

Global Media Journal-Indian Edition; Volume 14 Issue 2; December 2022. ISSN:2249-5835

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: An Analysis of Community Radio in India

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Abstract

The power of community radio as an agent of development is still unutilised in many parts of the world, including India. Community radio stations can work as catalysts at the local level to bring positive changes. How community radio can help to create a favourable environment to achieve sustainable development goals is still unknown, and this study fills this gap. The analysis highlighted that community radio's top-down communication practises in India undermine the medium's participatory nature. This study analyses the role community radio can play toward sustainable development goals (SDGs). This study uses a qualitative approach to analyse the role community radio is playing in achieving SDGs in local areas and to what extent it is successful.

It was found that community radio has vast potential in a culturally diverse country like India. If used in a planned manner, it will help to motivate people to channel their efforts towards the SDGs. Community radio should avoid a top-down approach because its participatory nature makes it unique and people-centric compared to mainstream media. This study shows a way forward for community radio and suggests how they can incorporate certain practises that can help India contribute towards attaining the SDGs.

Keywords: Community radio, SDGs, India

Introduction

World Population Prospects (WPP) 2022 reports that India's population is expected to surpass China's population on July 1, 2023, with 1.428 billion people (Hindustan Times, 2022). This population estimate is indicative of the role India can play towards sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a nation; this can only be done through an appropriate medium of communication that connects with the people; connection not in terms of access but a social and emotional bond. Community radio is a medium that shares a strong bond with the community's members. Community members who participate in programmes of the community radio station share an emotional bond with it (Shinkhede, 2019). As per UNESCO, community radio is a medium for grass-roots communication that makes it possible for the vulnerable to participate in the process of decision-making, which can bring positive changes to their lives, although this could not happen due to hurdles (Pathak, 2019). The special bond that community radio shares with its listeners rests on the participatory nature of the medium. As a nation, India can improve its contribution to achieve the SDGs if it uses community radio to channel its efforts towards the goals.

India can contribute to achieve sustainable development goals only when citizens start taking initiatives at the local level. To do so, it is necessary to first raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals. In a study by Victor Chikaipa & Anthony Mavuto Gunde (2021), it was found that community radio plays an important role in preserving local languages and cultures. The use of local language in programmes make them more impactful. The community radio station is run by community members and operated by non-radio professionals (Pathak, 2019). A community can be a geographic community or a community of interest. In a true sense, community radio is the people's medium. Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (2002) say community radio is a non-profit service run by a community and depends on its resources for its operations. It was noted by Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada that the programmes of community radio stations reflect the special interests and needs of the

community. People associated with community radio build their skills and those of their community (Tucker, 2013). In this manner, they are benefiting themselves and society at large.

The first guidelines for community radio in India were issued in early 2003, and eligibility was restricted to educational institutions. In the second community radio Guidelines of 2006, the government allowed the entry of civil society and community-based organisations. Only NGOs, educational institutions, and agricultural science centres in India can run community radio stations (Backhaus, 2020).

This research study aims to understand how community radio in India contributes to achieve sustainable development goals. Sustainable development goals (SDGs) are a set of seventeen goals that are also known as global goals. The United Nations adopted these goals in 2015. The goals aim to bring peace and prosperity to people and the planet (United Nations, 2022). Udaan radio station, an online community radio station, was selected for this study. This community radio works for disabled people. This online radio station was started in 2014 by visually challenged people. It was started with a vision to provide the disabled community a platform and aim to empower them.

Literature review

Community radio is the voice of the voiceless, and its horizontal communication practises make it people-centric. However, the ideals with which this medium was started are captured by the same system in practise in the mainstream media. Odunlami (2016) conducted a study on community radio in Nigeria. It was found that the institution's management constituted a board that takes decisions related to campus radio's day-to-day activities. University communities have become passive receivers of the messages, severely threatening community radio.

