Community Radio and Education for All: Bangladesh Perspective

Md. Monjur-e-Khoda Tarafdar, Registrar, Bangladesh Open University, rmonzur@bol-online.com and Md. Nazrul Islam Khan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, nikhanjs@yahoo.com

Abstract

In Bangladesh Non Government Organizations (NGOs) are catering basic education simultaneously with the Government Organizations (GOs). It seems that NGOs' activities are mostly featured with fund derivation and high cost. It is also project based tailor-made. These activities seriously lack in coordination, which are resulted in neo-illiterate, neo-drop outs and also lack in continuity in education in the broadband national activity. Due to diversity and potentiality of the Distance and Open Learning (ODL) system, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) as only ODL public institution can play a vital role through Community Radio (CR) as a catalyst institution for networked learning through using its academic, institutional resources and potentials. It can create an educational development platform to work together with NGOs, GOs and other social activists within the concerned realm of focus sharing with others' experiences around the globe. At the first phase, all that we need to do is to formulate a policy framework guided by a holistic approach in a clear conceptual working environment. This is followed by ensuring effectively coordinated activities of partners and alliances in the field of education for an auto regenerating system approach with the modality of community radio. There are reasons to believe that this system can help accomplishing the goal for quality education for all. The context of this Community Radio connectivity is also to activate and perpetuate the ODL system as a Junction Station, which looks like an indispensable phenomenon to be created right at the moment. The paper will attempt to find out a modality, flexible enough to work together with the cross cultural activists for all of those are engaged in alternative to conventional schooling as well as conventional schooling with NGO's, GO's and other pro-active partners in the education sector, especially engaged in eradicating illiteracy, basic education, continuing education, adult education and so on.

Introduction: History of Broadcasting in Bangladesh

The history of broadcasting refers, "After Guglilmo Marconi's discovery of wireless broadcasting in 1901, radio broadcasting was undertaken by amateurs. The first US commercial radio station KDKA of Pittsburgh, began operation in 1920" (Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia vol.1, p.84, 2005, India). The history of radio broadcast in Bangladesh dates back to the then British India and started broadcasting on 16 December 1939 as All India Radio at the old part of present Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. In 1971, Former Radio Pakistan changed its role as a front to assist the nation achieving its independence. Radio Bangladesh has been functioning as Bangladesh Betar (Radio) from all stations since the victory of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971. We have twin 16 December in our broadcast history. Bangladesh Betar, only public radio transmission agency, has country wide broadcasting network programme with 5 FM channels to add to its operational efficiency. There are private FM radio stations in the country having started broadcasting programs in recent years. It is very interesting to note here that every phase of development of this broadcasting technology took at least three and half decades.

Development of Community Radio in Bangladesh

"Throughout the world, the public sector has proved to be neither accountable nor accessible to the public. Grassroots organizations have established their own means of communication where the necessary means could be procured. In broadcasting these efforts– known as community, free or neighborhood radio have developed through Western Europe, in the United States and Canada, in Latin America and else where (Lewis 1984; White 1983)". But Bangladesh Government has disapproved this statement at least once. Bangladesh is now on an active way to proceed to the Community Radio (CR) broadcast as the Government has approved the "The Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy-2008" on 12 March, 2008. The policy states, "Community Radio is a medium that gives a voice to the voiceless, serves as

mouthpiece of the marginalized and is central to communication and democratic processes within societies". It adds, "The programme contents should cover educational, social, gender, economic, environmental and cultural fields and are required to be relevant to the needs of that particular community. It should not go beyond the community's notion of limiting itself within the cultural and historical perspectives. Any kind of political, sectarian or doctrinal programme shall be prohibited". This is definitely an appreciable understanding of the Government in terms of the utility of the Community Radio in strengthening the process of democracy. The policy's preamble articulates," In terms of availability, immediacy and reaching ability, the role of radio as a means of communication is undeniable. Therefore, even after the immense expansion of Science and Information Technology (IT), the importance of this media remains unchanged in developed, developing and underdeveloped nations." We are expecting to approach a hat trick date of 16 December in broadcasting history of our country. It is really praiseworthy for the Government to comprehend the importance of this old-fashioned communication tool, radio which is older than 100 years but still very much effective for its easy accessibility and universal acceptability. But this was not the whole story for the Community Radio. For a decade, we had to wait for CR since 1998, when Mass Line Media Centre (MLMC) applied for permission to establish a Community Radio to the Ministry of Information (MOI). And in the same year, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) drew an advocacy plan. Table "A" highlights advocacy and achievement history of CR through facts and events:

