Usage of Community Radio Stations for Disaster Management

Dr. Manisha Prakash

Abstract

Communication becomes vital in times of disasters as people desperately look for information related to their survival efforts. As most channels of communication like newspapers, TV, phone lines etc., are disrupted in severe disasters like floods and cyclones, the need for a sustainable media of communication which can function even in extreme situations is long felt. Radio is one such media. It has been advocated and proven time and again that radio has the requisites to be the best medium of communication in times of disaster. On top of that, community radio has the added advantage of geographic closeness and can play an important role during disasters in saving lives. However, studies show that community radios remain underutilized in India during disasters. This article aims to study the coverage of community radio in disaster prone areas of India and find out the gaps waiting to be filled in improving the communication needs of isolated communities during disasters. Examples from various countries and states of India have been taken to gain a better understanding of the usage of community radio during disasters which may be replicated in the case of Bihar, a state prone to various disasters, especially floods. The study discusses Community Radio as a tool for disaster management in terms of its success so far and its scope for the flood-prone areas of Bihar.

Keywords: *Community Radio, Disaster Management, Broadcasting, Flood, Bihar*

1. Introduction

Natural disaster is one of the major causes that prevent sustainable society development. History informs us about the role of disasters in wiping away civilizations which

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[1] **Dr. Manisha Prakash,** Coordinator, School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Aryabhatta Knowledge University, Patna

had grown with massive efforts, labour and enterprise of man. However, times have changed and humankind has the capacity and technique to save lives. For communities living in areas at the receiving end of nature and prone to natural disasters, enhancing their disaster management capacity is an important concern to protect their lives and livelihood. Disaster management is necessary for a community's sustainable development. It is imperative to facilitate the community to develop its ability for disaster management on its own.

In order to help a community to be self-sufficient in its efforts to counter natural disasters, the first step is communication necessary for cohesion of the people who form any community. Communication helps build understanding, solve issues and create solutions for problems. The entire process becomes easier and more acceptable to people when they come together with a common interest to take joint action on behalf of their community. Community radio can be one such technique.

After commercial and public broadcasting, community radio offers a third model of radio broadcasting. According to a study by the Association of Radio Operators for India (AROI), the radio industry witnessed a listenership of 51 million people which is close to the reach of television with 56 million and social media's reach of 57 million during the recent lockdown to curb the spread of Covid. The time spent on the audio medium increased by 23 percent to 2.36 hours everyday, second only to television during this time when the entire world was in isolation.

Zane Ibrahim, the father of South African community radio (Bush Radio), said "Community Radio is 90 percent community and 10 per cent radio." It is the community producing and broadcasting its own programmes while operating the station as well. The Community Radio is a short-range, not-for-profit radio station which caters to the people of a particular locality, in languages and formats appropriate for local context. These are low-power FM stations with a range of only 15 km.

International humanitarian organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO have recognized the importance of these radios to usher a free flow of unobstructed and genuine information, as the source is the community itself. There are around 5,000 community radio stations worldwide, of which over 70% are in the Asia Pacific region. About 500 CR stations in South Asian countries are located in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, which cater to the people of rural areas specifically excluded from the mainstream media (Srivastava, R, 2021).

The Information and Broadcasting Minister, Prakash Javadekar, said that the community radio stations are 'agents of change' in spreading awareness amongst rural communities. Being located in diverse regions, CR stations in India are united in reaching out to the marginalized and isolated communities left out of coverage by the mainstream media.

The first community radio station was established in Bolivia, South America in 1947. Seventy-five years later, the number of community radio stations has increased significantly around the globe. India, where the first community radio was set up in 2004, has 364 community radios operational at present as per Ministry of Information and Broadcasting figures.

India has over 70% of the people living in rural areas who do not have access to expensive techniques and resources and continue to grapple with a number of socio-economic issues. In such a scenario, community radio can not only serve people's information needs but also help improve their disaster preparedness.

Rural areas constantly face natural calamities like floods, lightning, drought, etc. It is a constant struggle for isolated rural communities to cope with various natural disasters. Community Radio has the power to come to the rescue of the affected population and assist them in connecting to useful resources and aid. Besides, it also helps in removing the communication barrier as the content is in the local dialect and the listener need not be literate to listen to radio programmes. In rural India, electricity is not a common privilege and the situation becomes dismal during disasters.Radio is the most accessible form of media in such times as it can even be listened to on inexpensive battery-run transmitters.

