



***Community Radio: Policies, Power and Possibilities***

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# Why CR?

- CR provides a framework not only to re-engage those communities which exist on the periphery, but also gives a chance for civic transformation, participatory democracy and mutuality
- Community Radio is a counterpoise to the egotistical profit driven media accountable to their own selves
- Despite this or perhaps because of being a poor man's medium radio has got little or no place in the broadcasting policy framework of this country.

# Need for CR in India

- What we had hoped to achieve from SITE in 1975-76 is now expected from CR: capacity-building in rural areas, preservation of traditional culture and wisdom, disseminating information that can be used by the concerned communities directly, bolstering Panchayati Raj institutions and of course strengthening grassroots democracy.

## CR Experience in India so far...

- The Indian experience with CR so far has demonstrated that if these objectives are to be achieved, government policy must be triggered towards propagation of community radio stations across the length and breadth of the country. In technical terms this inherently implies major policy reforms.

# CR Experience in India so far...

CR policy must try achieving-

1. Liberalization of eligibility criteria,
2. Expediting of licensing,
3. Meticulous planning to ensure the availability of frequencies to a large number of CR stations
4. Making the hardware available at prices which are affordable by the poorest of poor
5. Ensuring sustainability once a station has started &
6. Building an interface with communities to help develop programs on the key issues of concern.

# Policy flip-flops- Questions in search of answers

While the '**public property theory**' could make the task of democratization of CR very easy, it fails to explain these ambiguities inherent in the present system-

- Why is 'spectrum' an exclusive property of the government?
- How are airwaves public properties in a framework where the government has the right to auction, rent, buy or sell frequencies?
- Isn't the community the 'owner' of its station?
- Does the government have a total right over the entire spectrum or is it a limited right?

# Policy flip-flops

- It is being increasingly felt that the hegemonic dominance of 'media elites' on policymaking and governance, coupled with operational challenges often faced by community groups, results in legislation that restricts the enormous potentiality of community media access, participation and representation. Why else do we have such double standards like a separate policy for CR and FM.?

# Policy flip-flops- Consider this

- The same set of regulators which will go to extremes when it comes to licensing or when monitoring content (all in the name of public-interest) had no predicament when in July 2005 during the second round of allocation of broadcast circles, FM stations were handed over to the 'highest bidder'.
- The minimum net worth minimum net worth required for one channel per center in all regions ranged from Rs. 50 Lakh for the lowest that is the D category centres (which have a population between 1 lakh-3 lakhs) to over Rs. 3 Crore for A+ category centres. Little surprising, Sun TV, got as many as 23 FM circles.

# CR Policy: Access or Denial?

- In December 2002, the Government of India approved a policy for the grant of licenses for setting up of Community Radio Stations to well established educational institutions.
- The 10-page guideline neatly divided into 9 sections leaves one wondering whether amidst all pretences of freeing the spectrum and promises of free speech, clause after clause, state control in not only reinforced but strengthened.

# CR Policy: Access or Denial?

The process of screening the applications is long drawn and frustratingly tedious

1. Within one month of receipt of the application in the prescribed form, the Ministry of I&B shall process the application
2. The Ministries concerned shall communicate their clearance within three months of receipt of the application and the successful applicant will be selected for issue of the Letter of Intent (LOI)

# CR Policy: Access or Denial?

3. Within 1 month of the issue of the LOI the eligible applicant will be required to apply to the WPC Wing of the Min of Communication & IT, for frequency allocation & SACFA clearance. A time frame of six months from the date of application is prescribed for issue of Standing Advisory Committee for Allocation of Frequency in Ministry of Communication & IT (SACFA) clearance.
4. On receipt of SACFA clearance the LOI holder shall furnish a bank guarantee for a sum of Rs.25, 000/-.

# CR Policy: Access or Denial?

5. The LOI holder will then sign a Grant of Permission Agreement (GOPA) by Min of I&B, which will enable him to seek Wireless Operating License (WOL)
6. The Community Radio Station can be made operational only after the receipt of WOL from the Ministry of Communication & IT.
7. Within three months of receipt of all clearances the Permission Holder shall set up the Community Radio Station and shall intimate the date of commissioning of the Station to the Ministry of I&B.

# CR Policy: Access or Denial?

8. The sect on content regulation and monitoring states that the permission holder shall not broadcast any programmes, which relate to news and current affairs and are otherwise political in nature.
9. A very short section on perhaps the biggest issue in CR that of funding and sustenance sets the maximum time limit for commercials which is restricted to five minutes per hour of broadcast. This when read in the backdrop of the government policy on advertisements on private FM stations shows their hypocrisy.

# Radio Jamia @ 90.4 FM

## Key findings

- Sustainability is a huge issue, increasing program time from the current 90 minutes per day would mean increased expenditure. This despite the fact that since Radio Jamia went on air each student in the university is required to pay an annual fee of Rs 50/- for the same.
- Quality is difficult to maintain without paying minimum fees to artists etc...
- Radio Jamia is adjacent to such popular FM stations like Radio City and Radio Mirchi so lots of distractions during tuning... since unlike Radio Jmia they play popular music so they attract a lot of attention.

# Conclusion

- A lot of debate today has shifted from what is CR and who are these 'communities' which we are talking about to the CRS 'model' that India must adopt. The fact is that there is no one model which is the answer to India's varied communities and their needs. It is not a question of having to choose between Africa's rural radio or the Asian experience of a mix of State-public radio based on semi autonomous and independent community radio models. It is about first liberalizing the regulatory framework and letting communities get their first hand experience of what CR is all about.

Thank you