Table 'A'

Year	Facts	Achievement
1998	Application for establishment of Community Radio to the MOI by MLMC.	Started journey towards establishment of Community Radio.
1998	Advocacy Plan for Community Radio entitled "Policy Advocacy of CR in Bangladesh".	Journey Continued
1999	First National Mass Media Conference arranged by Centre for Development Communication (CDC).	Journey Continued
2000	Established Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communications (BNNRC) to continue advocacy programme with other concerned organisations for Community Radio	Journey Continued
2006	Three day Round Table on Community Radio organized by BNNRC, MMC, Focus, YPSA and Voice.	Advocacy continued.
2-4 March 2008	Community Radio Awareness Workshop jointly organized by Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), BOU, Development Research Initiative (DNet) & BNNRC.	Initiative to develop Human Resource for CR
12 March 2008		The Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy-2008

Along with those advocacy programmes, there were many more movements and mass people awakening strategies organized mostly by NGOs, pro-active partners and alliances which made the government enable to approve and implement the policy.

Global Concern about Community Radio

Radio has been considered as one of the prime strategic tools for achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The executive summary of the Department for International Development (DFID) on Information and Communication for Development (ICD) report states , "The paper highlights the relevance of radio in poor communities, its broad acceptability to a range of sectoral activities such as health, rights, education, livelihoods, and conflict prevention, and identifies the need to deepen the capacity of radio broadcasters and evaluation, so as to begin the process of developing a rigorous information and communication for development evidence base which highlights radio's - and other communications' mediums - strategic contribution to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals", (DFID 2006).

DFID also summarizes some thematic approaches in the said report on which it can actively do in support of enhancing radio's role in human development. Out of six thematic sections, one is dedicated to "what can DFID do to strengthen radio's health and educational content?" The report also has given emphasis on the Article 19, 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The access statistics of radio is obviously higher than television, fixed telephone and cell phone because radio is less costly, affordable, and simple in nature and it has connectivity compliance with other communication mediums like ICTs as well as satellite and it has easy reach up to an individual. This medium is much more captured by marginalized people rather than elites and can minimize digital divide. Radio can play an essential responsibility in achieving universal primary education. In this regard, Commonwealth of Learning (COL) emphasizes, "Of all the Millennium Development Goals this is the most fundamental. Having people complete a good quality basic education is the platform for sustained and sustainable development. COL is working with Governments to maximise the contribution that ODL can make to basic education. The worldwide drive to achieve Education for All (EFA) and its core campaign for Universal Primary Education (UPE) involve COL at several levels: 1. Teacher Development, 2. School Networks, 3. Open Schooling and 4. Sharing Content" (COL's Contribution to MDGs, 2005).

Radio most particularly is seen as the major communications artery to local and international information and education for communities marginalized from high end ICT access. A South African case study depicts the capacity of radio as an Appropriate Information and Communication Technologies (AICTs) to assist in effecting educational transformation within school and local communities across the country. CR supports democratic involvement of the community, and out-of-school youth and broadly underserved populations.

