

Building Communities through Media

Kalanjiam Community Radio Experience

P Krishnamurthi
DHAN Foundation
pkrishnamurthi@gmail.com

Communication is about the human factor in development - it gives people a voice, makes them "visible," and helps them to learn and take action. Communication is most useful when it starts by listening to what people already know, what they aspire to become, what they perceive is possible and what they can productively sustain.

There are many "paths of communication" ranging from folk media and traditional social groupings to radio and video to the Internet. Media can be used as a means for education, for motivation in the spheres of development action. If the media is owned and managed by the community it can reflect their insights, native wisdom, and heritage. It can act as a powerful tool to inform and educate themselves about new ideas and technical innovations for their own social, economic, and cultural development.

With more than two decades of experience in working with the poor and disadvantaged communities on microfinance and water, DHAN Foundation has taken up development communication as a potential area for action. It is involved in promoting use of information and communication as a tool for development.

ICT for Disaster Management

People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources.

Information, communication, and public participation become important aspects of a community's ability to recover from a disaster event. Men and women rely on different

sources of information; a multifaceted approach to the provision of warnings needs to be implemented.

Disaster preparedness depends more on how information and services will be facilitated during the aftermath of a crisis. Since many of the choices and preferences within the households are still divided along gender lines emergency preparedness needs to consider ways and means to ease the burden of these activities on women who may be themselves sick or in other ways affected by the disaster. Women's unseen and unrecognized contributes to



Pic1: Volunteer in Programme recording

the household's ability to recover from the disaster event needs to be taken into consideration, while designing disaster preparedness strategies.

Dysfunctional telephones and unwired remote villages often make the last mile reach a nightmare. The answer will be in strengthening and sustaining the local systems that work. Community radio initiatives and village information centres coming up along the coasts and their networking could help a lot in creating location specific disaster mitigation strategies. The role of community radio would be very critical in disaster management.

Communication for Rehabilitation

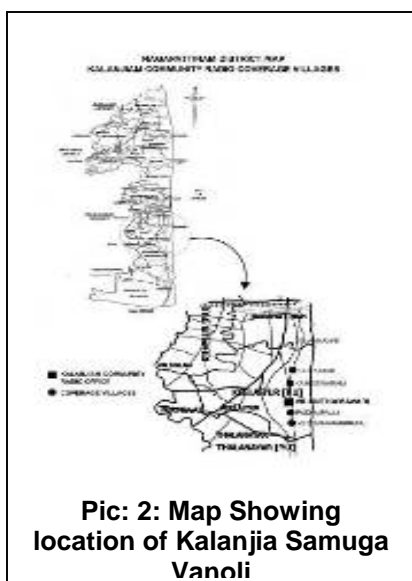
After the Tsunami devastation, in December 26, 2004, DHAN Foundation started working in a big way with the affected fishing and farming communities along the coast with a long term development focus. Empowering the community in all aspects, particularly in building capacity of the community for disaster management was felt as an important area of intervention. Applications of Information and Communication Technology were introduced through the Village Information Centres connected with internet facility setup in all the villages.

To complement this ICT initiative, the Foundation has launched a Community Radio Station *Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli* with a vision of creating a Community Media Centre with mixed media model, combining radio with video and web based technologies. United Nations Development Programme provided resources under its Tsunami Recovery Support Programme. The Station has started to function from October 2005.

Purpose

The Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli has been established

- To use information and communication as a tool for change in the areas of poverty reduction, gender and environment
- To enable the communities in the disaster prone coastal areas to get prepared for managing disasters and strengthen their livelihoods to cope up with such disasters through Community Owned Media Centre.
- To build skills of the community to prepare and disseminate audio programmes on the areas concerning their socio-economic and cultural development.
- To aid in promotion and preservation of local wisdom, traditional knowledge and skills by encouraging communities to prepare programmes in these areas.
- To create a platform for local youths and students to develop their skills in communication.



Location

The Station for Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli has been set up at Vizhunthamavadi village of Keelaiyur Block in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu (Pic: 2). Nagapattinam district is a coastal district of Tamil Nadu; The Keelaiyur block of Nagapattinam is next in south to the pilgrimage and tourist spot - Velankanni. The block is surrounded by sea in its east. Four hamlets located around Vizhnthamavadi village such

as PR Puram, Kameswaram, Pudupalli and Vettaikaraniruppu are under coverage.

Socio – Demographic and Listeners’ Profile

- The Total population of the five villages is 34,328 in 8,462 households; except two villages Puthuppalli and Vettaikaraniruppu, in other villages the female population is slightly higher.



