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Dr. Shahid Rasool, Director of CEMCA, addressing participants on 'Sustainability of Community Radio Stations at EFL university, Shillong

## In need of sustainability for CR stations

**Stijo Sebastian**

"The community should come forward to help CR stations sustain itself," Dr. Shahid Rasool, Director of CEMCA, said, as he spoke to participants on the topic "Sustainability of CR stations." In the session, Dr. Rasool spoke of the ways in which Community Radio stations sustain themselves. Sustainability of a CR station primarily meant "generation of money", he noted. Dr. Rasool began with a brief description about his institution, CEMCA, and its function to promote use of media technologies for education and training in order to attain sustainable development. He also elaborated on the efforts of CEMCA to the field of community radio in member states.

Dr. Rasool explained that the institution's strategy to achieve more CR stations included objectives such as increasing reach and listenership, improvement of employability, productivity, entrepreneurship, health and empowerment. "Our aim is to turn 60 CR stations into sustainable CRSs by 2021," he added. Dr. Rasool asserted that the sustainability of CR stations relied mainly on the quality and relevance of content, primarily which cater to the local needs. Another factor of sustainability was the financial support and base. This could be in the form of advertisements, government support, subsidies, DAVP projects, etc.

He referred to a model for CR stations as 'CMT model', after 'Church, Mosque, and Temple', highlighting "the crucial role of religious institutions" in catering to the needs of the people in the specific community. Dr. Rasool also stressed on the role of the youth in a CRSs sustainability. Using the awareness of the youth about technology ca help to maintaining community radio stations. The activities of CRSs to serve the youth, like career counselling, job melas, vocational trainer's meet and youth mobilization camps, are remarkable efforts by stations to make their mark and sustain themselves. Dr. Rasool ended the session by asserting, "Community stations should go beyond regular broadcasting. It should become a vibrant community centre."

## Trivia

» The first Community Radio Station established in Northeast- Gyan Taranga launched on 20th November 2010 by the KKSHO University

» The first CRS in Northeast established by an NGO- Radio Brahmaputra launched by Centre for Northeast Studies (C-NES)

» The second CRS in Northeast- Radio Luit by Gauhati University launched on 1st March 2011

# Make their voices heard

**Prejomon Sunny**

In a panel discussion titled "Community Engagement in CRS", experts highlighted on the various ways in which communities are being involved in the running, content creation, participation and operation of Community Radio Stations. In order to make the operation and content of community radio more inclusive, it is pertinent to ensure that community engagement be given paramount importance, the panel noted. Spearheaded by Dr. Ankuran Dutta, panel experts included Ms. Geetali Kakati, Ms. Debanjana Devarman, Dr. Alankar Kaushik and Ms. Santidora Nongpluh. The discussion kicked off with Ms. Geetali sharing how her community radio station, Gyan Taranga, tried to involve the different communities in their broadcast radius in their programs and content. She also mentioned that Gyan Taranga tried to include maximum participation ever since its inception. She cited the different programs in her station, based on various topics of local relevance, such as agriculture and street singers. These programs were broadcast with the participa

study to emphasize on "the plurality and diversity of voices in Community Radio." He began by noting that Radio Brahmaputra was the first grassroot CR station in the Northeast. Participatory communication is necessary to identify and instigate social change, he remarked. Radio Brahmaputra broadcasts content in five languages spoken in the region- Assamese, Bodo, Chadri, Mishing and Bhojpuri, taking into account the multi-linguistic and multi-dialectic nature of the region in which the station operates. "These dialects are seldom represented in mainstream media," he said. Dr. Alankar also stressed on the importance of development communicators to facilitate a two-way interaction between grassroot receiver and information source. This was followed by Ms. Santidora sharing her views on the topic. She recalled the attempt to recognize the communities that were left out in the pockets of Shillong, albeit being an urban centre. Plenty of issues plague the community here. Ms. Santidora highlighted the role of CHIME. Under the projects by CHIME, issues



tion and knowledge from the stakeholders, such as farmers and street singers. Ms. Debanjana shared that her CR station, *Friends FM*, run by David Super Star Bodal, based in Agartala had ventured into the community before generating content. By conversing with the members of the community, she came to know about their lifestyle, their psychological and emotional situations, problems, which, in turn, helped her to include the issues of the communities in their content. Dr. Alankar Kaushik used *Radio Brahmaputra*, based in Dibrugarh, as case

affecting the community were identified and the members themselves were given the opportunity to speak about them. She concluded with an advice to "realize the power of the community" while starting a community radio station. During the session, Dr. Ankuran Dutta remarked that communities should not only be given involvement in content and programs but also in the management of the station. "The issues broadcasted in community radio have to be decided by the community themselves." Only then will CR stations serve its' true purpose, he added.

