

Empowering the Rural Farming Community: a Case of Community Radio in Jharkhand

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Abstract

The present paper is an outcome of a detailed study based on Chala Ho Gaon Mein Community Radio initiative of Palamu district of Jharkhand. The study was conducted to understand the impact of the initiative upon the rural farming community of the specified region. The objective of the paper is to highlight the role of the government in facilitating the community radio for the empowerment of the rural community of Palamu district of Jharkhand. With the new legislation of the Government of India on Community Radio, Chala Ho Gaon Mein Initiative became a vibrant means of information dissemination, a significant platform for people's participation and a forum for expressing their day to day grievances and resolving it locally. 'Chala Ho Gaon Mein' is a unique experiment in using media technologies, especially radio, for development and empowerment of marginalised, rural communities.

Introduction

Radio is an affordable medium for reception and reaching communities at the very end of the development road-people who live in areas with no phone and no electricity. Radio reaches people who can neither read nor write. The 'Community Radio', has a wider implication in far reaching areas where other means of IT penetration is impossible. Community Radio (CR) has its own significance as it is operated in the community, meant for the community, about the community and operated by the community. Community Radio is characterised by access, public participation in production of knowledge and decision making, management of listeners, and its operations rely mainly on the community's own resources. The involvement of community members distinguishes it from the dominant state or commercial stations. Community radio works as a cultural broadcast mechanism that adapts and reflects the interest and need of the community. It serves and offers people, in the marginalised sector, an opportunity to express themselves socially, politically and culturally and is regarded as the best means to foster democracy, freedom of expression, and active participation in local life, etc. (Pavarala and Malik,

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2007). According to Tabing, 'the community can be territorial or geographical - a township, village, district or an island and can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory. Thus the Community Radio may be owned and managed by one group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory. Thus community radio may be owned and managed by one group or by combined groups. It could also be controlled and run by people such as women, children, farmers, fisher folk, ethnic groups or senior citizens.

In order to understand the impact of Community Radio, *Chala Ho Gaon Mein*, the popular community radio programme of Jharkhand state is studied and discussed here. The paper also deals with the scope and limitations of the programme while providing a number of suggestions for its development.

Chala Ho Gaon Mein or "come, let's go to the village" is a community radio programme broadcast over the local FM station in the evening in local language dealing with all local issues of Jharkhand. The programme is broadcast on Sundays and Wednesdays on FM band from Daltonganj at 7.15 pm to 7.45 pm in different local languages (Ho, Mundari, Santhali, Maghi and Nagpuri, etc., mostly spoken by the tribals of Jharkhand and neighbouring states) with the overall support from National Foundation for India (NFI) and covering the neighbouring states like Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. NFI is a national level Non Governmental Organisation that supports development activities (issues related to poverty, illiteracy, and health, etc). NFI has a programme area for development communication, which recognises the significance of media in facilitating grass roots level work for social change and community empowerment. It promotes initiatives with direct participation of the communities in the use of media, with the belief that access to media could empower marginalised groups, following the Supreme Court of India's judgment emphasising people's right to the airwaves in 1995. Through the programme, an initiative has been taken in a Public Private Partnership mode to bring the poor closer to the corridors of power while addressing their day today difficulties including poverty, poor governance and lack of access to information and basic facilities. Along with NFI, Alternative for India Development (AID), a local NGO is involved in implementation of the programme at the grassroots level in Palamu district.

The programme covers diversified issues like child marriage, alcoholism, dowry deaths and education for the girl child which are predominant in Palamu district. Based on the local requirements, the programme has also addressed local governance issues relating to daily administration, corruption, development works, etc. and

mobilized the local population for their basic entitlements including land, food, water, etc. Along with these, the programme provides three different services to the rural population including agriculture, livestock, and market information.

For the farming community, the programme provides agricultural information including expert advice, time and place of availability of seeds and fertilizers, weather, crop insurance, information on production technology, etc. Under production technology, expert advice is provided to the farmers on procedures of field preparation, sowing, modern irrigation techniques, uses of fertilizers, plant protection, harvesting and post harvest technology, etc. on a timely basis. All the information provided to the farmers is in Hindi, Oriya, Mundari, Santhali and Ho languages, so that rural farmers are able to follow the advice.

After completion of one and half years of the program the second phase of the program was initiated with more improvisation and value addition. In the first phase of the program AID's role was limited to joint theme identification, recording the episodes in the villages and the final editing was done at Ranchi which is 165 kms away from Daltonganj with travel time of around 5-6 hours from the villages. Very few people were exposed to the final editing due to the distance.