Pic. 3: Kalanjia Samuga Vanoli

- There are 5,051 children in these five villages, of them PR Puram constitutes for 57% of the total child population.
- Only 364 households come under dissemination range of Public Address System fitted over the Village Information Centres. It constitutes only 4.3% of the total households. Pudupalli has the highest reach of 12.3% households and Vizhundhamavadi the least of 2.3% households.
- The population predominately is most backward community and there is a small portion of scheduled caste population, who are mostly agriculture labourers.
- Migration to foreign countries is a common phenomenon in these villages. One in every two household has a family member employed in South East Asian countries. This is quite reflective from the fact that 37% of the respondents within the survey area had not crossed primary school, where as 29% had underwent high schooling and only 13 % had gone to higher secondary.
- 73% of the respondents have highlighted health issue as a serious development issue and other issues they raised were disaster, infrastructure such as road, electricity and drinking water.
- 22% of the household has cable connection and the popular channels are Sun TV, KTV, Jaya TV & DD1.

- Two radio stations are in the reach of the villages, they are Karaikal FM and All India Radio, Trichy. Karaikal FM is the most popular radio station having the largest listenership base. However during the monsoon / winter the people get access to five – six stations ranging from private FM stations of Chennai, Thirunelveli and Cylone.
- Popular Tamil dailies are available on subscription at home and mostly at tea shops. The reach of print media is limited to only a few of the village population, that too for men. Women have no access to Newspapers at all.
- The preferred form of information as suggested by the respondents is Audio by 73 % of the respondents, followed by 54% for Audio Video form, only 40% preferred for the print form.
- The respondents listed 21 health problems as the most prevalent health issues. Fever, Cough, Jaundice, Common Cold and Cancer were the most represented having more than 26% representation.
- On community participation in media production 30% of the respondents have expressed willingness and 19 % are willing to directly participate in production.

Facilitating Agencies

The Keelaiyur Vattara Vayalagam, a federation of Vayalagam Farmers' groups promoted by DHAN Foundation among the Tsunami affected communities owns the station. The Foundation works with the federation to set up Governance and Executive Structure for managing the Radio Station. This initiative is supported by the UNDP and technical support is provided by VOICES, a Bangalore based Development Communication NGO.

Programme Production & Dissemination

The Station is equipped with infrastructure needed for producing audio programmes. A team of trained Volunteers from the local community are involved in programme production. The station is connected with the VICs set up by DHAN Foundation in the villages through Local Area Network. These VICs narrow cast the programmes produced and sent by the Station through the Public Address Systems



Pic 4: Field Recording



Pic 5: Village Information Centre for narrow casting

fixed over towers. Presently programmes of 30-minutes duration are presented daily. Also the Station has made an arrangement with the AIR - Karaikkal FM Station to broadcast selected programmes once in a week for fifteen minutes.

Community radio programming addresses local information and community needs that revolve around disaster preparedness,

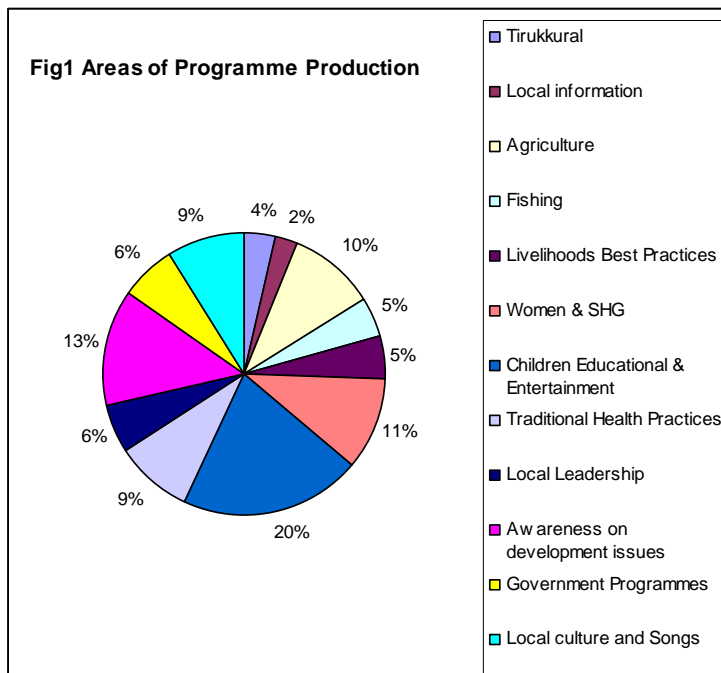
livelihoods, local best practices, women and children, health, education and farming. The Federation is getting prepared to apply for a license to broadcast under the new licensing policy guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

The station started functioning from August 2006. The Centre has made so far 2032: 35 minutes of programme of varying types and areas as detailed in the table 1.

