



Community Radio Broadcasting: Empowering Rural People for Participating in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh



1. Opening statement

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accredited with World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) of the United Nations and UN WSIS prize winner 2016 and Champion 2017. BNNRC's outreach extends to local, national and international forums for communicating Knowledge for Media.

BNNRC's approach to media development is both knowledge-driven and context-sensitive, and it takes into account the challenges and opportunities created by the rapidly changing media environment in Bangladesh including community radio development giving voices for the voiceless.

BNNRC now strives for the following core interventions to contribute in achieving 7th five Years Plan of Government of Bangladesh, UN World Summit on the Information Society (UN WSIS) Action Plan, and UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) through: Community Media Development (Community Radio & Community TV Community Film) for amplifying voices for the voiceless, Right to Information (RTI) for ensuring improved livelihood of the marginalized, ICT for Development for Bridging the Digital Divide in rural areas, Amateur Radio or HAM Radio for Disaster Risk Reduction, Community Film for Social Transformation.

BNNRC is actively working to improve recognition of the community electronic media sector (Community Radio, Community TV, Community Film) & its work in and involvement with the communities. BNNRC represent the community electronic media sector to Government, Industry, Regulatory Bodies, Media, Academia and Development Partners from 2000. BNNRC is supported by contributions from different development organizations worldwide who share a commitment in building a free, independent and pluralistic community media of voices for the voiceless.

BNNRC in August 2016 organized dialogues through community radios across the country for building capacity of the community radio broadcasters about their participation in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As part of its challenges, BNNRC held the participatory programs to enhance knowledge and awareness of the community radio broadcasters so that they could integrate SDGs agenda in their on-going programs. The initiative facilitated increased services in local communities about the opportunities for economic growth, challenges on environmental protection and the sustainable development for livelihood development. Currently 17 Community Radio Stations are on-air in the country, aiming to ensure empowerment and right to information for the rural community. They are broadcasting altogether 144 hours of programs every day on issues like information, education, local entertainment and development motivation activities. Around 1000 youth women & youth are now professionally engaged with those stations as rural broadcasters reaching some 4.6 million rural people in 17 upazilas under 16 districts according to OFCOM (Ofcom is the communications regulator in the UK).

2. Executive summary

Major achievement in terms of SDG implementation:

A total of 160 CR broadcasters are supposed to receive training of facilitators. Until now 32 community radio broadcasters have received the training. A total of 250 youth and youth women are destined for receiving SDG fellowship. So far, 138 of them received the fellowship. A total of 1000 community radio broadcasters are supposed to get training on SDGs.

So far 366 of them received the training from National Institute of Mass and Communication and Press Institute of Bangladesh of Ministry of Information. There are six types of programs; PSA, radio drama, talk-show, news bulletin, radio feature and magazine programs broadcast. A total of 5000 radio programs are supposed to be broadcast, so far 975 of them have been broadcast.



Major policy intervention focusing on SDG:

The community radio policy 2018 emphasized to highlight the SDGs targets incorporated in the regular community radio programs and Ministry of Information has developed national strategy for the implementation of community radio installation, broadcast, and operations policy in Bangladesh, United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action line C-9 (Media). The media — in their various forms and with a diversity of ownership—as an actor, have an essential role in the development of the Information Society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information. The effective implementation of the WSIS Action Lines can help accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

Specific challenges in facing activities:

During the implementation of works by the community radios in the local community it was observed that due to lack of awareness about SDGs, customized and specific data on SDGs, integration SDGs agenda in the ongoing programs, institutional strategy for implementation of SDGs localization, data for monitoring. Major areas where it would need support in terms of finance, capacity-building, technology, partnership etc. It can also introduce baseline surveys for collecting and updating local level data, coordination among local level stakeholders, orientation programs to further enhance capacities of CR broadcasters, increase offline, online mobilization, develop SDGs apps for local community with local area information and collection of success case studies on SDGs. Building capacity for SDGs related reporting of the local press to be introduced as SDGs Reporting Award handbook on SDGs reporting to be published for rural journalists, rural data driven journalism to be introduced and increased collaboration with different government departments at district and upazilas.

3. Introduction

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) has developed a systematic localization strategy for supporting community people to achieve the SDGs through Community Radio Broadcasting. During the period of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bangladesh achieved “remarkable progresses in line with 8 goals. The community radios in pursuing its goals had significant roles in the achievements of MDGs from rural level.