Community radio can work for every marginalised and oppressed section of society. It can bring positive changes to society if used in a planned manner. Nirmala (2015) conducted

a study on the role of community radio in empowering women in India, and it was found that radio developed leadership qualities among women listeners. Community radio can be utilised to uplift every weaker section of society. Genilo et al. (2016) argued that community radio ownership is a deciding factor in the community's representation in management and how much a radio station gives voice to the voiceless. This is one of the reasons community radio ownerships in India is restricted to NGOs, educational institutions, and agricultural science centres.

Marginalised sections of society find solutions to their problems and empowerment in the programmes of community radio stations. When a community analyses its needs and thinks about the causes of the issues, it will find that it needs communication, leading them to set up a community radio station (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Malik (2015) noted that community radio stations must prioritise programmes encouraging community empowerment. Community radio empowers the community not only by giving them a voice but also by nurturing their talents.

When the community understands the motive behind different initiatives of the station, they will be willing to participate in them. In establishing development radio initiatives, the mobilisation process should be participatory so that beneficiaries can understand the reasons for the project (Manyozo, 2009).

Objectives of this study

- To study the role of community radio as a tool of development.
- To analyse the role of community radio at the local level to bring positive changes.
- To understand how community radio can help in achieving sustainable development goals.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses development media theory as a theoretical framework. Development media theory came into existence due to the limited application of four normative theories of the press in third-world countries. Denis McQuail gave this theory, which sees the media as a tool of national development. According to this theory, until a nation is well established, the media must be helpful. Mcquail (1987) gave some major principles of the development media theory (Odorume, 2015):

- In the interest of the nation's development, the state has the right to restrict media freedom.
- Journalists and other media professionals have freedom and responsibilities.
- The media should carry out development tasks following nationally established policies.

According to the development media theory, media is supposed to work for national development; community radio also contributes to national development by working at the local level. Development of a nation can only take place when the development initiatives start at the local level. Sustainable development goals focus on the overall development of nations and not only on economic development, this can also be done using community radio in a planned manner. Under the community radio setup, it is mandatory to work for community welfare. A radio station must air programmes that cater to the needs of local community development. In this research, the main focus is given to the programmes and their content by analysing the role community radio stations play in contributing to national development by fulfilling the needs of particular communities.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to understand how community radio is contributing in achieving sustainable development goals. Telephone interviews were used to collect data. A total of ten respondents were selected for this study using convenience sampling. Five of these ten respondents were chosen from Udaan community radio station's team and five from their listeners. General secretary and Radio Jockey (RJ), event manager and trustee, advisor and RJ, programme manager and RJ, and station director and RJ were interviewed from the community radio station. Listeners were identified and contacted with the help of the radio station's team as the listeners of this online community radio are not limited to a geographical location and are not easily identifiable. This study included listeners in order to determine how much change community radio stations bring to the ground.

All the respondents were informed about the research study and voluntarily participated in the interview. The data was collected using a structured interview. Interviews were taken with team members and listeners with two sets of questions, both of which contained open-ended questions. Respondents were given the freedom to answer in English or Hindi. Questions were also briefed according to their choice of language. Interviews of all the respondents were recorded and transcribed manually for data analysis. A total of four male and six female respondents participated in this study; team members included three male and two female respondents, and listeners included one male and four female respondents. The identity of the team members and listeners is kept secret; therefore, team members are referred in this paper by their designation and listeners as A, B, C, D, and E. The data was also driven by the analysis of the weekly programme list given on the website of the radio station.

Data Analysis

Community radio station and SDGs

The station runs the following programmes: G K Capsule, Vocabulary dose, RPD act, and World this week in the education and learning category. In G K Capsule programme station gives general knowledge and current affairs weekly updates through 15 questions. Vocabulary dose is a weekly programme in which the listeners are introduced with sixteen trendy and competitive English words. Each episode of the RPD Act programme goes over each chapter of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. There are trending weekly news stories about the world in world this week programme. Listeners shared their experience with the radio station.

Listener A said, "Radio Udaan's programmes are empowering weaker sections."

