# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA
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# CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CR:

## Whose Capacities?  What Capacities?

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### The Concept

Born out of a premise that airwaves belong to everyone, principles of Social Justice and Inclusion become articles of faith for Community Radio (CR). Freedom of Expression (FOE) and Right to Information (RTI) become the two pillars that anchor CR in a community, while CR itself becomes part of a process for community capacity building. A capacity to negotiate CR as a valuable, dynamic space where communities can create and share   content in their own local idiom, language and context, as an alternative to mainstream   media in terms of their own needs for information and recreation.

It follows then, that capacity building for CR as a process, rather than a mere technical operation, needs to strengthen communities' ability to engage with all aspects of radio production – both creative and technical --,    management, participation, outreach, research and documentation as well as enable communities   to work towards their own development.

CR is thus a   highly localised   process, that constantly and critically needs to examine whose capacities are being built, whose voices are included and whose interests are being served.  It is also crucial for a CRS to recognise and accept   that the geographic community it serves is not a homogenous monolith, but a diverse, fragmented and ever-changing entity with varied needs, concerns and interests.  It is these abilities to engage the diverse community inclusively that capacity building for CR must hone and sustain both in the long term and on an ongoing basis.  Besides imparting training on a whole range of tangible skills, building the more nuanced and sometimes tacit abilities to use these skills for its own development should be the thrust of capacity building for community radio.

### The Context and Situation Analysis

If we review the way these ideas have informed capacity building over the last decade that community radio has been on air in India,  one may acknowledge that  there have been earnest attempts to incorporate them, albeit with varying intensity,  within the limits set by  the goals and objectives of funding agencies.    The focus, however, overwhelmingly  has  been  on  training  to  create  content  and  manage  day-to-day

operations of a radio station, indeed both very essential for the health of a CRS. The ability of communities to engage with a policy debate and negotiate radio as a democratic space, has received scant attention. Attempts to link radio with other civil society movements have been even less. The global development discourse which moved away from basic needs to basic rights has, unfortunately, not found sufficient articulation in the CR sector in India. The development paradigm on which the CR Policy Guidelines is anchored places a substantial "development" burden on the operator, broadly defining the *raison d'etre* of community radio "to be relevant to the educational, developmental, social and cultural needs of a well-defined local community". Coupled with a ban on news and current affairs and dependency on government advertisements as a main revenue source, stations have taken to filling air-time mostly with sanitised and specific goal directed content, thrown at a seemingly homogenous community defined on the basis of geography. Thus, somewhat extravagant claims of "serving a community through useful programmes" appear more frequently in CRSs presentations than a commitment to cater to specific needs of smaller groups with diverse interests.

It needs to be noted that an area where the sector appears to have done remarkably well is to give a boost to local culture and folk art and music forms, especially in rural and semi urban areas. In many instances, it has given the station a positive identity and acceptance within a community. However, the sector does not yet have a well-documented treatise that demonstrates with evidence that CRS are indeed rich repositories of cultural knowledge. Inadequate documentation is also a gap area that capacity building efforts need to address.

*Training and Capacity Building Initiatives for CRS - An Overview*
Given the diversity in the Sector in terms of type of licence holder (Educational Institutions, NGO, Krishi Vigyan Kendras); location (urban, semi urban, rural); broadcast languages; extent of support by parent organisation, training needs of the sector vary hugely. A number of organisations: government, national, international, multi-lateral agencies and NGOs have been directly and  indirectly engaged in capacity building for CR Operators. Somewhat like the blind men's exploration of the elephant, each has had a

different focus but has nevertheless contributed meaningfully to better understanding and practice of community radio.

With a few exceptions, training has been free for participating CRSs often with a financial incentive provided by the funding agency to create certain kinds of thematic content. (examples: DST, PR, WCD, REACH, UNESCO, UNICEF etc). Some programmes have also focussed on building other competencies like content research and broadcasting (COL-CEMCA), Research and Documentation (Ideosync), Technical aspects (NOMAD, CEMCA), self-assessment and continuous improvement of operations (UNESCO Chair on Community Media, MIB, CEMCA).