Such achievements are largely attributable to the resilience and creativity of the Bangladeshi people in finding innovative and low-cost solutions and empowering individual “agency,” especially of women. Community Radio Broadcasting sector is also one of the contributors where it facilitated empowering people, creating space and influencing power to contribute to MDGs localization at community level. One of the main lessons learned from the MDGs is the need to localize them through bottom up approach, in order to reflect differences across village to capital and capital to villagers in line with public service delivery, poverty alleviation and risk management.

4. Methodology and process for preparation of the review

BNNRC started reviewing process through workshops, research and information collection from community radio through a systematic process. The community radio broadcasters collected feedback on SDG from the community through daily programs, reporting in news, radio magazine programs, panel discussion / Talk-Show, phone-in, folk songs/music, drama, SDGs quiz etc.

5. Policy and enabling environment.

a. Creating ownership of SDGs:

The community radios are already broadcasting about 1000 hours of weekly programs to harmonize their program issues with 17 SDGs agenda. The SDGs agenda have incorporated in all 17 community radio programs broadcast weekly, and by this time six types of programs are broadcast namely, public service announcement (PSA), radio drama, talk-show, news bulletin, radio feature and magazine programs by the community, for the community of the community using local dialect.

b. Incorporate of SDGs in policy framework:

The community radio policy 2018 emphasized to highlight the SDG targets incorporated in the regular community radio programs. Developed tailor-made programs for different disadvantaged people of the rural areas, On behalf of BNNRC a regular monitoring and reviews are going on.

As per the advice of the Secretary of Ministry of Information the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC) organized training on how to engage community people, local government officials and local elected bodies on SDGs issues. Together NIMC, Bangladesh Betar and Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) organized capacity building trainings and Community Radio Reporting for a total of 364 and 64 CR broadcasters respectively.

c. Integration of the three dimensions:

Introduction of SDG principles into the community radio programs to balance economic growth, environmental protection and social development. The community radios broadcast about 1000 hours of programs weekly which also cover issues of opportunities for economic growth, challenges on environmental protection and the sustainable social development. As a result, listeners are better informed of their choices which have largely led them to seeking wider connectiveness and bridging the gaps. Hence the process of reimagining on 3 dimensions of SDGs has started.

Community Radio in Bangladesh





The focus of the training was to make effective participation of the multi-generation segments of the society like, senior citizens, youth and youth women and adolescents in improving knowledge on SDGs related service deliveries. Multi-platforms were used in reaching the audience like twitter, facebook, YouTube, mobile journalism (MoJo) in connecting the stakeholder.

In reaching the audience social engagement strategies were used in capturing the attention of the radio listeners as part of the 'Passive Engagement'. To increase communication and participation of the audience 'Active Engagement' strategies were used involving increasing desire to engage through moderate communication. In bringing listeners together and inspire them to contribute to a particular topic 'Co-Creation' strategies were used and in developing sense of commitment community 'Collaboration' strategies were used.

d. Leaving no one behind:

BNNRC is implementing, “Youth Women in Community Media and Journalism,” for participation of women in media. The program is aimed at empowering the vulnerable and marginalized groups of the society, reducing social inequality, building capacity to making easy access to information on social safety net. The program was designed to facilitate vulnerable and marginalized groups to be enrolled in the media and to develop themselves as professional community media journalists.

An experienced and senior level community radio staff plays the role of a mentor. The fellows prepare and produce news/reports/feature/case study/human profile about their communities. They broadcast these reports and features through radio and publish in local newspapers. BNNRC organizes orientation program for the fellows and mentors at the beginning and organize a knowledge sharing (& lessons learned) workshop at the end of the fellowship-tenure of each batch. So far 138 youth and youth women from vulnerable and marginalized groups successfully completed the fellowships who are now working with various community radio stations as community journalist. Such endeavor surely contributes to leave no one behind. Bangladesh's development momentum is strong, and as the country progresses to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), no one should be left behind, not even the vulnerable and marginalized communities through community radio at rural Bangladesh.

e. Structural changes:

During the implementation of works by the community radios in the local community it was observed that there was no customized and specific data on SDG, integration SDG agenda in the ongoing programs (government and NGOs), institutional strategy for implementation of SDG localization, data for monitoring, local level participation and accountability, building capacity on SDG and overall coordination in line with SDGs related review, planning and evaluation.