In the second phase, a recording studio was set up in the premises of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan Community Technical College – unit of AID in Garwah district of Jharkhand which is 50 kms away from Daltonganj. A local technical personnel who was associated with AIR Daltonganj was identified and further trained for effective editing of the programs. Hence now the major task of editing the program has been taken over by AID. In the first phase, due to the distance, content for 4 to 6 programs used to be recorded for the final editing in Ranchi. In this situation, most of the time, the issues used to become outdated. However, now as the editing is within the purview of AID, contextual news and information are being added to the programs and every effort is being taken to give latest updates to the program.

Table 1. Power/Range/Effective Height for Chala Ho Gaon Mein

SN	Effective Radiated Power	Range	Effective Height
1	100 Watt	approx. 11 KM	75 m

The program is edited and recorded in the studio. Songs, drama, interviews, etc. are recorded in different villages. A team of researchers has been constituted from different regions and local youth (women) have been given more priority and are trained to handle different programs. Regular interactions with villagers are organized

to find out their needs. Based on the feedback, programs are recorded and experts are called to respond to people's queries.

Programmes Broadcast under Chala Ho Gaon Mein

This information was gathered during the field study conducted at Palamu district of Jharkhand, from different CDs prepared by AID, Garwah, Jharkhand. The field work was carried out during April-May 2010 under the NAIP/ICAR project titled "Development of a Set of Alternative ICT Models based on a Study and Analysis of the Major ICT Initiatives in Agriculture in India to meet the Information Needs of the Indian Farmers".

Table 2. List of Programmes Broadcast

Subject Category	Interviews	Drama	Discussions	Songs	Total
Literacy	14	10	9	7	40
Dowry	22	16	6	9	53
Superstition	9	13	13	3	38
Child Marriage	9	9	5	9	32
Health Issues	11	8	12	3	34
Alcoholism	18	22	9	10	59
Forest Issues	7	1	2	1	10
Agriculture	16	NA	14	7	37
Govt. Schemes	8	3	9	7	27

Source: Information collected during field study at Palamu District, Jharkhand

Source of Revenue Generation

Chala Ho Gaon Mein has a different source of revenue generation. The major source of revenue generation is mostly from broadcasting of social functions like local festivals or melas, marriages, birthdays, village sports events, broadcasting school day functions, education campaign over radio, literacy or health campaigns sponsored by the state government, health campaigns like pulse polio, TB/HIV eradication, etc. Different departments assist in the revenue generation process. Contacts are made with various line departments including NRHM society, State Health, Education, Agriculture, Rural Development, Women and Child Welfare, Tribal Development, Forest, Social Welfare, Irrigation and Watershed Departments, etc. for sponsoring episodes for broadcasting their departmental programmes. Besides, the organisation has a tie up with international organisations like UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and other international non Governmental Organisations.

Target Group

"Chala Ho Gaon Mein" is one of the important initiatives of AID. It aims to create a society without poverty, illiteracy, ill health and inequality and to empower the poor to work for total transformation of the society. AID targets the rural populace mainly including the economically backward groups, tribes, neglected children, illiterate womenfolk, and migrant laborers. The selection of beneficiaries is on the basis of their level of poverty, ignorance, non-participation and exploitation.

Through the programme, issues related to people's rights including right to education, right to health, right to livelihood and empowerment of women, rights of dalits and tribes are highlighted. Organization and mobilization of poor into groups on various issues of importance such as land reform, good governance, strengthening of village forums and gram sabhas (village council), child rights and working for the development of poor people and their community through their active participation is the major target of AID.

In order to understand the impact of Chala Ho Gaon Mein on the rural farming community in Jharkhand, two villages of Lesliganj block of Palamu district were selected for the study. The study aims at determining the extent of use of ICT among existing recipient beneficiaries or among wider beneficiary populations.

Field Inferences

Palamu district is the most underdeveloped district of Jharkhand in terms of education, health, food security, infrastructure, etc. Majority of the population are characterised by illiteracy, poverty, hunger, and away from the modernization process, etc. People living in the district earn their livelihood out of minor forest produce and grow basic crops like paddy, wheat and lentils. Most of the population live on the edge of poverty, more than 70 per cent of the women are illiterate and a sizable number of men are dependent on migratory labour opportunities to earn their living. Due to unavailability of electricity, radio is one of the widely accepted tools for entertainment for the public both in rural as well as urban areas.

For the present study, Lesliganj block was selected from Palamu district. Two villages ie. Shonsh and Guriyadamar were selected as beneficiary villages and Koeripatra village was selected as a non beneficiary village. A beneficiary village is one where people are the beneficiaries of the initiative or of the programme, also called the target group.

