



India Update: Community Broadcasting

[At the moment the Government of India has initiated Phase II of the private FM radio licensing policy. Under this policy the Government has called for applications for broadcasting licenses.

Earlier, in year 2000, Phase I of the policy had been introduced. It was terminated in 2001. According to government sources, the main thrust of that phase was on operationalising commercial FM in India. The following articles and news clippings taken from various sources provide a general view of the situation regarding community broadcasting in India.]

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All India Petition on Community Radio

The current "Community Radio Policy" of India is discriminatory towards communities as it bars community members, community based-organisations, non-government organisations and other civil society groups from applying for licenses to operate low power community radio stations. The policy holds that only "well established educational institutions/organisations" can apply for a community radio license. So, what we have in the name of Community Radio is in reality Campus Radio.

Several organisations, academicians and individuals have been actively campaigning for communities' right to access the airwaves for the last seven years. They have made innumerable representations to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and to the Broadcast Regulator (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India - TRAI). They have also written and submitted several drafts to reform the existing Community Radio Policy so as to include community rights in it. In spite of these efforts the government continues to be non-committal and discriminatory.

We urge you to join hands with us to mount adequate pressure on the government to end this discrimination against the largely rural and poor communities. Please express your solidarity by signing the 'Urging the Inclusion of the Right of the Communities within the Community Radio Policy' petition at:

<http://www.petitionOnline.com/comradio/petition.html>

BBC Tamizhosai shares educational content with community radio Anna FM

August 26, 2004. BBC Tamizhosai, the Tamil Service of BBC World Service, is sharing its programming in support of education with community radio stations in India. As a pilot, Anna FM (90.4 MHz), India's first community radio station, has been treated to an eight-part series on nuclear science, titled 'Anusakthi Arivom'.

The total duration of this content is 70 minutes and the response to the eight-part series is being evaluated to take such content sharing agreements further.

T Manivannan, Head of Tamil Service, BBC World Service said, "This programme is the first of its kind and is being done on a trial basis. We would like to assess the impact. Yes, we are willing to take this further, provided there is sufficient interest and response. We are also willing to provide the content free for all educational institutions."

The programme on nuclear science, which is originally in English, has been translated and packaged in Tamil by the BBC Tamil Service. The same show has been heard on BBC Tamizhosai between March and May this year.

The Tamil division of BBC Radio is interested in offering educational programmes on themes like English learning, science and technology, and health matters to students through community radio stations.

Anna FM's students will be conducting a survey to find out the station's response to the programme. The eight-part nuclear science series was rebroadcast to Anna FM listeners from August 20 to 27 twice a day at 7.15 am and 8.15 pm. BBC Tamizhosai is expected to pursue other possibilities of content sharing with other community radio stations as well.

An official release stated that the joint venture would explore the potential for a long-term collaboration between BBC and Anna FM in sharing of programme content.

Source: <http://www.communityradionetwork.org>; attributed to exchange4media Chennai Bureau

Bangalore to host Our Media conference

OUR Media/Nuestros Medios is a trans-national network with over 400 academics, activists, researchers, practitioners and advocates working across every continent and in more than 40 countries. Its aim is to work towards the strengthening of media and information/communication technologies (ICT's) that support social justice, human rights, community autonomy and empowerment of grassroots levels.

Our work concentrates on varied fields like community media, independent media, radical media, citizens' media, grassroots networking, telecommunications policy, copyrights regimes, internet governance, indymedia activism, cultural and digital arts, communications theory, social-movement research, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, development communication and communication for social change. We have been holding annual meetings since 2001 and have become active in strategic collaboration and analysis. Past conferences have been organised in Washington D.C (2001), Barcelona (2002), Barranquilla, Colombia (2003) and Porto Alegre, Brazil (2004). This year we are calling for panel proposals to meet in Bangalore, India from December 5-9, 2005.

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Community FM Radio service inaugurated

August 17, 2005. "Teachers should impart quality education to students to help them compete with their counterparts in international level," said Assembly Speaker K. Kalimuthu at Erode Sengunthar Engineering College while inaugurating a Community FM Radio service in the college.

The Speaker wanted students to develop skills in various fields and also encouraged them to speak Tamil clearly. He emphasised that students should have political knowledge and should involve themselves in political activities after completing their studies.

College Correspondent J. Sudhanandhen presided over the function.

