

Research Paper for PCF5 Conference

Interactive Community Radio and Its Role in Distance Learning: Aspect in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Open and distance learning (ODL) is experiencing rapid growth throughout the world. Although started in 1956, the ODL has expanded remarkably after the establishment of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in Bangladesh in 1992 as the only national public university. Meanwhile, BOU has launched 23 formal and 19 non-formal academic programmes throughout the country. It uses several print and electronic media to deliver instructions to its formal students and non-formal target groups. Among the various media used in BOU, it appeared that radio is one of the effective media for delivering instructions to the students and target mass peoples living in remote rural areas of Bangladesh. It is the cheapest and uninterrupted medium for those who live in the areas with no telephone and electricity. The effectiveness of radio can significantly be increased by changing its current format into an Interactive Community Radio (ICR). The ICR would be a cost-effective educational device for approximately 200,000 junior, secondary and higher secondary levels students living in rural places where electricity is still unreached. This research paper discusses ICR importance for BOU, budget of a ICR station, the problems and prospects of ICR as an effective medium of BOU ODL system and suggests possible ways to get benefits from this cost-effective medium.

Introduction :

Bangladesh is a densely populated country. Accordingly Washington-based Population Reference Bureau 2007 report, Bangladesh has ranked seventh among the most populous countries with its 149 million population this year. Country's population increases by about 2.5 million each year. Most of the people of the country are living in rural and remote places without television, internet and newspapers. But radio is visible in a good number of rural families. It is cheaper than other modern devices and can run with one or two dry cells only. In this aspect, radio reaches every nook and corner of the country. BOU can use the medium utmost as education device for its around three-lakh students and mostly are sprawling in the country's rural places where electricity is still unreached. The BOU can use radio & Community Radio(CR) effectively for their various educational programmes. The authorities can easily develop CR based education in its existing 12 Regional Resource Centres (RRC) for getting colossal educational out-put. Two or three known mobile phones can be used for interaction between students and resource person while the programme will broadcast. There is no rules and regulations existing on CR in the country at present. Within a short time rules on CR will be passed by the proper authorities. I believe, when the research paper will be read almost 50 awaited CR stations can be launched from Bangladesh with great prospect. The BOU authorities now can take necessary preparation and can collect successful example on CR from other neighbouring countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Afghanistan. They have attained a meteoric success by using CR in their respective society.

What is Community Radio?

A community radio station is one that is operated in the community, about the community and by the community. The community can be territorial or geographical – a township, village, district or island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined as territory. Consequently, community radio can be managed or controlled by one group or by combined groups, or of people such as women, children, farmers, fisher, folk, ethnic groups or senior citizens.

CR & its Importance for BOU :

Most of the learners of BOU are in economically marginal level. But almost all of them are capable to purchase an FM radio which costs around 2 \$ only.

Most of the learners are employees in different levels of work. They don't have enough time to spend for educational purposes. But they have some time in__their work schedule to be engaged themselves in educational purposes. Now BOU can take initiative for these learners to transmit educational programmes through FM technology. For this purpose, BOU's Regional Resource Centre (RRC) can be used for transmitting FM signals. All the learners of BOU can be divided into 12 communities centering RRCs. Now a days, FM technology is cheaper than the point of transmission and reception accessories. BOU,has a precious and well equipped audio studio and well reputed academicians. We can make adequate number of programmes for our learners and hence we can transmit these programmes through community transmitter by establishing at our RRCs.

A schedule of programmes for our learners is to be made well before and than it is to be made available to each of our learners so that they can be able to listen to their needful programme in time. Thus community radio can serve an important role in disseminating its academic programmes towards her learners.

Community radio is a radio for the people and by the people. It may give voice to the voiceless people who reside in rural remote areas of the country. It also encourages participation, sharing information and innovation. That is why, community radio is a concept that uses this powerful media and brings it to the people. The students of BOU are residing in every nook and corner of the country and they can be benefited from such a media. Community radio already prove that this media can be the right place for the local people by broadcasting local happenings, local news on health,agriculture, local commodity prices, folk songs, social educational awaring information, myths, weather updates and stories. Commercial media broadcast would never these types of content. They always think about making money.