A non beneficiary village is one which is neither coming under the target of the initiative or programme nor are people getting any benefits out of the scheme. To understand the impact of the initiative on the people of the particular village, four types of questionnaires were developed, filled and analysed. The first type of questionnaire was the *Village Situation Analysis Questionnaire* formulated to gather information from the two beneficiary as well as one non beneficiary village. The second *Questionnaire for ICT Provider* was filled by the Alternative India Development (AID), the service provider for the initiative. The third was the *Beneficiary Questionnaire* where 30 sample beneficiaries were interviewed with an open ended questionnaire and the last was a *Non Beneficiary Questionnaire*, developed for people not getting any benefits from the initiative. Under this category, 30 people were interviewed.

The objective was to understand the uses of ICT (Radio) to develop the agriculture sector, reduce poverty, deliver basic services, increase incomes and their livelihoods; and to understand the influence of the Chala Ho Gaon Mein (CHGM) community based radio programme on the rural farmers in empowering them in enhancing their standard of living and employment as well as livelihood generation.

Impact of Community Radio Programme on the Farmers

During a detailed interview with sixty selected farmers from three different villages of Lesliganj block of Palamu district, it was revealed that 63.33 per cent of the beneficiaries and 73.33 per cent of the non-beneficiaries of the initiative were male and majority of them belonged to the middle age (53%). Majority (40%) of the beneficiaries had completed their primary education whereas majority of the non beneficiary farmers (36.66%) in the non beneficiary village had completed their secondary education.

More than 83 per cent of the respondents in beneficiary villages and 86 per cent of the respondents of the non-beneficiary village have a nuclear family structure and mostly take independent decisions regarding agriculture which is the main source of their occupation. Ninety per cent of the respondents in the beneficiary villages were having less than one hectare of land and they are marginal farmers but have more than ten years of agriculture experience.

Level of Orientation

To understand how far the ICT Initiative has oriented the farmers in terms of economic orientation, social participation, risk orientation and scientific orientation, different questions were put before farmers. After detailed study, it is revealed that

there was only 60 per cent orientation towards their social participation. Regarding economic orientation and risk orientation, the initiative had medium (76.66% and 53.33%) impact. Forty six per cent of the total beneficiaries expressed that due to ICT initiative, they are ready to take any sort of risks for better yield. Most importantly, though the majority of farmers were illiterate, the ICT initiative has had a higher impact upon scientific orientation. Out of 30 beneficiaries, 93 per cent beneficiaries revealed that due to the ICT initiative, they are scientifically oriented.

Social Recognition

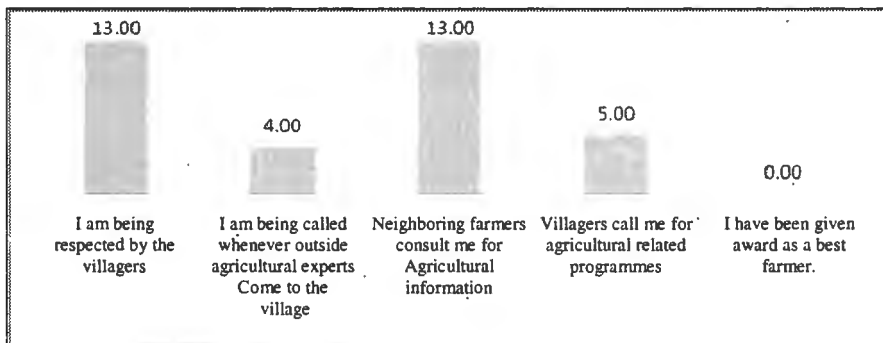


Fig 1: Social Recognition of the beneficiaries

Revealing the social recognition, farmers/beneficiaries (13) revealed that due to the adoption of ICT, they are being respected in the village and villagers and co-farmers call them and take their suggestions regarding agriculture related problems. They were able to solve a minor problem faced by the co-farmers in the nearby village. On the other hand, 30 per cent of the farmers revealed that they had been called many a time when agricultural experts visited their village. For this reason, they keep contacts with agriculture experts for future information as well as better productivity in agriculture. Due to the initiative, a majority of the farmers revealed that their various problems related to agriculture are controlled to some extent. Not only this, during the recording of the radio programme, many a time they had been called to the studio at Daltonganj for sharing their experiences which not only improved their social status but made them popular in the region.

Impact of ICT on Farmers

All the farmers (100%) revealed that the area under cultivation, employment generation, their family education, material possession, livestock possession, consumption of food and savings have increased somewhat because of following agriculture expert's advice through Chala Ho Gaon Mein initiative. The use of

chemical fertilizers, pesticides, market and loan facility, input cost for agriculture have decreased significantly. Farmers revealed that due to high increase in yield, they are saving money and purchasing pump sets, ploughing machine with the amount instead of going for bank loan. It is important to mention here that due to ICT, the cultivation area has increased.