It is not possible for a country with 22 officially recognized languages and over 1,600 local dialects spoken in an area of 3.2 million kilometers and having 2000 ethnic groups to have its own mainstream media, the scope, however, remains for every community to have its own radio. Given its diversity in terms of geography and culture, it was difficult for government and NGOs to reach out to the rural and remotest areas. Therefore, community radio stations offer a choice in such a scenario.

Given the positive impact of these radio stations on the communities, there is a need to nurture them as they are the voice of the voiceless. However, community radio is still in its early years in India. In November 2006, the Government of India approved the

new Community Radio policy that opened up Community radio to Non Government Organisations (NGOs). The Community Radio movement in India can be traced back to 9th February, 1995 when the Supreme Court of India delivered a historic judgment that, "Airwaves constitute public property and must be utilized for advancing public good. Airwaves, being public property, it is the duty of the State to see that airwaves are so utilized as to advance the free speech right of the citizens which is served by ensuring plurality and diversity of views, opinions and ideas." The judgment followed nearly a decade long struggle by Community Radio aficionados for creation of a framework that would allow not for profit radio stations owned and run by members of the community which is otherwise isolated from the reach of modern day media, so as to enable marginalized communities to use the medium to create opportunities for social change, cohesion and inclusion as well as for creative and cultural expression (Pavarala, Malik, Belavadi, 2010).

2. Methodology

Methodologically, the experiences of community radio practitioners as well as case studies of some of the significant contributions across the country collected from various sources have been utilized to develop an understanding of the critical role of community radios during crises. Bihar has been taken as a case study considering the state's potential for expanding the community radio in this backward state.

3. Current Status in India vis-à-vis Bihar

Indian government plans to bring up the number of Community Radio Stations in India and the state of Bihar has also put up representation in this regard with the Central government. As of 3rd August, 2022 there are 364 operational Community Radio Stations in India out of which 190 are run by Non Governmental Organizations. These numbers speak of a huge scope for the Community Radio Movement in India as a vast area of the country still remains uncovered.

The significance and scope increases manifold for a state like Bihar which regularly faces disasters like floods and has a huge rural population and low literacy rate. As per the National Multidimensional Poverty Index Baseline Report 2021, 51.9 percent of the people in Bihar are poor. Bihar, the third most populated state in India, has only

11 community radios, some of which are newly established and not working to their optimum capacity.

Current status of Community Radio in India Facts & Figures as on July 13, 2022

Table 1: Source: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB)

	India	Bihar
Community Radio beneficiaries to whom financial assistance given in last three years and current year	69	2
CR applications, wherein licenses have been issued	366	11
Total number of Community Radio applications received in the Ministry as on 13-07-2022	2450	104
Community Radio applications, wherein licenses are not issued	1643	70

Community Radio Stations
as on 01.07.2022

■ India ■ Bihar
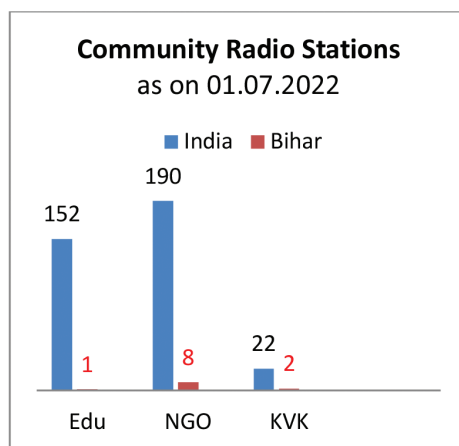
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Edu NGO KVK

Figure 1: Source: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting(MIB)

(Edu: Educational Institutions; NGO: Non Government Organisations; KVK: Krishi Vigyan Kendra)

4. Usage of community radio stations for disaster management

Community Radio has been proven to be an ideal communication platform and media platform in several isolated communities worldwide.The experiences of countries as diverse as Japan, Haiti and Nepal have demonstrated community radio's effectiveness

in disaster mitigation(Sen, 2013). Indonesia, Japan and Nepal - countries which are prone to natural disasters – have used community radio to their advantage. Community Radio has been seen as a successful tool for disaster management time and again, in several parts of the world, they are often the only functioning media technology at times of disaster.

Lintas Merapi FM station of Indonesia broadcasts volcanic status regarding the Mount Merapi which is located in the area. It broadcasts regular updates about the volcanic activity and disaster reduction information. Information is provided as to how to combat a disaster when faced with one, and preparedness in terms of stockpiling and storage of food, medicines and water is a part of the radio content.