Listener B said, "Here we get to know that as a blind how we can operate a computer."

Listener D said, "They run awareness programs, talent shows, and skill development programs."

SDG 4 is about quality education and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (GSDR, 2015). As shared by the listeners of the radio station, educational and learning programmes are contributing to SDG 4. The programmes offer an inclusive learning platform without any age, gender, disability, or religious barriers. As this is an online community radio station, there is also no geographical barrier. All the programmes are repeated, which increases their reach and impact.

In the motivational category, the station is running 'Kuch bheege panne from yaado ki kitab', in personality skills category 'Jeena isi ka Naam hai' and in technology category Techcity. In 'Kuch bheege panne from yaado ki kitab' and 'Jeena isi ka Naam hai' programme

discussion on celebrity, social issues takes place with music. Techcity programme gives its listeners information related to technology and new applications. Listeners shared their experience of motivational and technology related programmes.

Listener A said, "I have come out of depression (after losing sight) just because of the radio Udaan team."

Listener C said, "When we listen to different experienced personalities, we can correlate with them, and this is possible because of radio Udaan. This is shaping my personality in a greater manner."

It is clear from the statements of listeners that the station is helping them to build a strong personality, attitude, and skills that will help them get employment. In this way, the station contributes towards SDG 8 of decent work and economic growth. This directly increases employability and contributes to the abolition of hunger and poverty in society.

Analysis of programmes of the radio station

This section analyses the programmes based on the weekly schedule given on the website of the radio station. The analysis of the programmes is done on the basis of the five major categories: entertainment, education, personal problems, news, and miscellaneous.

Table 1: Udaan Radio Program Categories

Programme category	No. of shows	Percentage
Entertainment	8	29.62
Education	6	22.22
Personal Problems	2	7.4
News	2	7.4
Miscellaneous	9	33.33

(The miscellaneous category includes one programme in each of the following categories: travel, trending, stories, motivational, technology, gazal, personality skills, reality show, disability issues)

The table shows that the radio station is giving more importance to programmes related to the entertainment category, with 29.62%. The percentage of educational programmes is 22.22%, which is comparatively less than entertainment programmes. The programmes of the radio station should be creative and innovative so that they can attract more listeners to serious programmes rather than more entertainment, which has little benefit for them (Kamala, 2021). The percentage of personal problem programmes is 7.4%, and the percentage of news programmes is also 7.4%. The radio station runs programmes on travel, trending, stories, motivation, technology, gazal, personality skills, reality shows, and disability issues. It gives listeners diversification, and the percentage is 9%, which means one programme in each category once a week.

Empowerment of weaker sections of society

Community radio stations work on weaker sections of society that are overlooked by the mainstream media, and the disabled community is a major segment of the weaker sections. Community radio stations have expanded the nationwide broadcast landscape by promoting the expression of new perspectives and neglected voices that are both information-based and cultural (Malik, 2015).

Listener A shared his experience, saying, "They have empowered the person to stand on their own with proper guidance."

Listener B, who earlier worked with the station as RJ, said, "Since I connected with radio Udaan, my confidence has improved as a disabled person. I learnt editing at the station. I have a YouTube channel, so after learning editing from the radio station, now after editing my audio and video, I upload it on YouTube."

Listener D said, "Not everyone can give their performance on TV, but through Udaan Idol (a singing competition), we can show our talent and be motivated."

The community radio station is not only offering its listeners a platform but also helping them with personality development, as a support system and skill development, which will help them get employment. It indicates how community radio works as a development tool and fulfils the study's first objective.

Inclusion of the disabled in the mainstream

Udaan radio station is being run by disabled people, mostly blind. Although this station is being run online which makes its reach much wider but lack of visuals are limiting the audience, and mostly blind or disabled are its listeners. A listener gave a very insightful remark about the inclusion of the disabled community, which is worth mentioning here, "Normal

people (non-disabled) don't listen to radio Udaan, or they might even not know about it, so they don't know what inclusion is; therefore, they cannot play their role to include us (disabled), although it is much needed. I think they (radio Udaan) can add some visual content so that other people can also attract and when the awareness will increase from both the sides (disabled and non-disabled) only then we can have an inclusive society."