Radio experts and communicators working on community radio have urged in the last World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) held in Rome on the month of October, 2006 to give community radio its rightful place as a development tool in the communication debate.

Community Radio – A Case Study:

Monira Begum (29), a student of BOU's SSC Programme. In 2006 she enrolled with the Programme. She is living in country's south coastal area named Southkhali under Bagerhat district. She explained her harrowing experience with devastating tidal surge 'Sidr' which hit on 15 November, 2007 at night. 'Waters sprang up atop the trees. We don't know how come we are alive. We don't have television or radio. There was no warning for us of the impending doom'. She again said, 'With my two sons and husband, I was in the house till the evening when we saw waters rushing towards our

room, we decided to leave and look for a safer place'.“ The moment we got out, a giant wave swept us away.

‘After some time, I managed to take shelter on the top of a tree’. After a second she gasped and said, only a radio could have saved us from such heinous natural fury.

Not only recent cyclone but so many natural calamity like flesh flood, drought, bird flu, cold wave, famine etc are regular phenomenon of Bangladesh. In these context, the usefulness of CR has been proved again and again. These such radios will be helpful in spreading warnings, taking precaution, minimising damages and mitigating sufferings through information shared before, during and after a disaster. BOU can take opportunity in this regard by establishing CR station in its campuses.

Empowering Through ICR:

BOU closely related with youth, self reliance and women development. But the authorities have conducted the programmes in a traditional way. Only print media is playing vital role in listening to the students. Radio and TV programmes of BOU are almost indifferent and uninteresting. Inspiration and delight are almost absent in BOU’s radio programmes. So, the programmes can’t attract its students. If BOU incorporates ICR based education with this traditional systems then it may play a vital role and will bring high success in youth and women related programmes. BOU offers 23 formal education Programmes of which 12 are closely youth and women empowering related. A statistic has been given below.

S.L	Schools	youth (male/female) related BOU’s Programmes	Present student enrollment till 2007		Total	Level	Number of broadeasted Radio Programme	Time of Radio Programme school wise
			Male	Female				
								Everyday 7.5 PM-7.30 (pm)[25 minutes]
1.	Open	SSC	70474	36537	107011	Under Graduate level	134 (Total)	Programmes Schedule Sat-SOE Sun-SSHL
	Open school	HSC	44697	23979	68676	-		
	Open school	BBS	413	180	593	Graduate level		
2.	SARD	BAGED	1935	656	2591	11	34 (Total)	Mon-OS
	SARD	CLP	111	03	114	6 month certificate level		Tues-SOB
	SARD	CPFP	22	11	33	6 month certifica		Wed- SARD
	SARD	DYDW	102	5	107	1 1 – years 2 Diploma level		Thus-SST
3.	SSHL	BA/BSS	35480	20680	56160	3 years Graduate level	144 (Total)	Friday/First week- SOE, 2nd
	SSHL	CELP	194	38	237	6 month certificate level		Week- SSHL, 3rd
	SSHL	CELP	147	19	166	6 month certificate level		week- OS
4	SOB	BBA	493	172	665	3 years Graduate level	140 (Total)	4th week- SOB and

5	SST	BSC-IN-NURS ING	310	1830	2140	3 years Graduate level	138 (Total)	5th week (if SST/SARD
		Total	154383	84110	236567		=594 Grand Total	