Town walk programmes is a concept by Radio FMYY of Japan. It is an open event where disaster prevention specialists, program personalities and announcers walk around the town looking at it from a disaster prevention point of view and the audience can listen to their recommendations. Emergency drills are also conducted which help community members to take safe places.

Indonesia's Aceh Radio reconstruction network was launched post the 2004 Tsunami with the purpose of community-based rehabilitation (Jethwaney, 2016). This network comprises of 46 community radio stations from Aceh and North Sumatra region. It works in co-ordination of community radio with other forms of communication such as website, telephone and fax lines in order to maximize reach. The purpose of this network was to assist affected communities interact with each other. The network also worked as a monitoring system and accountability mechanism to ensure that the victims' complaints and grievances were attended. On-air trauma counselling, reporting the conditions and developments of aid and relief camps were also a part of the programming.

Post the 2004 Tsunami, Radio Netherlands Worldwide developed a portable radio station. In 2005, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) in Association with United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization(UNESCO) started work on development of a low-cost mobile broadcasting system that could be utilized in remote areas as well as for disaster response. It was to be economical, compact and most importantly portable. Radio-in-a-box systems have been employed in disaster areas where broadcasting infrastructure was destroyed. Post the 2009 earthquake,

Radio Netherlands Worldwide delivered Radio-in-abox system to Padang, Indonesia; to Haiti post the 2010 earthquake and to Chile after the 2010 earthquake. Radio-in-a-box systems have also been deployed to Africa, Bhutan, India, Jamaica, and Tonga. This communication channel has been quite effective and has proved vital in disaster mitigation efforts and activities (Ilieva, 2013).

First Response Radio Network was established since the Tsunami of 2004. It is a network which comprises of radio broadcasters, NGOs and Government partners. The members of this network work in disaster areas to provide information via radio as aid. The aim of this network is to establish a local team of their members and getting on air from the field of disaster by utilizing a portable radio station (essentially Radio in a box) within 72 hours of a disaster. The network has developed its own form of 'Suitcase Studio'. The team also carries a stock of radios to distribute to the affected community. The network has so far worked in India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Philippines.

Within 72 hours of the disaster first striking Uttarakhand, the team of First Response Radio India had begun emergency broadcasts. The floods had continued to increase since the calamity first struck; hence warnings were broadcasted about the increasing danger. Shortly after the initial broadcast, a team of 4 people was deployed in to the field of disaster. In the field they interviewed the affected community, government and NGOs and produced informative broadcasts of 30 minutes every day using the Suitcase Studio. The team also visited the most affected town of Uttarkashi. Radio in a box has proven resourceful at several occasions of disaster management but it isn't widely available yet in Indian radio stations.

In India, community radios have provided valuable services during the floods in Kerala, Chennai and Odisha during Cyclone Fani. After the devastating tsunami of December 2004 that ravaged coastal Tamil Nadu badly affecting fishing and farming communities in this belt, DHAN Foundation began an initiative to empower these communities and build their disaster management capacities. Information and Communications Technology systems were introduced in the villages through village information centres which were connected with internet. The foundation also launched a community radio station KalanjiamSamugaVanoli in October 2005 with resources from the United Nations Development Programme under its Tsunami Recovery Support Programme.

India's first radio station on disaster management was Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli which started to function in 2005. The prime focus of this community radio station was to function as a warning system regarding impending calamities, providing the local community guidance on coping with disasters and along with it the overall social change and empowerment of the community.

In June, 2013, the North Indian State of Uttarakhand faced multi day cloud bursts which triggered flash floods and landslides. This mass destructive calamity is said to be India's worst natural disaster since the 2004 tsunami. The death toll was high, people were homeless and with all modes of communication lost, there was a state of panic. Rudraprayag district, where the Mandakini River flows, was the worst hit. Bhanaj, which is in the Mandakini river valley region of Rudraprayag, is where People's Power Collective was working with the Community Radio station Mandakini ki Awaaz. The calamity led to the project being temporarily halted. Still, the People's Power Collective and Mandakini Ki Awaaz team decided to assist the community to their best capacity and also took the opportunity to make a case for community radio as a tool for disaster management. Their Strategy was to help with relief and awareness building in three key ways: i) Identify those in need from within the community; ii) Connect with the Media to tell the local Story; iii) Reach out to their combined networks and to aid agencies on the ground to ensure their relief reached the villages; iv) Audio Document to make a case with the government for radio as a critical tool for disaster management.