It is clear from the statement of the listener that the radio station is working for the inclusion of the disabled community, but this station is not well known among the non-disabled, therefore inclusion is not taking place at a larger level.

Community radio as a medium of education

Every community radio station's responsibility is to educate the community they serve. Education is the first step toward every developmental activity, and this is also true with sustainable development goals. Community radio can inform the community through different programmes in entertaining forms. Members of the radio station's team briefed on how they are educating their listeners:

Trustee and event manager of the radio station said, "We work on both formal and informal education."

Advisor and RJ at the radio station said, "We do different kinds of programmes like sports, entertainment, and education."

Programme manager and RJ shared, "We educate listeners through different program, sometimes we also do physical events where we receive good response."

Imparting education is very important for empowering weaker sections of society, and the disabled community is one such segment. Listeners also shared their thoughts on how the station has helped them learn:

Listener D explained, "By listening to the programmes we get a lot of knowledge. In their news programmes we get to know what is going on in society. In community colour programme they cover personality development, skill development, cooking, and they also hold talent show."

Listener E said, "I listen to so many mainstream things and also listen to radio Udaan, so I get to know what is going around and where there are gaps in the disabled and mainstream communities."

It is clear from the team members and listeners of the radio station that community radio is not only educating its listeners but also providing them with the necessary skills to help them get employment. This theme helps to understand the role of community radio as a tool of development, which is the first objective of this study.

Change in the lives of the listeners

Community radio deals with local issues in the local language and aims to develop the community (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). The way community radio addresses local issues connects the station with its community, and it can be said that community radio is like an extended family. It has the potential to address the individual needs of its community members. Community members get attached to the radio station and share a personal bond with it.

Listener A shared his personal experience, "I lost my sight at 54, and I was in a depression at that time because I had no work to do. It was challenging for me. When I got the number of the radio station, I contacted them. I have come out of depression just because of the radio station's team."

Listener C also shared her experience, "Debates on different issues impacted me, and I started applying those things in my life. When we listen to different experienced personalities,

then we can correlate with them, which is made possible because of radio Udaan. This is shaping my character more remarkably."

The community radio station is bringing positive changes to the listeners' lives by helping them overcome depression, working as a support system, and shaping their personalities. It fulfils the study's second objective, which aims to analyse the role of community radio at the local level to bring positive changes. By changing the lives of individuals in a country, a radio station is supporting the national development agenda. From this, it is evident that the station is following the development media theory in their day-to-day functioning.

Awareness and contribution to sustainable development goals

The country's people can only contribute to achieving sustainable development goals when they have knowledge about the goals. The listeners interviewed were not aware of these goals. Therefore, the author briefed them about the SDGs to know whether this community radio station is contributing in achieving the goals or not.

Listener B mentioned, "Yes, they are doing this through their programs."

Listener C said, "Yes, to some extent. By creating awareness and development of the disabled community."

General secretary of the radio station explained how the station is contributing to the SDGs, "Disability is a part of sustainable development goals. It is emphasised that we cannot exclude the disabled, so we are playing a role. These things can only be taught through awareness and education. We can contribute by telling people about these goals and frequently discussing them."

Station director and RJ also shared how the station is working for the SDGs, "We work on this; we run different campaigns. We try to tell people that if you are educated, you can fight."

The community radio station is working to uplift the disabled community, which is an integral part of the SDGs. The station is also educating its listeners about different social issues. Even though, there is a lack of awareness about the SDGs among radio station listeners. This theme fulfils the third objective of the study, which aims to understand how community radio can help achieve sustainable development goals.