*Dr. R. Sreedhar is a popular name in the community radio scenario, as a pioneer in the field. His association with the medium spans more than 30 years, beginning with his collaboration at the All India Radio. He is the mastermind behind the first Community Radio Station in India,* Anna FM, *launched 15 years ago, in 2004. He has also volunteered in setting up CR stations in institutions across the country. Dr R. Sreedhar was here to preside over the three-day community radio awareness workshop. In an insightful and enlightening interview, he shares the story of his tryst with community radio and exhorts the students to pursue community radio.*



# A Talk with the Pioneer

## Anjaly Manuel

*Excerpts from the interview-*

**Q. What was your inspiration behind setting up first CR station in India?**

A. I finished my PhD in Chemistry, which has nothing to do with Journalism and Mass Communication. But I could not find any job in that field. Then I started to write in newspapers and covered science events like technical exhibitions, Pokhran nuclear experiment, satellite launches for the radio. Special science reporting cell was introduced at that time and I was the first science reporter of AIR. What I did was the benchmark of science programs. Radio assisted farmers during the period of green revolution. This led to the thought that science is very visual in nature. I thought of how to do science programs effectively. The best way was to take scientists to the people and we had terrific results. In, 1980s radio schools were started, which was called All India Radio School of Continuous Education. I came back to All India Radio as director and then switched over to IGNOU. In 1999, radio was given to commercial sector and one frequency was given to social sector. Gyan Vani came out as an outcome of commitment to society. In Gyan Vani, 60 per cent was given for education and 40 per cent for community. I left IGNOU to join Anna University. Eventually, I had the privilege to set up the first community radio station in India at Anna University, Chennai. When Tsunami struck the shores of Tamil Nadu in 2004, students used CR as an effective tool in covering the disaster. This gained popularity for CR which had earlier faced

negligence from the Government.

**Q. How do you think an ideal community radio station should operate?**

A. Community radio stations are for the community, by the community and of the community. We should understand the need of the community. For example, I prefer broadcasting the issue of dengue fever in the community than the IPL match. In most community radio stations, broadcasting is for the community by keeping the idea that "I know everything, I will tell you, and you are supposed to listen." Let them ask questions. There is no RJ in community radio. It does not give any heroic appearance to anyone. People are the core source of content in CR. Doors of CR are open to common people.

**Q. There are only 7 community radio stations in North East. What are the reasons behind this? Are there any peculiar reasons that hold North East backwards in the number of CR stations?**

A. The problem is that radio in India works on All India radio models and commercial radio models. There is no particular model for community radio. The program schedule pattern starts from devotional programs followed by agricultural programs which is being taken from All India

Radio models. Another problem is that some NGOs started community radio as an extension of their activities. We need to have independent models for each CR stations. We can cite example from Wayand in Kerala, where the state government pays 20 rupees per second whereas the central gives only 4 rupees per second. This is because Kerala government has understood the importance of community radio. State government support is vital for the running of community radio stations. Unfortunately, most of the community radio stations in North East do not get the support of state governments. However, central government's 90 percent subsidy is provided. But no one takes the initiative of setting up CR stations due to lack of information, training, lack of exposure and following old school models. North East has the potential to have at least 200 CR stations.

**Q. How do you think we can educate and train students and youth in the field of CR?**

A. We have already created a Community Radio Empowerment Centre. They were closed later. If the community radio empowerment Centre in Delhi gets developed, the interested can join there, practice and get trained. Television, print etc. have become digital. Therefore, radio might become digital in 5 or 10 years. So, community radio has to become digital.

# Quality content a must for CR stations

## Experts deliberate ways to generate quality content

**Jelwin Varghese**

"Content generation – building capacity of community" was the topic on the table for the panel discussion on day two of the 'community radio awareness' workshop. The panel which was chaired by Dr. Shahid Rasool and included Ms. Debanjana Devbarman, presenter at David Super Star Bodal, Agartala, Mr. Eroz Laishram who works with the Diamond CR in Manipur.

The discussion began with Mr. Eroz, who talked about the primary way of generating content, by keeping the community radio station open to all members of the community. Engaging with the community would provide potential stories and themes for programs. More interaction with different groups of people such as farmers, students and the like would help in designing specific programs for these groups of the community. Not trying much to create content

and keeping things simple, involving with the community could generate quality content. Community radio doesn't need to follow the program style of other commercial radios. Methods like providing free classes for students and programs related to health and the like could be potential content.

Ms. Debanjee focused on making maximum society related themes. Programs on awareness about ration card usage, amenities related to it were talked about as potential areas for content. Health issues and current affairs were looked on as probable programs that can be implemented in every community. Also traffic related themes such as traffic updates, traffic rules and news on accident prone areas and safety measures can be used as informative programs. Programs on exam stress and student related programs were

also found as good areas to generate content. Tackling superstitions and such myths of the society and tips related to health could be potential areas for great content.

Finally the discussion concluded with a common consensus that involving and opening up and going into different groups of the community and areas that could generate quality content.

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