In 2004 when Tsunami struck India, Anna FM was the only functional Community Radio Station. The Radio Station played a big role in assisting the affected communities in these times of distress. Though by law the community radio station wasn't allowed to broadcast any news or current affairs, but considering the occasion called for such a decision, they decided to act immediately and lend their support to the victims. Student volunteers were sent out as reporters to the disaster struck areas. The community Radio station acted as a platform for the victims to voice their grievances. They broadcasted information about relief material and likely outbreaks of epidemics.

After observing the effectiveness of Anna FM in disaster management, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting wished to extend this platform for further benefit of the victims. Anna University was asked to set up similar Community Radio stations in Nicobar Islands, one of the worst hit by the Tsunami. They were to train the local

people to run the radio station. Seven radio transmitters were to be installed along with a satellite triggered disaster warning system. Anna University further worked on the project for development of Community Radio stations in Andaman and Nicobar islands but despite constant effort from the team of Anna FM the state did not take any action.

The role of community radio is tremendous in natural calamities. A public radio station with a reach of 15-20km becomes highly powerful with the integration of mobile telephony in real time (Manzar, 2013). Gram Vaani is a social development organization which builds open source technologies for rural community media. Their flagship product is a radio automation system called GRINS (Gramin Radio Inter-Networking System), designed for rural areas of developing countries(Citizen Media Network, 2013) They have been operating relief lines called Uttarakhand Rahat Samachar lines. These are not essentially helpline numbers, but community members can call these toll-free numbers to report news or access updated information.

The Uttarakhand floods brought to attention the gap Community Radio can fill in terms of Disaster Management. In the disaster in Uttarakhand, information was the biggest casualty (Manzar, 2013).

5. Case Study: Bihar

Bihar is a state with agriculture as its prime occupation and as per details from Census 2011, 88.71 per cent of the population of the state is based in rural areas. Bihar is the third most populous state of India with total population of 104,099,452. It is also India's most densely populated state, with 1,106 persons per square kilometre. At 11.3%, Bihar has the second-lowest urbanization rate in India.

The Bihar State Disaster Management Authority (BSDMA) website mentions 73.63% of the geographical area of North Bihar is considered to be prone to floods. Out of 38 districts, 28 districts get flooded (of which 15 districts are worst affected) causing huge loss of property, lives, farmlands and infrastructure. In the do's and don'ts mentioned on the BSDMA website, the first instruction is to "Tune to your local radio for warnings and advice." Other instructions suggest disconnecting electrical appliances and turning off electricity.

Year after year Bihar faces severe floods. In 2008, the Kosi belt received one of the worst floods in the history of Bihar. At that time people evacuated from their homes

after listening to the radio announcements of the chief minister Nitish Kumar. In August 2017, large areas of Bihar were flooded along with parts of North India, Nepal and Bangladesh. During this crisis, First Response Radio (FRR) India responded with dedicated radio programmes providing vital relief information, psychosocial support and opportunities for affected communities to communicate with authorities and each other. The listeners' responses confirmed the life-saving value of receiving timely information and creating opportunities for affected people to be heard. Between 12 to 20 August, 2017, heavy rains in Seemanchal and neighbouring Nepal, in the catchment areas of major North Indian rivers, resulted in a sudden increase in water discharge and flash floods in several rivers – Gandak, BurhiGandak, Bagmati, Kamla, Kosi and Mahananda. The floods even affected the districts surrounding Patna. FRR India had coordination with local AM/MW radio stations in these districts, an SW broadcaster covering all of North India and with local NGOs. FRR India was able to mobilize these partnerships rapidly and responded to the flooding with disaster radio broadcasts on AM and SW from 18 Aug to 23 Sept 2018. First The listeners' response confirmed the life-saving value of receiving timely information and creating opportunities for affected people to be heard.

Apex bodies like the NDMA have emphasized the need to develop a network of community based FM stations post the 2004 Tsunami and in 2008 during the Bihar floods. However, there was no follow up action(Sen, 2013).

There is a strong emphasis for allowing such stations in coastal districts, as they are vulnerable to natural calamities. In fact, Over 50 of the operational radio stations are in 26 coastal districts, however, Bihar's most flood affected districts have none.

6. Scope

In India, over 70% population lives in rural regions, out of which 7.3% rural households have electricity, which means that accessing information through other mediums such as TV becomes challenging. In such a scenario, community radio plays a potential role to offer discursive spaces for those left out in the digital divide.