Social, economic, and political inclusion of the marginalised section

Community radio stations aim to work for the marginalised and weaker sections of society. The community radio station selected for this study works for the disabled community. According to the World Health Organization's 2011 global report on disability, around 15% people worldwide live with a disability. As per the 2011 census, the population of the disabled in India is 2.68 crore, which is 2.21 per cent of the country 's total population. Inclusion of disabled people in society can be done and is being done by raising awareness.

General secretary of the station explained how the station is working for the inclusion of the disabled, "We teach them how to be lawyers and software engineers; we invite people who are already in the field to teach the younger generation. We are empowering them and providing them with skill development so they can work in their respective fields."

Program manager and RJ also briefed on inclusion of disabled, "Our purpose is their overall development. We do programmes on debate, group discussion and visually impaired people get a platform that from their homes they could speak on the radio."

It is clear from the statement of the radio station's team member that their programmes are contributing to the overall development of the disabled community, which

will ultimately benefit the nation's development initiatives. This approach clearly indicates that the workings of the station are based on development media theory.

Listener A explained how this station is working for the inclusion of people with disabilities, "Radio Udaan's programmes are empowering weaker sections. For economic inclusion, they do shows to give guidance."

Listener E also shared her experience on this, saying, "This platform is very good for creating awareness, their events focus on social inclusion."

The community radio station is running various programmes for the social, economic, and political inclusion of the disabled community; this indicates that the station is contributing to SDG 10, which talks about reducing inequalities. This matches with the third objective of the study to understand how community radio can help to achieve SDGs.

Work for gender equality

Gender inequality is still a big issue all around the world. Community radio stations can make a difference by creating awareness of this issue. General secretary of the station stated how they are dealing with this, "We have regular discussions and invite speakers who talk about this and highlight the challenges, so we are working on this. Our director, programme manager, content writer, and many RJs are female."

Trustee and event manager also briefed how the station is working for gender equality, "By contacting institutions and through programs, personal counselling we work for this."

Through discussions, the station is creating awareness of gender equality, and its workforce also reflects gender equality. In this way, the station contributes to SDG 5, which discusses gender equality. This highlights how community radio is helping achieve the SDGs.

Issues and challenges

The radio station's team and listeners highlighted in the interviews some issues and challenges they are facing. The first two points discussed below are about community radio stations, and the third is about the disabled community's representation and information needs.

Funding is a challenge for community radio

Community radio has vast potential, but funding limits this medium's power. Due to a lack of funding, community radio stations have to compromise on the quality of their programmes, and the listeners feel a big difference between the programmes of profit-oriented FM radio stations and that of community radio stations. When this question was asked of the selected five members of the radio station team, all replied that funding is the biggest issue.

Programme manager and RJ of the radio station said, "The biggest issue in moving ahead is to collect funds because this is a social work and collecting funds is not an easy task."

General secretary of the radio station also discussed the financial problem, saying, "Funding is the biggest issue. Our issue is that we cannot always get people to work voluntarily. We need funding."

As shared by the team members and the listeners Udaan community radio is working towards the SDGs, but a lack of proper funding is limiting the potential of this station. If the station gets proper financial support, it can work more efficiently towards the SDGs.

Lack of participation from the listeners

Community radio is known for its participation. Earlier studies (Dele Odunlami, 2016) have raised concern about the vertical communication practises of community radio. In earlier

studies, community radio stations were blamed for their one-way communication practises. Listener E said, "I don't give feedback. I know a few people working at the station, so if I have to say something, I will say it to them personally."

General secretary of the radio station raised concern about the lack of participation of the listeners, "Precisely and honestly, listeners' roles are not very good. My complaint with listeners is that they don't give us the feedback we expect given the way we see our listenership. I feel that in the listener role, we need improvement."

The only aim of a community radio station is to empower the community by involving community members in the functioning of the radio station (Belavadi & Jena, 2022). Community radio demands the active participation of the listeners, and for this, the listeners will have to come forward.