Source BOU's

SSS Division

In 1999, youth development related education programme, named 'Diploma in youth in development work (DYDW)' was launched BOU with the help of Commonwealth youth programmes (CYP). Still it create craze among the young people who want to do something for the society as well as for themselves. Youth and women related another programmes are also mentioned in the table. The table showed, as many as two and a half lakhs young male and female people have been attached with the BOU's youth related programmes. They are taking knowledge from those programmes for empowering themselves. Meanwhile, so many young people have got expected jobs after taking this education. Only print media and tutorial classes (2 days in a month) dominated the students the way of their knowledge. BOU also broadcasts radio and TV Programmes on above mentioned programmes. But those programmes are so lean that it can't put any good impact on the students. Because, BOU has no well planned radio schedule although a modern media centre stands in the campus with beauty. In this backdrops, firstly, BOU can install community radio station at its 12 Regional offices (RRC). But BOU can look forward to its local offices (Co-ordinating Office). Any BOU's news, educational non-formal Programmes will broadcast for their students through ICR from the offices. The local BOU students will able to know about their day by day lifestyle, weather forecast, local marketing of commodity, health care through the ICR alongside their Programme news. It may also contribute country's national youth policy. That can empower local young people for being established in the society.

At present, some mobile operating companies have been giving information in those subjects to their respective subscriber by taking more money. It is costly and not friendly. A community radio subscriber can get information of those subjects from respective radio station at nominal price without any hazard.

Awareness Building Through ICR:

BOU has broadcast 19 non-formal programmes which help people to aware themselves through radio and TV. Around 300 BOU's radio programmes on environment, basic science, agriculture, management, health, nutrition, population and gender issue have been broadcast through state run radio station. But its impact on the society is not mentionable. Because the script was not written in keeping with the hope and aspiration of the local village people CR can fill all the gaps in this connection and can play a dynamic role to aware the mass people which impact will be more sustainable. At present AIDS and drug abuse have become a main social problem that demand launching of a wide spread campain to combat these deadly menace. The outbreak of HIV in neighbouring countries, cross borders and steady rise of STIs make Bangladesh a high- risk zone for HIV/AIDS prevalence. Now some expected 24 thousand people live with the disease in the country. This is considered as law prevalence. But the risk is very high. Because of lack of proper communication strategy, the number of HIV patients are now increasing alarmingly. Besides, a good number of young people are taking dreadful drug like 'Yaba', phensidyle and heroine that also create so many social problems. In this backdrops, BOU has been broadcasting so many radio and TV programmes on those issues. But these efforts didn't fetch any good effect for the society. Because the programmes are very weak

and unattractive. So radio listeners are significantly reducing. In this context, BOU can play a vital role in above mentioned contents by establishing CR station.

A Study on BOU's Radio Programme :

A need assessment survey report was conducted by Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in 1994 which is given in the following table.

Distribution Of households access to various electronic facilities (Rural & Urban)
In percentage

Facilities	Region				All Over Bangladesh
	Dhaka	Chittagong	Rajshahi	Khulna	
Radio	90.9	94.5	93.6	94.4	93.2
TV	78.5	90.3	89.1	86.4	86.6
Cassette Player	58.0	80.0	62.4	49.5	63.1
Telephone	26.1	44.5	16.5	15.5	26.4
VCR/VCP	22.8	30.7	19.5	9.9	21.5
Computer	2.4	2.7	0.4	0.7	1.7

Table-01

Distribution of Target Respondents by Awareness About BOU Programmes (Rural & Urban). In Percentage

Awareness About BOU	Region				All Over Bangladesh
	Dhaka	Chittagong	Rajshahi	Khulna	
Listen to BOU Radio Programmes	20.5	67.2	20.9	27.1	34.8
Watch BOU TV Programmes	56.2	26.8	62.9	23.6	43.3

Table-02

Distribution of Target Respondents for Suitable Timing BOU Radio Programme (Rural & Urban). In Percentage

Time Slot	Respondent				All Over Bangladesh
	Dhaka	Chittagong	Rajshahi	Khulna	
8-12	8.6	11.3	5.1	7.2	8.3
12-15	8.8	6.4	5.1	7.6	7.1
15-18	28.7	26.1	22.3	37.9	28.3
18-19	18.8	26.6	19.3	10.8	19.5
19-20	16.9	20.8	42.0	13.1	23.1
20-22	23.7	17.0	22.3	19.8	20.7