Nepal, a small neighbouring country, has almost 300 plus CR stations. However, in a country like India where in every 10 kilometres, the mode of agriculture, culture and

dialect changes, there is need to encourage community-based organizations to own and run radio stations that speak in local languages catering to local needs.

The sixth report of the Administrative Reforms Commission titled, Local Governance, stressed on the need to strengthen the third tier of governance by raising awareness of local bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions through effective media campaigns. The Commission suggested that visual media such as television would not survive due to lack of rural electrification, while print media is still struggling to find its space in rural areas due to poor literacy rate. Underlining the importance of radio broadcasting in rural India, the Commission outlined that radio could be the only medium which is not always dependent on electricity, and could effectively convey the message to masses.

It is at times of crises, such as natural disasters and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that the general public and the media notice the value of community radio stations. While the mainstream media have their limitations in terms of their largely urban middle-class outlook, alternative media such as community radios have reached out to rural communities and to the deprived sections of urban India most effectively to ensure that they receive locally relevant information in local languages and dialects.

7. Application of Community Radio for Disaster Management

Community Radio can play a crucial role in disaster management via assisting the community in three stages - Pre Disaster, During the Disaster and Post Disaster.

In the Pre Disaster stage, community radio stations can provide, guidance regarding preparedness in case of a Disaster. It can foster the community's awareness on the current situation in other places hit by disaster; broadcast forecasts and warnings issued by the meteorological department, and provide updates on the status of relief and rehabilitation operations (Sreedher, 2013).

During a disaster most forms of communications are disrupted, barring radio signals. Community radio can help the community maintain links with the relief agencies and government control room. Generally, the Community Radio (CR) provides information on health, education and often is instrumental in spreading awareness. But the role of CR is measured during crisis, especially when the other forms of communication come to a standstill. (Venniyoor, 2013).

Post Disaster: This phase is a very crucial phase as during rehabilitation the community requires maximum support. Having a medium of communication in their own language or dialect can help in the moral building of the community. Post trauma counselling, updates on relief and aid can be a part of the content being broadcasted. The need is to build the capacity of operating personnel of CR and equip them to handle and disseminate disaster-related information in an optimal manner. In this manner, the local community itself can be enabled through infrastructure and training to make use of community radio approach (Sreedher, 2013).

In the aftermath of the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake of 1995, a large number of community radio emerged in Japan as emergency radio. Similarly, after the East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, emergency FM Radio increased significantly. Once the recovery period is over, however, their numbers dwindle.

There are some instances from Japan and around the world in which community radio has contributed significantly to the local development needs, and then in case of disaster, it became the prime vehicle of information sharing during emergency period as well as post disaster recovery. This community radio can also play important role in disaster risk reduction, especially in pre disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts through raising awareness in different groups of communities, and sharing information on risk reduction activities. Its role in pre-disaster period can be linked to during and post disaster activities. Thus, a pre-disaster involvement can enhance the role of emergency radio during and after the disaster. In Japan, after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and abroad after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the community radio has become a useful tool in disaster management and disaster victim support.

In their document 'Building Communities through Media Kalanjiam Community Radio Experience', Dhan Foundation sums it up: "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. People need information as much as they need water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources."

8. Suggestions

Setting-up support and other pro-active measures to promote organizations to adopt the medium of Community radio would go a long way in encouraging voices that are otherwise excluded.Community radio should not end up becoming another tool for extension and education and remain a medium to promote participation and the rights of the people (Malik, 2013).

Here are some suggestions:

At the policy level

I.   Disaster management should be included as a key function in the community radio agenda in India.

II.   Initiatives and innovations in the community radio should be integrated together.

III.   Genuine community groups should be identified in disaster prone areas, capacity building programmes should be held for them and they should be equipped with community radio infrastructure. These groups should be strengthened to ensure that community radio can be a long term and sustainable solution for disaster mitigation.

IV.   The licensing process should be reconsidered to reduce the time required to acquire a license. The current licensing process can be de-motivating and lead to declining interest of communities.

V.   The government needs to rethink the fee system considering that these community radios are to serve rural communities where funding is a concern.

VI.   For community radio sector to be vibrant and effective, dedicated spectrum allocation for community licenses needs to be ensured and the bureaucratic procedures for obtaining a frequency have to be eased out.

VII.   It should be ensured that the genuine groups of people interested in the welfare of the community are issued the license as there is a risk of this sector being appropriated by a few.