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) also organises a series of orientation programmes for new entrants- both applicants and holders of Letter of Intent (LOI). Owing to the complex licensing procedure, high setting up costs and more recently the 'lure' of securing start-up fund subsidy, discussions at these workshops tend to focus on procedures and finances, rather than a vision for "why radio". However, it must be mentioned here that over time, the orientation programmes have evolved both in their content and format and participants do get to interact with a team form operational CRS in the region and sometimes an opportunity to visit a nearby station.

A wide variety of good quality training materials also exist including a set of comprehensive technical guides and self –assessment toolkits, though they are often underutilised beyond the initial and testing stages of the materials.
Participation in training programmes has usually been by invitation, coupled with the availability of a CRS at a given time. The practitioner driven associations are well appointed to carry out training needs assessment and drive the activity but by and large, these associations have been preoccupied in making the operations financially sustainable, dealing with issues like DAVP empanelment, chasing release of funds, extensions and renewals of lapsed permissions and so on. Sometimes pulled in opposing directions by narrow concerns, the groups have yet to come together as a robust community of practise (COP) and build a strong currency for negotiation. A now

discontinued initiative of Peer Review initiated by the MIB was a step towards just that-forging better exchanges within the sector. The MIB has also allocated a fund for "Capacity Building", which, like much of the scheme funding, remains largely undisbursed.

Against this backdrop, this working group has identified several areas where sustained and regular capacity building is needed and makes a few suggestions for consideration by the larger group. The two operational CRS in the group have also provided some insights into their understanding of capacity building and the challenges faced.

### *Key Issues and Possible Solutions*

Experiences from the peer review project and training and capacity building experiences of other stake holders have thrown up several gap areas and challenges that need to be addressed while building capacities of the sector in order to strengthen it as a third tier of broadcasting. A need to re-imagine the training and workshops with CR stations has also been pointed out, revisiting both training formats and locations. More on-site trainings at CR stations centred on production and research have been mooted, as these occasions provide for peer to peer learning, and content producers get an opportunity to engage directly with the community to address their challenges collaboratively. While there is a whole gamut of areas where training inputs are needed, to facilitate discussion, these have been grouped into a few broad categories.

### *A different Sound for CR*

The Sector has not yet evolved a "Sound for CR" (a phrase borrowed from Venu Arora, Ideosync Media Combine). Most CRSs produce programmes that either sound like the public or the local commercial broadcaster. Innovation in creating a local sounding CR, beyond the language and dialect, requires training in innovative content and radio practices which would help the CR evolve a stronger personal identity. Over the decade, CR stations have mostly figured out their own ways of producing programmes, but there is a certain complacency at work with regards to issue-based programmes like health, education, governance, etc. Trainers can help the stations to step out of their comfort

zone and imagine the programmes in a new way. Newer, bolder formats, developing their own grammar, breaking away from the public broadcaster-style 30-minute slots on a fixed-point chart can help the sector evolve its own distinct vibe.

### *Creative Programming*

Creative approaches to production must be developed so that producers can design programming that is more open and participative. The prevalent style of programming is often preachy, solution oriented, information heavy. Presently, each story or memory shared is approached as an issue rather than as a lived experience. Hence, most of the programmes struggle to end with a solution or a resolution, a burden placed by the development paradigm in which the sector is situated. There is a need for more gender sensitive programmes on CR. Many stations think they do gender programming under which they categorize programmes on women's health, education, child marriage etc. It is proposed that gender is seen as a lens that should cut across all kinds of programming as well as all operations of a CRS. Capacity building for producers should ensure sensitivity to providing representative spaces for women and men. For instance, most programmes on farming address only men, vox pop formats exclude women, as programmes on child development tend to exclude men. CRS must be sensitised to the fact that gender equity is not restricted to programme topic alone. Men and women listen to radio at different times, so different broadcast slots may be needed even for programmes of common interest. In scripted formats like plays, sketches, dramas a conscious effort has to be made to break stereo types-like assigning roles (surgeon, farmer: male; teacher, nurse: female) personalities (women : nagging; seeking knowledge; men : funny, imparting knowledge). Often phrases, proverbs, idioms commonly accepted in local culture tend to be gender, class, caste insensitive. In many communities, women tend to not call, during phone-in programmes. Alternate ways of capturing their participation -through SMS, suggestion boxes, and so on- need to be included. CRS must learn to examine all these aspects carefully and build a lens around and make its gender equal stand public.

