

Community Radio for the Upliftment of Farming and Rural Communities in India

Aditya*

Bidhan Chandra Krishi Visva Vidyalaya, West Bengal

Email: aditya@bckv.edu.in

Radio is still popular in rural India where it is seen as an effective medium to reach people with low literacy levels and scarce electricity supply. In the current social context where there is no dearth of information owing to electronic and digital media; radio has withstood the popular social media in providing information to the masses at little or no cost and in their local dialects. Another kind of radio which is “for the people, by the people and of the people” could be understood of as Community Radio. It is a major role player in information dissemination which is the closest and most easily accessible medium for the rural communities in their vicinity covering a diameter of 10-15 kilometers approximately. The operation of community radio depends on the purpose which it aims to serve. It could be deployed for the students of the university to discuss ideas and bring forward educational programmes, for the farming community to distribute and collaborate in educational and informative programmes for the farming community of the area, for the unemployed youth in educating them on entrepreneurial avenues in the area and related aspects. It can be operated by the local communities themselves and used for various issues of immediate concern related to development, health, nutrition, education, entrepreneurial avenues, farming, etc. Also, it helps to strengthen the folk culture of the community by providing a platform for the local artists to showcase their talent and skills helping in the development of positive social vibes resulting in the empowerment of the community.

* Mr. Aditya, Ph.D. Scholar from Bidhan Chandra Krishi Visva Vidyalaya, West Bengal, is pursuing his research on “Role of Traditional and Emerging Media in Agricultural Development in the State of Bihar, India.” His popular science story entitled “Community Radio for the Upliftment of Farming and the Rural Communities in India” has been selected for AWSAR Award.

The Government of India approved a policy to set-up Community Radio Stations (CRS) by well-established educational institutions in 2002 which was later amended in 2006 to include non-profit organisations in its ambit. During the past few years, CRS has seen sustainable growth in the country. The present study was conducted to access the impact of the programmes broadcasted by one such community radio at *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* in Patna district of Bihar which is operational since March 2011. This research was considered important to observe the contribution of traditional media like community radio in the current digital age where information is readily available at fingertips.

In the effective development of agricultural sector in India, information and knowledge could be understood as two major enablers that have helped the country to rise from a food importer to meet domestic requirements to a major food exporter with the increase in food production by over fourtimes since Independence. The dissemination of information through traditional media like the community radio has been studied and was implemented by *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK), Barh, Patna, Bihar on FM 91.2 Mhz daily for a period of three hours since 2011. The programmes broadcasted through the radio includes a wide range of topics of interest to the men, women, children, and youth. The programmes like farmer's arena, women's world, children soaps, health feature and folk songs are produced in Hindi and local dialect covering topics on farming, government schemes, entrepreneurship, health and hygiene, environment, etc. The tagline of the radio is "*Aapan radio, aapanawaz*" (My radio, my voice). The various forms and formats in which the programme is developed are radio talks, interviews, panel discussion, call-in programmes, live broadcast of meetings in the community, radio drama, folk songs, etc. The topics are decided by conducting a baseline survey prior to the development of content to understand the needs and preferences of the audience.

In the present study, seven blocks in which the community radio is easily accessible were purposively selected for the study which is covering 390 villages and approximately 39,800 farm families. A total of 90 active listeners were selected following simple random sampling. The farmers were later trained at KVK, Patna on three aspects of vermicompost production, honeybee rearing, and mushroom production based on their interests and preferences. The data was collected directly from the participating farmers through a semi-structured interview schedule and focused group discussion during April–November 2014. It was observed that the knowledge acquired by farmers through the training increased significantly which was later implemented by over 20 per cent of the trainees in adopting the agricultural practice. The items evaluated include the general concepts discussed during training lectures, which are the scientific methods used for honeybee rearing, mushroom cultivation and vermicompost production; farm plan and budget; record keeping; varietal selection; land preparation; marketing arrangement; processing aspects; harvesting and post-harvest technology. The feedback of the farmers after the training was an important component which enabled the content creators of the community radio to design the program in an effective way stressing some issues which were earlier deemed irrelevant.

The findings of the study provide a roadmap to the content creators for reaching the rural communities in an effective manner. Ignoring the traditional media might result in a condition

where there is a dearth of information for the specific community for which content is intended. The impact of the agricultural content broadcasted on the radio was strengthened with the training support at the KVK resulting in higher knowledge and adoption level among the participants. The study reveals that community radio is a major contributor to the development of the agricultural sector if it is well conceived by an extension agency with regular follow-up and service support. The study is of importance in the context of agricultural reforms in the country for getting the better impact of extension program through the implementation of community radio stations in every KVK of the country. India has a wide network of KVK in the country with as many as 695 KVKs operational in each district (as of September 2018). Such a network will help in the creation of a wide knowledge base for farmers from every district of the country resulting in effective problem solving and wide adoption of agricultural technologies developed by the research sector. It would further lead to the effective reach of agricultural developmental schemes to the intended farmers spread in the remote rural communities where it is difficult for the mainstream media to reach. The community ownership and management of the community radio provides a voice to the rural population helping them orient their own developmental goals for the benefit of the community.