VIII. The community radio stations should be allowed to flourish in a manner that they stick to the philosophy behind such a media and do not compromise on

the principles that define it i.e. diversity, participation, empowerment of the marginalized and foregrounding the rights of the disadvantaged.

IX. The ban on news goes against the essence of independent media and must be withdrawn.

X. CR stations should be given formal recognition as media so that CR station reporters can also get local administrators and authorities to speak to them over the phone or include them in social media groups meant for distribution of official circulars.

XI. The government should extend emergency funding to community radio stations like many other countries recognizing them as a valuable public resource.

XII. The community radio policy in India permits CR stations to broadcast seven minutes of advertising for every one hour of air time. However, very few CR stations in the country are able to raise even five minutes of advertising time per hour of broadcast due to their geographical disadvantages, lack of marketing skills and the socio-economic status of audiences. The CR stations need to be provided regular training as capacity building exercise.

XIII. The Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) should issue government publicity advertisements on various welfare schemes regularly.

XIV. Internet connectivity should be given to the community radio stations at marginal cost. This will help them to serve the community in a better way.

At the community level

1. More and more awareness needs to be spread regarding the value of community radio and steps need to be taken to encourage communities to come further for development of community radios in their communities.

2. Universities and institutions with Mass Communication and Journalism departments may compulsorily be asked to apply for community radio as Radio Production is a paper taught in most courses. The community radio will help students to gain hands-on experience and will also create a talent pool of skilled professionals and trainers who can facilitate the development of other community radio stations.

3. It is important for disaster radio stations to accumulate experience and share it widely and to create a structure that when disasters occur, various groups and individuals will cooperate in their activities.

At technological level

1. During a natural calamity when regular facilities like telephone, television, internet, print media are unavailable, radio stations can be listened to on basic mobile phones or battery run transmitters.

2. For effective utilization of Community Radio in Disaster Management, it is essential that the Community Radio staff members have been well trained for the purpose. It is essential that appropriate training and capacity building is provided to equip and motivate the Community Radio team.

3. Another key aspect which if integrated with Community Radio can prove highly beneficial in enabling Community Radio as a tool for Disaster Management is Radio-in-a-Box. It is an economical broadcasting system that comprises of a laptop, mixer, CD/Cassette player, digital audio recorder, microphones and equipment required to set up a radio station in a remote location or disaster situation. It is basically an integrated mobile radio broadcasting station. Radio-in-a-Box can be set up in an hour and can be easily transported via airplanes or helicopters to reach remote locations and sites of disaster. These systems can function in a stationary situation and also can be mounted in a vehicle for mobile operations. Such a radio station can be instrumental in transmitting updated information from the field and also provide instant feed regarding relief measures, rehabilitation centres, medical assistance, food, clothing and shelter among others.

4. The reach of community radios can further be enhanced if they work in conjunction with phone/ mobile and internet system as is already being done in many places.

Conclusion

Community radio is the most economical tool to reach the masses and communicate quickly. Community radio is often defined as radio 'for the people, of the people and by the people'. In all the phases of disaster – disaster preparedness, early-warning, damage mitigation, recovery and rehabilitation, communication plays important roles. The

third tier of Radio broadcasting requires priority in its early days of development in the country to grow in to a network of community radio stations across the country. Although India has a growing number of community radios, a host of factors, including cumbersome license processing procedures, have handicapped its growth. States like Bihar face a number of challenges in acquiring this medium due to various factors.

This media platform acts as the eyes and ears during a disaster and serves as the prime vehicle for sharing information for preparing communities and for reducing risks. Being a persuasive, flexible, speedy and powerful local medium, it is sensitive towards understanding the needs of people. Community radio stations are trusted sources for disseminating information in the remotest regions of the country.

The development of Community Radio needs to be closely observed in order to ensure that it serves its true cause and does not turn in to just another media vehicle. Community Radio has the potential to bring in diverse ideas, opinions and stances within a public sphere controlled by the elite or by dominant ideologies.

Community Radio in India offers a huge scope but unless the licensing system is Speeded-up and the stations can begin functioning in their full form the potential cannot be entirely fulfilled. Licences need to be issued to Community Radio stations so that they can move to Broadcasting from Narrowcasting and be able to focus more on content rather that the distribution of the content.

Enabling and empowering community radios to function independently and facilitating their regular communication with their communities through public funding and periodic capacity-building measures are the most effective ways of ensuring that this third-sector media acquired its position in a pluralistic media landscape. The low-tech information dissemination tool, acts as the voice of rural and marginalized communities.

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