Table-3

Source BOU's Planning division

Why BOU's Radio Programmes not Effective:

- 1) Almost all learners don't know when, who and which Programme will broadcast. Because no programme schedule on radio have been given to the learners.
- 2) Language Problem. Formal Language of radio programmes do not attract the listeners. Because most of the BOU's listeners have been living in village and expect broadcasting the Programmes through local language.
- 3) Radio scripts aren't written in keeping with hope and aspiration of the BOU's learners.
- 4) Entertainment in radio programmes not enough.
- 5) Authorities negligence to the radio programmes.

Status of CR in Neighbouring Country:

CR is now emerging as a strong Social device for the society and have been persistent in neighbouring country like Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Afghanistan.

Now we can mention some CR stations which proves its necessity in their respective society. Kothmale Community Radio, in Sri Lanka, established in 1989, a truly community-owned radio station in South Asia began with the pioneering Radio Sagarmatha in 1997 in Nepal, which brought the king's deadly rage upon itself in 2005. On 16 November, 2006 the government of India notified a new community radio policy which permits NGOs and other civil society organisations to own and operate community radio stations. About 6000 community radio licenses are on offer across India. Of which Mana Radio in Andhra and Raghav FM in Bihar community radio stations and Anna FM successfully operating their station.

BOU can take necessary experience from above mentioned CR stations before launching at its offices.

Statistics of Radio & Media Users in Bangladesh :

National Media Survey (NMS) completed its national survey on radio and other medias like TV, internet and newspaper in 2005. The result of the report has been given in following table.

Statistics of Media Reach:**By Region(%)**

<i>Media</i>	<i>Nation</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Metro</i>
<i>Any Media</i>	71.5	91.6	64.1	94.3
<i>Not Any</i>	28.5	8.4	35.9	5.7
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100

By Division (%)

Media	Dhaka	Chittagong	Rajshahi	Khulna	Sylhet	Barisal
Any Media	74	75.5	67	66.7	68.6	74.8
Not Any	26	24.5	33	33.3	31.4	25.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

By Sex (%)

Media	Male	Female
Any Media	79.4	63.7
Not Any	20.6	36.3
Total	100	100

Source BNNRC

Present Radio Broadcasting Facilities in Bangladesh :

Radio broadcasting facilities in Bangladesh are divided into two segments. The state run broadcasters like Radio Bangladesh (Bangladesh Betar) and the commercial broadcaster like Commercial FM Radio. On the other hand, there are at least 4 commercial FM Radio stations which are now operating in Bangladesh beside government owned Bangladesh Betar. BBC and VOA also operate FM Radio.

Budget of a CR Station :

The simplest community radio set up can consist of a low-power transmitter harnessed with an antenna, a tape recorder and a microphone.

According to UNESCO note book only 7,500\$ is needed for installing a CR station.

Disadvantage of CR station:

Unlicensed community radio stations often creates so many problems as interference. BOU is a public university. So there is no possibility to broadcast any untowards news from its CR stations.

Recommendations:

- i) For the greater interest of the BOU's ODL education it should take plenty of necessary preparations for establishing CR station at its regional offices.
- ii) To maintain close lobby with concern govt. body for establishing a CR station at BOU campuses at once.
- iii) Necessary seminars, symposiums, workshops should be organised at present on this issue by the BOU authorities. It helps to get feed back.
- iv) Necessary training for the media men should be completed on this issue at once.
- v) A precise guideline in keeping with govt rules on CR programmes for BOU should be chalked-out now.

Conclusion :

To establish community radio, we need to talk with government officials along with civil society leaders. After commissioning the CR with govt. legal frameworks, the BOU education will get a new lease of life and may fetch a revolutionary success in country's ODL education. Apart from this, Community radio will give us the opportunity to disseminate grassroot based experience which will turn into a social change among the rural community. Community radio will help to build strong leadership and can flare social awareness activity among the rural people who are backward in every field of development from urban people.

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