The Kalanjiam Community Radio Station jointly with district disaster preparedness training unit organised a training programme with 40 Community members from five villages of the Keelaiyur block. They were trained on disaster and its types and how to respond in a disaster, doing basic search and rescue in a disastrous situation. They were also taught on steps to be taken in a distress situation. The participants were shown how tackle fire accident and different rescue methods. It was followed by training on First Aid and follow up. A practical manual on disaster management was distributed to the village information centers and community leaders attended the training programme.

Table 1: Areas of Programme Production

SI No	Type of Programme	Duration (Seconds)	Minutes
1	Tirukkural	4445	74:05
2	Local information	3029	50:29
3	Agriculture	12051	201:51
4	Fishing	5616	94:36
5	Livelihoods Best Practices	5997	108:57
6	Women & SHG	13002	217:42
7	Children Educational & Entertainment	25217	421:77
8	Traditional Health Practices	10854	181:54
9	Local Leadership	6733	112:13
10	Awareness on development issues	16419	273:39
11	Government Programmes	7736	129:56
12	Local culture and Songs	10818	181:18
Total		121,917	2,032:35



The Chart (Fig 1) shows that livelihoods related programming constitutes about 20 percent of total programme produced, which is more of best practices in existing sea and land based livelihoods. Similarly programming for Children was 20 percent of the total duration of programmes produced. Traditional health practices, local culture and folk songs were the major areas of programming to fulfill the demands of the communities generated during need assessment.

The KCR has taken up a campaign on Right to Information Act 2005. Provisions of Right to Information Act 2005 and how the general public can make use of the act were made into programmes. In association with the Tsunami legal Action committee, the team has made an interaction programme with villagers. The interactions were made into programmes and were disseminated through narrowcast.

Moving into Mixed Media Model – Community Media Centre

To build on the community radio initiative, the concept of Community Media Centre combining ICT based Village information Centres (Thagavalagam), Community Radio and the proposed Community Video

has been conceived to maximize the impact of information and communication on the lives of the local communities, especially women. The vision of the Centre is to inform, inspire and empower community to speak and act on behalf of their fellow members, to use radio, television and the Internet to create and distribute programs that promote and celebrate individual expression, local achievements, education, cultural exchange, arts appreciation and civic engagement. The Community Media Centre (fig 2) would work with the following objectives:

- Combine the Audio, Video and internet resources and tools that can empower the communities to be more conscious media consumers.
- Enable the community to tell, share and preserve their own stories by themselves
- Discuss the issues and challenges concerning their development and find out collective solutions for Gender inclusive development.

It would take media literacy as one of its core area of intervention. Media literacy is the practice of turning passive media consumers into critical

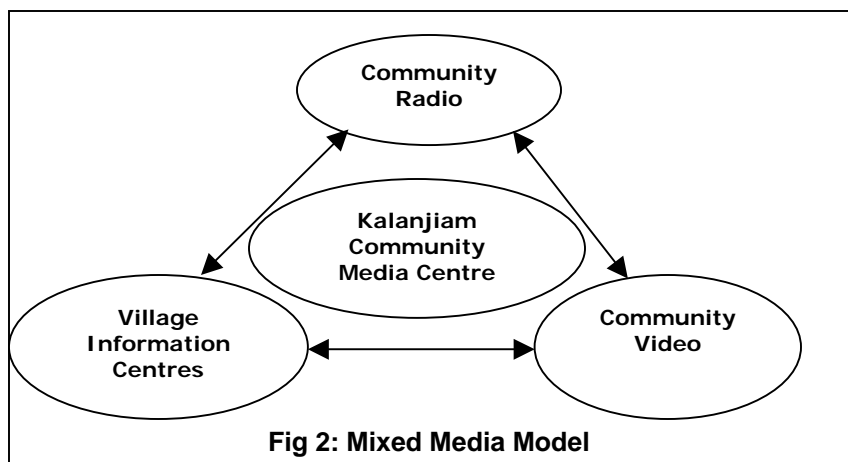
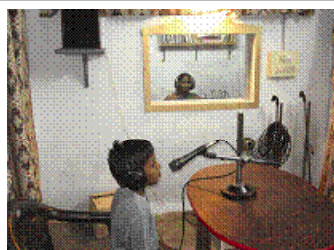


Fig 2: Mixed Media Model

thinkers and media creators. It would enable the communities, particularly women to look for what is not in the media, and to ask why certain messages, viewpoints and perspectives are not included. Its ultimate goal is "Building Community through Media."