*Celebrating radio as an art form*

Creative uses of sound to create different moods and locations easily achieved in radio compared to other media, is not explored enough. The spoken word with a sense of joy is often missing in most content. Humour is restricted to programmes on 'jokes'. A lightness of approach to the way in which various issues are addressed might also help in making the issues relatable and more participative. Live programming is restricted to anchoring or expert based question-answer programmes. A certain fear and mistrust of the listeners that something inappropriate will be said on air that could get the CRS into trouble seems to make producers shy of live programming, except in expert based question-answer formats. Producers need to be trained to become more comfortable and adept at handling such situations.

*Building networks and local partnerships*

There is a strong need for training around forging effective local partnerships in order to strengthen relationships at the local level, which in turn, helps stations move towards social sustainability. Approaching local administration and co-opting them into programming is considered a challenge for many CRS.

Strengthening networking with thematic experts is another area that can enhance the capacity of a CRS. A network of local and national organizations with a deeper, rights-based and localized understanding of these issues may be created and these resources linked to the CR stations.

*Demystifying technology beyond basics*

Most community reporters have a basic understanding of recording and to a lesser extent, the editing software. It is often assumed that know-how of basics is sufficient for participative radio. Technical skills around mixing, field recording, sound design, studio recording need to be experimented and explored further as these can change their approach to programming. Training from people who are familiar with new software and use this hardware regularly will allow CRSs to play with technology and experiment with content production. Likewise many CRSs lack even basic troubleshooting skills and a fear of spoiling equipment holds back community participation in handling and mastering

technical aspects of production creating a distance between the field reporter and the finished programme. Training can help bridge this gap creating greater involvement.

### *Rights-based perspective*

It is felt that CR stations are often working in silos and are not connected with other social movements in the country. As a result, the larger socio-political-economic environment in the country, often, does not get reflected in the programmes. CR producers need a political analysis of the situation in the country, where fundamental concepts around tolerance, diversity, resilience, discrimination are discussed openly, so that the producers become more aware of the country at large and see their communities in relation to this analysis.

Understanding of FOE, The Constitution of India, the Indian legal system and media law, including the CR Policy guidelines are also reported to be fairly poor within the CR community. Therefore, capacity building, first on principles of CR, the idea of FOE, role of media and the role of a strong third tier of broadcasting is much needed.

### *Community mobilisation and confidence building*

Community radio is also about promoting mutual respect and presenting socially disadvantaged groups in a positive light. Keeping an open door policy for participation, and, giving opportunities to the community need patience and training, but usually get the desired results. In the words of Savita Verma, of Alfaz-e-Mewat :

"*Earlier I was very scared, in fact, in my first recording, I was shivering with fear of voicing my thoughts. However gradually, I got used to the radio environment. I have gained so much confidence by working in a radio station that today I go out and talk to the men in my community fearlessly. I like this freedom. . The workshops have brought a huge change in my programme development and delivery styles.*"

Using radio to catalyse and collaborate with peoples' movements in the country (environment, UPE, RTI) and using it to introduce accountability in governance (public distribution, civic amenities) and approach programming with principles of inclusion, equity and social justice are also areas that needs urgent attention from capacity building exercises.

### Research and documentation

Quality of good programmes depends on research and familiarity with issues and field interaction. There is certainly scope for better researched and planned programmes. Besides content research, use of participatory research methods to analyse and understand issues, feed back into the CRS is also a gap area. Video documentation of various processes in the station and community can provide a powerful analytical tool but at present most CRS lack the skill and the wherewithal to undertake this.

It is understood that there are a host of other concerns that beg for attention like : managing the station in a participative manner with true community representation in programme and advisory boards, transparency in accounting systems, providing a safe and gender friendly work environment , awareness about copyright laws and infringement, while building capacities of a community and the station to function meaningfully , fulfilling the vision of providing an equitable and inclusive democratic space.