Source: *The Hindu Online edition*

For a Radio of Their Own

August 07, 2005. No one seems to have an ear for the voices from the faraway rural areas that are seeking a "radio of our own" for using it as a tool to participate in and further their own development. Radio, designated by several as a medium of the poor, seems to have been hijacked by the elite.

THE PHASE II of the private FM radio licensing policy has made access to the airwaves a whole lot simpler and feasible for the commercial players and 330 frequencies in 90 cities are up for bidding. It has also cleared FDI (foreign direct investment) within the overall cap of 20 per cent. Radio entertainment in India is witnessing a revival of sorts as the airwaves break free from government monopoly.

The social sector, however, is left high and dry every time the government takes a step forward in making radio more accessible. No one seems to have an ear for the voices from the faraway rural areas that are seeking a "radio of our own" for using it as a tool to participate in and further their own development. Several non-governmental and other civil society organisations have been campaigning to get the permission of rural communities to set up low-cost local radio broadcasting facilities but to no avail.

Today, even after more than a decade of the landmark Supreme Court judgment of February 9, 1995, which declared the airwaves as public property, the Government of India has liberated broadcasting cautiously so as to allow its use fundamentally for entertainment. The private commercial FM radio services have not been permitted to broadcast news and current affairs programmes even under the new policy.

The long-standing demands for a third tier of independent, non-profit broadcasting in the country have yielded a confined "campus" avatar of community radio in the form of "guidelines" that allow "well-established" educational institutions to set up FM transmitters and run radio stations within their campuses. This decision somewhat dilutes the hegemony of the state and market over radio, but to open up the broadcasting sector for an urban, educated, elite coterie in areas that are already well served by media, betrays the fundamental philosophy behind community radio.

A tool for development

Community radio is characterised as a mouthpiece for the socially, economically, politically and culturally marginalised people and also as a tool for development. It is a social process in which members of the community associate together to design, produce and air programmes. The involvement of community members distinguishes it from the dominant commercial media that are operated for profit, propaganda, power, politics and privilege.

Algole Narsamma of the Pastapur village in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh and Mangala Gowri of the Budikote township in Kolar district of Karnataka are young, rural women, matriculate, belonging to poor daily-wage earner families. They have been trained in radio production as part of the community radio initiatives of the grassroot NGOs, Deccan Development Society (DDS) and Myrada/Voices respectively.

Shy and hesitant at one time, today they proficiently manage audio studios in their villages along with a couple of other women and carry out planning, recording, scripting, editing, narration, mixing, mastering and production of programmes in the local dialect that would "benefit their community." Their studio archives boast of 300 hours of recorded cassettes on information specific to the region's agricultural needs, indigenous knowledge systems, health, food security, gender justice and the narrative traditions of song and drama. But they cannot go 'on air.' The hold-up is that media laws in India do not permit ownership of radio broadcasting facilities by communities even for developmental agendas.

Even as the government is reluctant to facilitate the functioning of community radio, some community-based organisations have begun to use the state radio network (All India Radio) to support their development work. The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghathan (KMVS) in Kutch district of Gujarat and the Alternative for India Development (AID) in Jharkhand are airing programmes made by rural reporters by purchasing a commercial slot on local AIR stations.

The community radio reporters of Kutch and Jharkhand may have negotiated with the contemporary state policy for airing their programmes, but their voices harmonise with those in Budhikote and Pastapur for demanding "a radio of our own." All of them believe that in order to deploy radio as a tool for empowerment, participation of people is not enough. The ownership, control and management of the radio station must be in the hands of the community for it to function as an autonomous media space open to the need for self-expression of the silenced voices.

Little is being done to reorient broadcasting to encourage such meaningful content that unites rather than emulates current practices of commercial radio, and addresses the developmental, social, cultural, communal and democratic imperatives of the country. Radio, designated by several as a medium of the poor, seems to have been hijacked by the elite.

Source: The Hindu online edition

74 proposals, only 8 community radio stations

28 July 2005. The government of India, as part of its initiative to begin community broadcasting has issued letters of intent to 38 educational institutions for community radio service. So far 23 of these organisations have signed a licence agreement with the government.