Problems Expressed by the Farmers in Utilization of ICT Services

Though the radio programme provides different kinds of information to the farmers, they still expressed different problems while obtaining the information. Though information received by the farmers is useful and based on their requirement, still a majority of them (100%) expressed that information without a coordinated institutional mechanism has created major problems. They get information about production technology but face problems while implementing the advice in the field. Information they receive is very general in nature which has often led to disappointment as their information need could not be satisfied most of the time (100%). Importantly, more than 60 per cent of the beneficiaries expressed that the information they receive is not very clear which leads to confusion, etc. Importantly farmers demand training along with information.

Suggestions to Strengthen the Community Radio Initiative

Chala Ho Gaon Mein is indeed a unique experiment in using media technologies, especially radio, for empowering marginalized rural farming communities. Designed as a community-driven project, it takes on a special significance in an economically deprived area, marked by illiteracy. Within a short time, the programme has generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the people involved in day-to-day agricultural practices. Many villagers claimed tangible benefits from listening to the programme.

Many of the people identified the major issues on which the programme is made, viz., alcoholism, dowry problem, superstition, bribery, literacy and child marriage, during focus group discussions, with the exception of the elderly and few women. Majority of the farmers interviewed expressed that due to *Chala Ho Gaon Mein* initiative, their socio economic lives have improved as they are getting information about the outside world and learning about agricultural practices in other parts of the country. The programme has empowered the community with updated information. Direct contacts with the experts have resolved their queries. People are aware of modern techniques of farming, irrigation practices, judicious uses of chemicals and fertilisers, and most importantly the daily weather reports and mandi rates. However

many farmers demanded more agriculture related information in their local language through the radio programme.

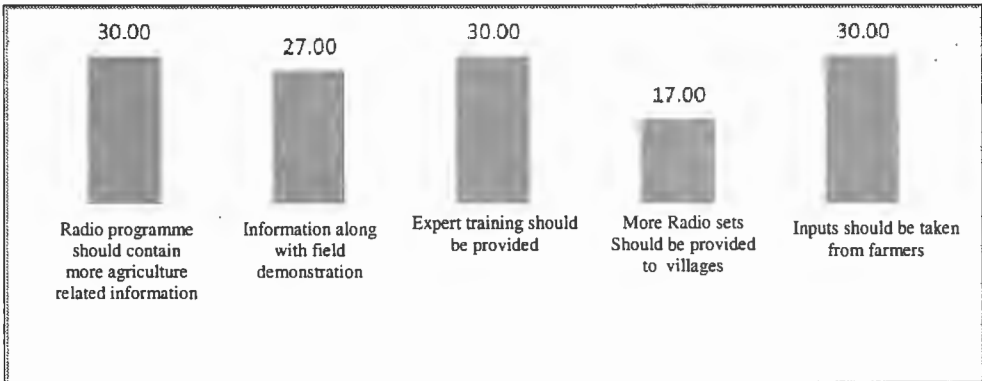


Fig 2: Suggestions given by the beneficiaries

All the farmers (100%) revealed that CHGM initiative should contain more agriculture related information other than social empowerment issues. Agriculture content is very less and to some extent it is generic in nature.

Secondly, 100 per cent farmers suggested providing training along with information to make the program more effective. Along with information they suggested obtaining continuous feedback from the farmers regarding their problems while accessing as well as implementing information. Thirdly and importantly, as discussed many a time, farmers need field demonstration along with information as the programme is in audio mode. Field demonstration would facilitate more with proper implementation than mere provision of information. Moreover, it is observed that a segment of population was kept aside from the community radio throughout the field study. The habit of group listening by men, with friends or neighbours, as well as the domestic division of labour results in a scenario where women farmers rarely get an environment conducive for listening. Even women do not have access to radio as they do not get time from work and men take the radio set outside the house to listen with friends.

However, after having studied the structure of the programme carefully and having interacted with audiences, community reporters, programme managers and project coordinators, some recommendations and suggestions are given in the spirit of making the programme more participatory and vibrant for community development. Farmers recommended that although there is some kind of culture of radio listening, the number of radio sets capable of receiving the FM signal is still too low. While it

might be unviable to distribute radio sets, efforts would be needed to increase the number of listeners. This could be done by strategically placing a few community radio sets, which by promoting group listening followed by deliberations on the issues raised, could build more meaningful democratic spaces within the villages. The programme could be broadcasted on mobile radio for easy accessibility of farmers and more coverage. Copies of the episodes could be made on audiocassettes for narrowcasting and repeat listening in places such as vegetable markets, panchayats, and other village-level collectives, especially of women, etc. Last but not the least; farmers demanded that frequency of the broadcasting should increase for more accessibility and coverage, etc.

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