### Insights from the ground

Often CRSs interpret "Capacity Building" as capacities of the CRS staff to sustain the operation programmatically and financially. For instance, **Hamara Radio, Solan** runs programmes on radio production, often provided free or at a subsidised cost to students from the community who are unable to pay the fees. This enables the CRS to get a steady stream of trained personnel, provides a training ground for the course graduates and better livelihood opportunities outside the CRS once they gain experience and confidence, at once addressing both issues of attrition and the need for trained staff to run the CRS. By their own admission, eliciting community participation remains a huge challenge. While this is a crucial aspect, there is a need to work at building capacities of the community to participate, collaborate and enjoy the radio. Capacity building activity, in fact, must begin even before the CRS starts its full-fledged operations. Two remarks by the operational stations in the working group illustrate these points better:

### *Alfaz-e-Mewat*, *Haryana*

- The team learnt vital lessons from the three year long wait to get the permission to set up the station; through a baseline survey and community engagement to know what the community expected from the medium.  When the radio station was being set up and the transmitter tower was installed, the small red bulb on the tower became a subject of curiosity and unease for the village community. A rumour that it might be a camera for taking pictures spread fast, and a group of curious villagers gathered at the station. The group was welcomed in and shown how a radio broadcast functions. This incident reflected elements of capacity building for trust building that goes a long way in achieving peoples' sustainability.

### *Hamara Solan*, *Himachal Pradesh*

- Radio was altogether a new ball game for us. When we had started the radio station in March 2009, we couldn't afford the cost of professional service providers and hired a local carpenter who advised us to purchase material for the studio from Chandigarh and the acoustics of the studio was taken care of at a minimum cost. The radio equipment like computers, mikes, recorders and the console was picked up from the wholesale IT market in New Delhi. The tower erection was also done in a minimum cost and it suffered huge damage due to a storm.

Clearly, CRSs can benefit from a more detailed understanding of what the entire operation entails, before venturing into it.  Stations coming up in later years undoubtedly have had the advantage of taking guidance and learning from the experiences of older stations. The practitioners' associations can play a key mentoring role in this regard

**Recommendations:**

Capacity building is a continuous learning processes that requires more trust building and willingness among stakeholders to share their knowledge and experiences on a common platform. The mandate is indeed very long and ambitious, clearly outside the scope of any one organiser or stakeholder. As the number of CRSs grows, the gap between the needs as well as skill-sets of mature, older CRSs and the new entrants will increasingly vary. Re-training to take care of attrition and complacency are issues that need to be addressed. Some steps that different players could take to strengthen capacity building initiatives in the sector are suggested below.

- **The MIB** could create a Training Institute/Consortium as an umbrella organisation (not in the brick and mortar sense) to better coordinate different capacity building activities for the sector.
- List and update agencies with the capacity to provide training.
- Create a dynamic database of experts/individual consultants with a facility for end users to provide feedback.
- Develop a training calendar for different types of institutions, regions and linguistic zones.
- **Stakeholders** that fund initiatives in the sector (e.g. CEMCA, UNICEF, UNESCO) could share their specific interests and thrust areas, along with outlay if possible, with MIB/Consortium to help fine-tune plans.
- Promote a **multi-sectoral** approach to training by engaging cross-media experts on issues such as gender, environment, and health, and those with expertise in theatre, folk arts, other media to introduce creative and lateral thinking for innovative programming.
- Consolidate all the training material and make them available in the Creative Commons. Training guides to help utilise the materials effectively may also be considered, along with translation rights and support.
- **The different practitioner agencies** could forge partnerships for a common minimum training agenda and help with identifying training needs.

- **Operating CRSs**, without depending exclusively on organised training events by stakeholders and the MIB, should imbibe a training culture and conduct periodic trainings locally and regionally.
- They can help build a cadre of Master Trainers from among themselves from each State/linguistic zone that would be helpful in providing cost effective, quick, short- term and refresher training.
- CRSs must initiate a culture within their stations, whereby, any person who has attended a training programme must share the ideas, learning, materials with a larger group comprising CRS staff and community contributors.