Pic: 6: Studio Recording

The boy stretches his neck to reach the microphone that dangles in front of him. But that does not break the enthusiasm. He eagerly narrates the story of Ali Baba and the 40 thieves. This young storyteller comes from a rural village near Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu. He is one of the many talents, staff and volunteers, who help in creating a very unusual radio programme for an unusual radio station Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli. Currently staff of eight works for the radio station full time. "I like doing

the programmes", says Dinolya, the latest addition to the team. She and her colleagues know how to spot interesting topics, to do interviews, to edit and also how to narrate a programme. Every day they go out on field assignments to collect new audio material. The topics range from agriculture, health, education, issues around Self Help Groups, events around festivals up to disaster preparedness

Governance

The Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli has been founded on the systems and community processes that would ensure the local management. The Board of Governance of the Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli has been drawn from the Keelaiyur Vattara Vayalagam. Panchayat level Cluster Development Associations of the federation have nominated representatives for the Board of Governance. 21 members Board of Governance works with a professional deputed from DHAN Foundation and a team of local volunteers. Two third of the Board of Governance are represented by women. In addition, an advisory group consists of teachers, health workers, farmers, fishermen, women and children has been set up to advise on content.

The ownership will be with the community from Day one of the initiation. All the assets created for the centre and it would be transferred to the Vayalagam Federation immediately. DHAN Foundation team will prepare the community and handover management to them. The staff and the Board of Governance would be prepared to manage the Centre and adequate sustainability measures would be in place when they takeover management. The Coordinator who has been deputed from the Centre would

train a local person to takeover management under the guidance and supervision of the Board of Governance. The Board of Governance would be equipped to take up following roles.

- Giving guidance for evolving content for production and dissemination
- Review and monitor the functions of the Coordinator and staff
- Review and monitor the physical and financial performance
- Facilitate other members of their cluster / Village to participate actively in the Kalanjiam Community Media Centre's activities.
- Resolving conflicts / issues in the above areas

Learnings

- Organised social infrastructure sets the foundation for setting up and running Community Radio Station. The community organised already around the disaster and livelihoods issues have set a platform for setting up the Community Radio station in Nagapattinam.
- Narrowcasting has several limitations with respect to reach and coverage of listeners. Natural and physical barriers prevent effective dissemination and distort the quality of audio material. Dissemination through Tape recorders played during group meetings did not yield good results. Although the community gets an introduction and experience into the new media, only broadcast could be the solution for effective reach and coverage.
- Getting Government officials for content and programming was not that easy. They have not understanding about the CR and reluctant to appreciate and participate in the programming. Even some of the All India Radio officials do not have adequate understanding about this.
- Children and elders are the potential resources for content generation that needs to be tapped. The responses from these groups were overwhelming for programme production.

Challenges

- DHAN Foundation decided that from the day one, the ownership should be with the communities. The present policy guidelines issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting emphasizes that the license can be given to NGOs who should have a proven record of at least three years of service to the local community. Though DHAN Foundation wants only the federation promoted by it to apply for license, the federation could not fulfill the eligibility criteria as it was promoted only after the Tsunami in December 26, 2004. The other hurdle is even if DHAN Foundation decides transferring the license; it could not do so, as the license is not transferable.
- Community Participation Vs ownership: Since the communities have been accustomed with mainstream media, making them a part of designing and implementing media production becomes challenge. Investing time and energy in educating the members individually and as a smaller group is imperative. Much of the team members' time is spent on it.
- Involving women in the core business of media management, within the male dominated local communities is the other challenge. Women's speaking through the media is always seen as threat within the families as well as in the villages by men. The KCR has taken efforts to bring more women for the management of the station. Two third of the Board of Governance has been earmarked for women. Still making women as part of day to day management is a big challenge for the team.
- Sustainability: Setting up of Community Radio is a capital intensive activity. The setup of Community Radio was possible with the support of UNDP under its Tsunami Restoration initiatives. With the less number of Community Radio Stations run here and there by a few NGOs and lack of proven models for sustainability, this is an area unexplored fully by the practitioners. The KCR need to face this challenge in the near future.
- Community radio broadcast would be especially important in the education and warning roles. But many of the Community Radio initiatives do not have the

direct links to the authorities issuing warnings that the larger broadcasters have, so that is an issue that requires special attention.

Way forward

The Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli is working towards setting up systems for disaster mitigation and management. It is involved in the collection and consolidation of indigenous disaster mitigation and management systems being followed by the local communities with native wisdom. Also the Centre is working towards coordinating with authorized agencies of disaster early warning systems to establish institutional linkages.

With a transition into mixed media model of ICT based radio and video, the Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli is taking shape of a Community Multi Media Centre. Ensuring community ownership and management is the focal point of all its activities. With the mandate of ensuring major stake and ownership for women the Centre is enabling the women to participate, own and manage the Kalanjiam Community Media Centre to address various socio, economic and development issues concerning them.

The Centre plans to attain financial sustainability in a phased manner. It would invest substantial amount of energy to build capacity of the community and management team to work for it. Number of areas and activities has been identified for achieving sustainability such as paid audio video services to the public, various internet based services, producing documentaries for voluntary organizations and educational institutions etc.