6. Progress on specific targets

The community radio stations are now broadcasting 144 hours of daily programs majorities of which are aimed at addressing SDGs goals by motivating people, connecting and bridging the gaps by setting agendas like reducing poverty and inequalities, need for education and good health and clean water & sanitation. Around 1000 community broadcasters are now working with 17 stations throughout the country as rural broadcasters.

Community Radio has created scope for the poor and marginalized community to raise their own voices; it becomes the voice for the voiceless. These neo-media outlets opened scope to establish their rights of Information and communication in social, political, cultural and environmental arena. As result of such advocacy programs scope widened for poverty reduction and sustainable development because of the rights to raise voice of the community and accessibility to knowledge and information.

Scopes also opened for exchange of dialogue between local elected representatives, government bodies and NGO professionals for the sake of establishing good governance. Direct linkage established between the community and the main sectors. Scopes were created for social debate, inclusion and preservation of cultural diversity by ensuring the inclusion of the marginalized community.

Community radio is now able to play more active role particularly in addressing SDG policies and development agendas of the government. Most of CR programs correspond to the government's development agenda in line with international national commitment such as 7th Five Years Plan, UN Sustainable Development Goals, and UN World Summit on the Information Society (UN WSIS) Action Plan etc.

The radio programs also supported the Sustainable Development Goals like End poverty in all its forms everywhere, End poverty in all its forms everywhere, Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all



ages, Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, Reduce inequality within and among countries, Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss and Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The community radio programs are contributing for achievement of 8 special programs out of 10 development agenda chosen by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

7. Means of implementation

The community radio broadcasters after receiving skill development training went back to their respective stations and integrated SDGs agenda into the daily 144 hour radio programs through SDGs reporting in news, radio magazine program, panel discussion / Talk-Show, phone-in, folk songs/music, drama, SDG quiz etc. Some programs are recorded and some are live. But there also some exceptional programs in particular station, such Community Radio broadcast social motivational program for reducing the rate of suicide, as suicide rate is very high in broadcasting areas of this radio station.

Similarly, Community Radio broadcast program targeting the river erosion victims and people living in char areas. In the coastal areas eight community radio stations are broadcasting programs on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change at the bay of bangle. A substantial amount of the national budget is allocated for social safety net programs for empowering the disadvantaged community.

Therefore, the government could consider community radio broadcasting as a tool for SDG localization connecting to serving the unconnected community. For adaptation, technology transfer and financial mobilization of climate change community radio can be use effectively in promoting the agendas of 3R - Reduce, Re-use and Recycling can be promoted through community radio program.

The community radios can also be used as tools for promoting small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) which can boost rural economy particularly in creating employment of youth and youth women in rural areas to ensure sustainable graduation from The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to developing country (DC).

In continuing the much appreciated existing pace of the community radios on promoting SDG localization, the government can consider incorporating community radio sector in its SDG technical assistance programs.

8. Way forward

To take the momentum of the existing programs to the next level it is necessary to introduce certain programs which include SDGs review and planning meeting, SDGs fellowships for community radio broadcasters, award for local journalists on producing and publishing best judged reports on SDGs. It can also introduce baseline surveys for collecting and updating local level data, coordination among local level stakeholders, orientation programs to further enhance capacities of CR broadcasters, increase offline, online mobilization, develop SDGs apps for local community with local area information and collection of success case studies on SDGs.

9. Conclusions

The current programs on strengthening the capacity of the stakeholders to be continued, raise level of awareness to a new height and inform community about the specific services given by government under SDGs programs, develop and reinforce cooperation with all stakeholders, develop innovative methods, make wider use of social media and mobilize youth community, learn and improve through measuring and benchmarking performance, bring listeners together and inspire them to contribute to give SDGs related information through Bootcamps.

Building capacity for SDGs related reporting of the local press to be introduced as SDGs Reporting Award in line with accuracy, balanced, and fairness, handbook on SDG reporting to be published for rural journalists, rural data driven journalism to be introduced and increased collaboration with different government departments at district and upazilas.

The Community Radios are becoming an active ground for organizing dialogues at rural level in line with SDGs localization. These dialogues will help the rural mass to find out their own voice and ensure leverage their free opinion in respect of social, economic, political, cultural and environmental issues.

Community radio in Bangladesh is a two-way process that empowers people to identify problems and create solutions. It enables the most vulnerable to participate in decisions for positive change in their lives. Access to media and ICT should not be viewed as an end in itself but as a means to the ultimate goal of social inclusion. Community radio helps the remotest communities to integrate into national and global economies.

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