The Utility of Community Radio for Achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

It is well documented in the reports of COL, DFID and others that Community Radio can effectively be used for achieving all the eight MDGs. Due to potential diversity, the CR technology can most effectively be used for non formal education for adult people, awareness programmes, youth development programmes, local community knowledge sharing, recycling of knowledge, ethnic community preservation programme and in areas, where density of population is sparse, where access to school is difficult like char (land within a river) and hilly areas of the country and also isolated places because of less access to road or other communication, and where access of qualified teachers are very few. Sweeney and Parlato (1982, p. 13) stated, "Radio plays an effective educational role both as the sole medium or in conjunction with print and group support". So, Community Radio has a prospect for education expansion and community schools. Community Radio can also help, develop and mobilize social capital. This technology is cheaper too. For example, Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) is a well-tested teaching and dissemination method that is inexpensive, accessible and flexible. In Africa, Community Radio has speeded up and expended the process of information exchange. The second goal of MDGs is to achieve universal primary education. Education is the backbone and foundation for a nation. This is one of the fundamental goals as Nobel Lauriat's Amarta Sen argues, "Development is freedom and education is the royal road of freedom" (Daniel, 2006). As most developing countries underscore its educational potential and importance, many writers have proposed that educational radio can

be most effective when supported by trained facilitators, group learning, group discussion, feed back and the use of multimedia approaches, thus interactive and independent learning help develop social software which is considered essential for quality education. The dynamic potential of radio in motivating listeners to take action, modifying behavior, and undertaking activities is evident in the literature thus far.

Use of Community Radio in Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

Learning is the liberating force of human development and every individual has a right to education. To serve the aforesaid considerations, ODL helps create democratisation in education for flexible learning system. In ODL, student centered teaching approach is used. Tutors and learners are physically separated in the system, and distance education institutes usually use technology like state-owned Radio and Television for a particular time to disseminate contents of learning to the learners, which might not be effective and accessible to all distance learners due to inflexible time allocation. Since CR is covering a limited geographical area and focusing on the local needs, culture and social events, educational and academic programmes can be incorporated into the CR programmes at any time of any location as it is more flexible than national broadcasting. In addition, distance education institutes have long experiences in using the technology of Radio and TV. They can apply their experience for CR on segment base as well as programme base. Most distance learning organizations generally have several outlets for tutorial or other instructional services in distant and remote areas. Having their own infrastructures, these distant teaching outlets could be turned into Community Radio Learning Centres (CRLC) for the open and distance learning institutes and these stations can be worked as local facilitators for the academic programmes of both formal and non-formal education. Anyanwk (1978 p. 15-16) mentions, "Through collective listening, discussion, and the use of audio-visual aids, the radio can contribute substantially to the process of transformation of agricultural traditions, as well as some social and economic attitudes in general". Radio has been used extensively as an educational medium in developing countries like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, South Korea, Mali, Guatemala, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, Mexico, Philippines and also proved its impact and efficiency in health, agriculture and other development issues.

Need and Preparation of Bangladesh Open University for Using Community Radio

Radio-based educational opportunities are very much commensurate with the delivery system of ODL. After 15 years of the establishment of the Bangladesh Open University (BOU), it has accumulated huge resources in terms of technology and media oriented human resource and infrastructures to put forward a new look to the Community Radio applications. Bangladesh Open University needs to adopt the segment base strategies to provide education for all. The case of Bangladesh is similar as to Louw's (Paris, France 2007) statement, "..to ensure that communities who have been denied access to resources, take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio that encourages them to communicate with each other, to take part in decisions that affect their lives, and to celebrate their own cultures". The reason for establishing Bangladesh Open University nearly echoes Louw's statement as in the Mission statement, of the BOU Act 1992 envisages that "the objectives of the University shall be to expand all levels of education, knowledge and science by a diversity of means, including the use of any communication technology to improve the quality of education and to provide opportunities for education to the general public through mass-orientation of education and to create efficient manpower by improving the quality of education in general". To accomplish these goals of BOU mission statement, it is no denying the fact that BOU needs immediate steps for adopting the Community Radio approach. In terms of preparation, BOU has Media Centre fully equipped with the transmission equipment, full-fledged radio recording studios, editing suites, portable radio recorders and modern radio broadcasting technology. However, BOU has already sought the permission from the Government for having its own frequency allocation.