Till date, 74 applications for community radio service have been received by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, out of which 53 have been referred to various government agencies for clearances. Information and Broadcasting Minister Jaipal Reddy told Lok Sabha (Lower House) that the government has approved a scheme for granting community broadcasting licenses to established educational institutions, including universities in December, 2002. However, foreign investment in community radio venture is not allowed by the government.

Institutions that have started community radio broadcasting include Anna University, Chennai; Sri Namakula Vinayagar Engineering College, Pondicherry; India International Institute of Management, Jaipur; Kongu Engineering College, Erode; MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai; Sunbeam English School, Varanasi; Vidya Pratisthan's Institute of Information Technology, Baramati, Pune; and City Montessori School, Lucknow.

Source: www.Indiantelevision.com

Putting FM in the Right Frequency

July 11, 2005. Decades after American engineering pioneer Edwin Howard Armstrong invented the Frequency Modulation system for broadcasting, FM radio can hope to reach new levels of coverage and popularity in the country. Phase II of the Central Government's policy on FM radio that was recently approved by the Cabinet promises to free the superior technology from the constraints of poorly thought-out regulations and help it achieve healthy growth.

FM radio, which can deliver high quality stereophonic sound, occupies an important position in the national broadcasting framework, aimed at providing entertainment, education, and information to all. The Tenth Five Year Plan foresees for FM the additional role of spreading literacy and increasing coverage to 60 per cent of the population.

Opening up of FM radio to the private sector in 2000 was by no means a resounding success and, despite high expectations, only 24 out of 108 radio frequencies offered were activated, one of which subsequently closed down; the unsustainable regime of open-bidding to fix high licence fees, including a 15 per cent annual increase, made expansion of FM unviable in Phase One. Appropriate lessons have been drawn from the stunted growth of FM radio and regulatory changes will be made in the new policy under which 336 frequencies will now be offered in 90 cities. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which also regulates broadcasting, has, to its credit, stood by the revenue sharing model despite uncertainties in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry over questionable accounting practices followed by some operators on advertising earnings.

Given the potential of FM to revive radio and attract advertising (a national survey in 2005 has recorded a rise in urban radio audiences owing to FM) it is natural for the new policy to receive an enthusiastic welcome from private broadcasters. The Information and Broadcast Ministry has, however, missed the opportunity to take an even bigger leap by allowing private radio channels to offer news and current affairs programmes. The restriction on such programmes would appear incongruous in an era when private television is free to provide news, and information flow in general cannot be restricted due to growth of digital technologies such as the Internet. A rethink is also necessary on the question of granting multiple licences. The policy provision allowing for only one licence per city is a restriction that could compel channels to compete for listeners with similar populist fare rather than come up with creative programming genres. With FM radio sector on the threshold of a major change, the role of All India Radio becomes even more important. Its public

broadcasting strengths should fully exploit FM to bring to listeners a variety of high quality programmes, on the lines of the British Broadcasting Corporation, which has four acclaimed FM channels in most cities of Britain, or the National Public Radio in the United States.

Source: <http://www.southasianmedia.net>; attributed to *The Hindu*

Something in the Air

July 4, 2005. The appeal of the radio has survived in the age of the Internet and cable television. The government's decision to approve a revenue sharing model for the second phase of private FM radio broadcasting should come as a boost to a fledgling sector that has been struggling to take off. Though the sector was opened to private participation five years ago in May 2000, when 108 frequencies in 40 cities were offered, only 21 private FM stations are on air today, in 12 cities.

The open bidding process followed then had resulted in high entry costs, which put off many a willing player. The government has now acceded to the industry demand for doing away with licence fees, which were prohibitively high. Instead it has decided to opt for a 4 percent share of the revenue every year. Wisely, they have also gone in for a closed bidding process for the entry fee. Phase II envisages the setting up of 330 stations in 90 cities. Up to 20 per cent of Foreign direct investment has also been allowed.

The government has not yet lifted the restriction on the news and current affairs broadcasts. The ban will hopefully be reviewed in the near future. Promoting local, community-based and non-commercial radio stations might well be next on the ministry's agenda.

Offering quality programming will definitely be a challenge for newcomers. However, levelling of the playing field can be the first step to discover new talents and movements, so that a comfortable relationship with the radio is established.

Source: <http://www.southasianmedia.net>; attributed to *Editorial in the Tribune*

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Related websites:

<http://www.communityradionetwork.org>
<http://asiapacific.amarc.org>

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