Mainstream media and the disabled community

The team members of the Udaan radio station and their listeners highlighted many times in the interview that the disabled community is not getting enough representation in the mainstream media. It was one of the reasons for starting this online community radio station. The founders of this station wanted to give the disabled community a platform of their own. General secretary of the radio station, who is also a founder, explained:

"There was no representation of us (disabled community) in the media, and we had no platform to discuss our issues. There was no coverage of issues concerning people with disabilities in the media. And we never saw a representative from the disabled community taking part in social debates and discussions on TV, particularly on electronic media."

Every marginalised section of society needs special attention to improve its condition. Still, when the mainstream media does not contribute adequately in this direction, the role of community media begins. This radio station started to uplift the disabled community in 2014.

Listeners to this community radio station also believe that the mainstream media does not cover disability-related news.

Listener C said, "General media channels hardly ever show anything with regard to persons with disabilities; they will only show when something amazing happens."

Society and concerned individuals need to take timely action to deal with the issues of funding and participation so that community radio can function more efficiently and bring more positive societal changes. The mainstream media and their owners must pay attention to the issue of representation of the weaker section of society. However, community media is there to work for these sections of society; mainstream media has a significant impact, and they should utilise it for the betterment of all.

Conclusion

Sustainable development goals are very comprehensive, and practically, it is not possible for one community radio station to achieve and work towards all 17 goals. Every community radio station serves a particular community; it can be a geographical community or a community of interest. However, every community radio station can play a role in achieving sustainable development goals. Radio Udaan (community radio) is working for the social, economic, and political development of the disabled community, in particular. Community radio empowers the community through various programmes, such as educational, news, personality development, or reality shows. Community radio's functions are based on development media theory; as proposed in this study, they also aim to contribute to national development. In India, restrictions are imposed on community radio stations, and only NGOs, educational institutions, and agricultural science centres can run such stations. These restrictions are justified in the development media theory for the national development.

This research study is not intended to generalise but to highlight community radio stations' role in attaining sustainable development goals. This study found that the selected

radio station contributes to attain SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, and 10, which are about no poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, decent work, economic growth, and reduced inequality.

Findings of the study state that community radio stations are bringing positive changes in the lives of the listeners by addressing their problems. The study concludes that community radio is currently contributing toward achieving sustainable development goals, but funding is a major challenge, as the findings state, which is limiting its potential. It has also been found that there is a lack of participation by the listeners in quizzes, competitions, and live programmes. Still, when it comes to programme generation, their role is limited to providing suggestions. Listeners are not actively creating the content, which has made the community radio station another medium of a top-down approach. This practise raises the question on the relevance of community radio stations.

Recommendations

Community radios are working to empower the weaker sections as per their setup and resources, but they require financial assistance and extensive training. The government is expected to support the community radio stations for overall development at the grass-roots level. With this, India can improve its contribution towards achieving sustainable development goals. According to a news report (Economic Times, 2022), India is now ranked at 120 on 17 SDGs, down three spots from 117 last year, with India being behind all South Asian nations except Pakistan, which is at 129. This study suggests that if India uses community radio effectively, this can improve India's performance on the SDGs.

Community radio is nothing without the active participation and support of the community. Vuuren (2000) argues that broad community involvement can result in a thriving community radio station. Therefore, the study also recommends that it is the responsibility of all the community members to play their role in the day-to-day activities of the station as per

their capacity. Community radio stations need to understand that only catering to local needs is not enough today. The study proposes that community radio stations should also come forward on national issues because any society can only bring change at the national level when it starts at the local level. The community that runs the radio station should also use it as a tool to transfer their art forms through various programmes. Udaan radio station is focusing more on entertainment than education; team members of the radio station should understand the role of community radio actively. The practise of allotting more duration for entertainment shows is a matter of concern for community radio itself and the community it serves. The radio station is required to add more programmes related to education and news. The community radio station can develop rigorous and appropriate codes of conduct in the spirit of self-regulation, as suggested by Kanchan Malik (2015). Regulating their functioning and conduct through self-observation, community radio stations will improve their work and increase their credibility in the community.

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