Quick Need Assessment of Community Radio in Bangladesh

Being in the administration, we have opportunities to travel in the remote areas of Bangladesh. Some of the areas are so distant that access to civic facilities like sufficient primary and secondary schools, electricity, health complex, sanitations etc. are rare and in some cases these accesses are few. We talked to the general literate and illiterate people of those areas regarding the benefits of radio. Since the radio has been introduced long ago and it has more than 70 years history of services to the country, and radio is easily portable device as used by less costly batteries, the people who are not properly literate are capable of operating a Radio. They know radio as medium of entertainment only and some of them know the programme schedule of the Radio. When we approached them asking do they like to use radio as a medium of basic, primary and higher education for them or for their children or do they like to use radio for celebrating their local communal festival events or sharing regional knowledge about their own wellbeing, information exchange or updating knowledge about local market, they did remain quiet in most cases when they first listened to our questions. Their quietness was the reason of being surprised with such possibilities. However, some of them came forward with reply that radio could be very effective for learning because one radio could be shared by many people and because of its portable nature they could carry it wherever they would go. Some stated that since their children didn't have teachers to teach English or Mathematics, their children could learn the lessons from the radio. But added with a suggestion that these lessons should be regular and the approach of educational radio content should be need based. Some of them said that it would be profitable if radio informed them about the price before harvesting of vegetables or other saleable goods, they could make a good use of the information. The formal conversation with local people of remote areas showed that the appropriate use of CR can be very contributory initially for creating informed and updated mass people of Bangladesh. It may require training and development of human resources to activate CR suitably for each type of formal or non-formal educational needs of the locality. Bangladesh ranks 7 in the basic education status amongst 14 countries in the region, which is seen here in the table below (ASPBAE and GCE 2005 India):

Table "B"

How countries fare in their support for basic education			
Country	Marks (Out of 100)	Grade (A-F)	Rank (Out of 14)
Bangladesh	50	E	7
Combodia	46	E	8
China	63	C	5
India	43	E	9
Indonesia	42	E	10
Malaysia	82	A	2
Nepal	35	F	11
Pakistan	24	F	14
Papua New Guinea	33	F	12
Philippines	70	C	4
Solomon Islands	25	F	13
Sri Lanka	79	B	3
Thailand	86	A	1
Vietnam	56	D	6

This scenario of Bangladesh in the table "B" demands a lot of efforts to be deployed to achieve the goal of EFA by 2015. It is strongly believed that using Community Radio applications in support of basic education, we could achieve an accelerating speed of grade achievement.

Conclusion

Since Bangladesh Open University has expertise and experience in disseminating education through distance modes using state owned Radio and Television, BOU plans to use those skills and proficiency through establishment of CR in Bangladesh. BOU can play dynamic roles setting up CR stations in its 12 Regional Resource Centres (RRC`s) and 80 Coordinating Offices (COs) throughout the country for broadcasting tutorial programmes according to local needs to ensure quality. In addition, BOU can also lead to create a place for work with GOs & NGOs and other philanthropic organizations collaboratively and more comprehensively towards sustainable educational development. The wide introduction of Community Radio creates new types of employment opportunity in the country for a range of people, who have to work as programme producers, presenters, educators, tutors, technicians, facilitators, educational content developers (radio curricula), which require training and development. BOU can stand here very profoundly to play a role model for the manpower development of this Community Radio technology. In this paper, we have given a lot emphasis on Community Radio in various respect of eventualities since we strongly believe in the case of Bangladesh, this communication tool can be very appropriately instrumental for GOs, NGOs and other pro-active forces and partners working in the realm of formal education, basic education, non-formal education, adult education, continuing education for eradicating illiteracy and other distance academic programmes for the accomplishment of the objective of 'education for all'. As such, it is expected that at the inception of Community Radio history in Bangladesh, this radio would be handled and operated by an educational professional body like BOU.

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