness and early warning, the Radio Team generated awareness and tried to prepare the nearby tea garden communities on various levels in terms of availing safe drinking water during floods, constructing sustainable toilets that would mitigate unhygienic conditions in the immediate vicinity during and after floods, tackling common post-flood diseases like Diarrhea, take measures to built sustainable animal shelters for domesticated animals so that they can be kept in hygienic conditions during floods, build homes whose structures are not low lying using cost-effective materials that can result in less loss of property and ensure quick rehabilitation. The CR team also tied up with UNICEF as well as other Government of India Organizations such as Ministry of Women & Children, Ministry of Health has programmes and projects that address mother and infant mortality especially Early Childhood Development (ECD), health of pregnant woman, and menstrual health and hygiene.

Various programming formats on Disaster Management were initiated and broadcasted by the CRS like Quiz on Disaster Management, which saw large-scale participation as a popular Phone-in Programme, Narrowcasting in Schools to generate awareness among students, Radio Interviews with Medical Professionals which was again narrow casted in the villages in community meetings and schools wherein elements of extension activities were blended with the radio programme, Card games after broadcasting and narrowcasting of programs through which recall and retention

is done of the advices on disaster management in a community meeting set-up, especially with the women.

During-Flood Disaster Management Activities of Radio Brahmaputra- Bulletins were made by the Radio Team on the Status of the people on the Maijan North Line. Assessment was carried especially to look out for the pregnant women in the area, as they are vulnerable to diseases at this time. They are monitored so as to proper medical facilities can reach them on time. Relief drives were organized to collect aid for the flood victims. Radio Interviews with various Disaster Management officials broadcasted generating awareness of the proactive measures to be undertaken.

Post- Flood Disaster Management Activities of Radio Brahmaputra -After the floods, community visits were arranged and assessment activities undertaken in collaboration with other relief giving agencies like the health services specially focused towards pregnant woman and provide them immediate relief and access to medical assistance, Rehabilitation of flood-affected houses

Community Radio in Karnataka

Community Radio in Karnataka, situated in Southern India has addressed different issues relating to lives, social, economy, cultural and legal issues. 'Namma Dhwani' the first ever CR setup in the state of Karnataka was catering to a community of listeners of mostly illiterate women who otherwise had little access to information.

Namma Dhwani enhanced the participation of women in programme making and created awareness among the women listeners about health and sanitation, education, food habits and family system and significant change was happened in the lives of women. The important aspect was that the radio developed leadership qualities/behavior among the women listeners. So it played a significant role in changing the life of the rural women. Presently there are 14 listed active and functional community radio stations in Karnataka which are owned by educational institutes, N.G.Os, Agricultural Universities and Krushi Vigyan Kendra.

The first Community Radio Station in Southern India under State Agricultural University known as Krishi Community Radio Station, and was established at University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad campus on May17, 2007 for the benefit of the farmers in that region. The basic idea behind the station was to reach the

farmers, to address the farmer's problems and transfer of technologies. The station has become the platform for the languages, voices and views of local farmers and addresses all the issues concerning farmers and agriculture.

(Bora & Lakhendra, 2012)

In the context of Disaster Management, the Radio Station has been pro-active in broadcasting various programs on disaster management in the agricultural sector, one being the draught situation which is very common to this region. Draught is a situation in which there is a prolonged deficiency of rainfall over a wide area resulting in serious depletion of soil moisture and consequent poor agricultural production and general water shortage resulting in low incomes and great public suffering and distress.

The Krishi Community Radio Station in order to prepare and create awareness in dealing with the perennial draught situation addresses issues like draught monitoring and management strategies with the help of different methods like Terrace water harvesting and recycling, controlling of soil erosion and conservation, drainage line treatment, plantation of draught tolerant vegetable crops and so on.

These issues are brought to the farmer community through programs like Scientists interview (Vigyanigala Sandarshana), Hygiene in the kitchen (Adugemaneyannagisi Arogya Kendra), Progressive farmers information (Krishi Chintana) produced and broadcasted by the Krishi Community Radio Station.

VI. CONCLUSION

The case studies show that Community Radio can provide extensive help in Disaster Response Management in all the three main group of actions: (1) Prevention, preparedness and early warning (2) Disaster impact and needs assessment and relief and emergency response (3) Rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery.

Radio Brahmaputra in terms of the emergency flood situation proved to be an effective disaster management communication tool, whose potential can be further explored and harnessed in dealing with similar emergency situations in future. Even Krishi Community Radio, Dharwad remains fully equipped with communication technology and adequate knowledge base to deal with both natural and man made calamities in the field of agriculture.

In fact these models can be easily replicated in the other parts of the region to deal with various disaster management issues. The characteristics of the Community

Radio in terms of being accessible, participatory, localized, democratic, de-institutionalized, is perfect for the bottom up communication strategy for disaster management. Community Radio by promoting receiver centric media system at grass root level enabling rural people to manage their own development and to exert control over the developmental process through self-management can prompt the common man through horizontal communication links find different solutions in managing disasters.

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