

Tribal Participation in Content Development for Community Radio: A Case Study of Radio Mattoli

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Abstract

Community radio creates an avenue for the community members to be a part of content development, its creation and broadcasting. The extent of community participation may vary with different stations. The present case study attempts to look into the Tribal participation in content development process of Radio Mattoli, a community radio from Kerala. The Tribals, an important section of the target population gets a platform to bring out their perspective on issues concerning them, by which the development agencies can conceptualize the tribal development programmes and policies putting the tribal perspective at the central point.

Keywords

Community Radio, Participatory Content Development

Introduction

Community radio is a type of radio that caters to the needs, interests and overall development of a community, otherwise overlooked by the mainstream media. It is the content which distinguishes a community radio from the other private and commercial radio stations, most of which generally broadcast songs and entertainment programmes. A glance through the history of community radio implies the diversity the term imparts to in different parts of the world. In UK it is synonymous with the many illegal pirate radio stations whereas in US community radios are non-profit, non-commercial services. In most of the countries, community radios work in similar lines. Despite the differences, the underlying motto is the same- to be the voice of the voiceless. As described by Dagon, community radio, is one of the best ways to reach excluded or marginalized communities in targeted, useful ways and giving them a 'voice' that matters most in development communication (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). Felder also, in the foreword of 'Making Waves' mentions the importance of voice in participatory communication.

Information and how it is made available to even the marginalized sections of the society is a vital aspect in the development process of any country. As per the census report

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of 2011, 68.64% of India's population dwells in rural areas, most of which lack even the basic amenities. This creates an imbalance in the information flow and thus the rural folk are unaware of the policies and programmes being developed for them by the government and agencies concerned. The mainstream media frequently ignore these concerns. Here is where the role of an alternative medium such as community radio comes in. It facilitates cost effective information flow, often in the local dialect, catering to the needs of the community.

Vertical practices tend to neglect the indigenous knowledge of any community. Thus, the idea of including beneficiaries at the grass root level helps in creating a sense of ownership within the community. This is also important when the sustainability factor is taken into account. So, assuring the inclusion of beneficiaries in all stages of content development- conceiving, planning, implementing and evaluating- is necessary to ensure horizontal communication, without which it is difficult to advocate development projects (Felder, 2001).

Community access and participation are the two foundations of any community radio station. As Bora & Bala (2012) put it, there are two types of community radio stations prevalent in Asia. One is the service model. In this type of stations, a definite duration of slots is allocated to air community programmes. In the other model, the radio station is located in the community itself. The latter allows and ensures the participation and contribution of the community members in the programme development process. Still there is another model in which community radio stations are owned by state rather than the community. The Kothmale Community Radio (KCR) of Sri Lanka is an example (Tacchi et al., 2009). The present paper is a case study of Community Radio Mattoli that caters to the development communication needs of the tribal communities residing in the hilltops of Northern parts of Kerala, through its unique style of content development.

Objectives of the Study

- To study participatory content development for community radio, taking Radio Mattoli as a case
- To understand the programme development mode of Radio Mattoli
- To understand the extent of tribal participation in content development

Location of the Study

Community Radio Mattoli is located in Mananthavady taluk, Wayanad district of Kerala. It stands on the southern top of the Deccan plateau, bounded on the east by Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu and Mysore district of Karnataka. It has Coorg district of Karnataka in the north and Malappuram of Kerala on the south. On the west, it is bounded by Kozhikode and Kannur districts of Kerala. The present Wayanad district came into being on the 1st November, 1980, with three Taluks - Vythiri, Mananthavady and Sulthan Bathery.

Community Radio Mattoli 90.4

Radio Mattoli was the first community radio station in Kerala and the 44th in India when it started broadcasting on June 1, 2009. Located at Dwaraka, Mananthavady taluk of Wayanad district, Radio Mattoli is the only radio station in the district. Its license holder, Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS), is an NGO under the Diocese of Mananthavady (No. 94/1974). It is the only electronic media in Kerala to broadcast programmes in tribal dialect daily. Its sustainability is ensured through projects and program support from Central and State Ministries and Government. Currently the station airs programme for 17 hours

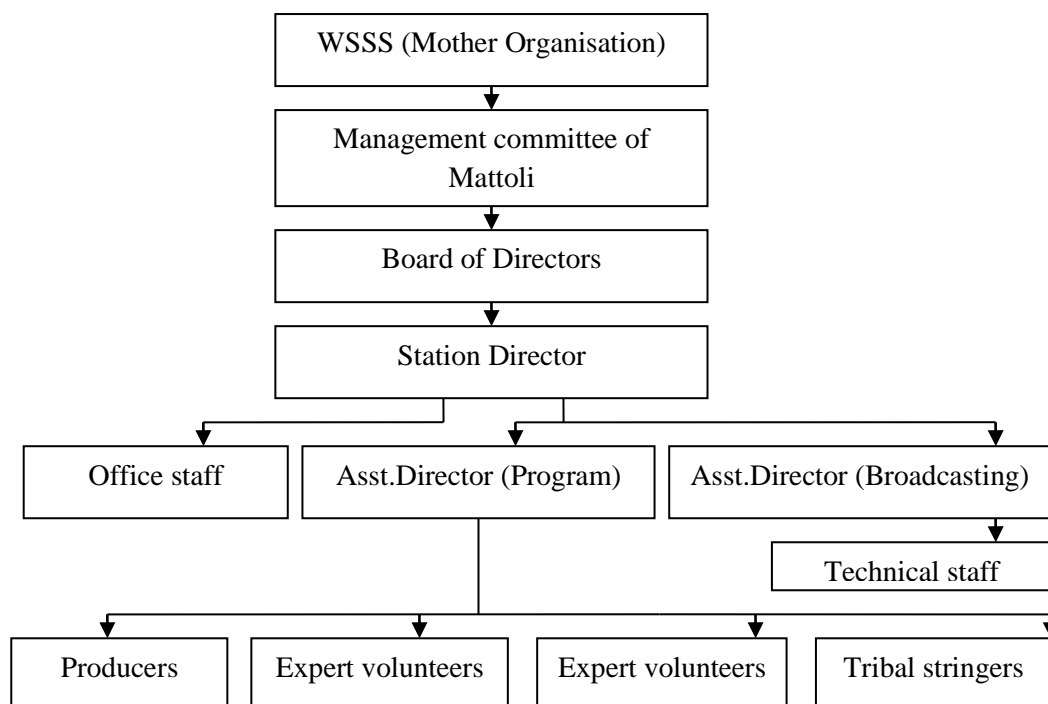
daily and cover about 85% of Wayanad district. The target audiences of Mattoli are marginal farmers, Tribals, Dalits, agricultural labors, women and children; with special focus on marginal farmers and Adivasis.

Methodology

Case study method was adopted for the present study. Personal communication with stake holders as well as data from online and other sources were used. Mattoli adopts participatory method in content development which can be described as content created after extensive discussions, conversations and decision- making with the target community; and where community group members take on content creation responsibilities according to their capacities and interests (Watkins & Tacchi, 2008). As Dagrón (2001) puts it, the word participation is kaleidoscopic which changes its color and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held. Even though it is a relatively new topic of interest to academicians, its roots could be traced back to the Miner's Radio of Bolivia.

The underrepresented sections of the society are given a platform through community media. This can actively be brought to action by ensuring the participation of the community members in the content development. Community Radio Mattoli aims listeners not as mere target audience, but as active, creative producers of media content.

Fig. 1: Organizational structure of Radio Mattoli

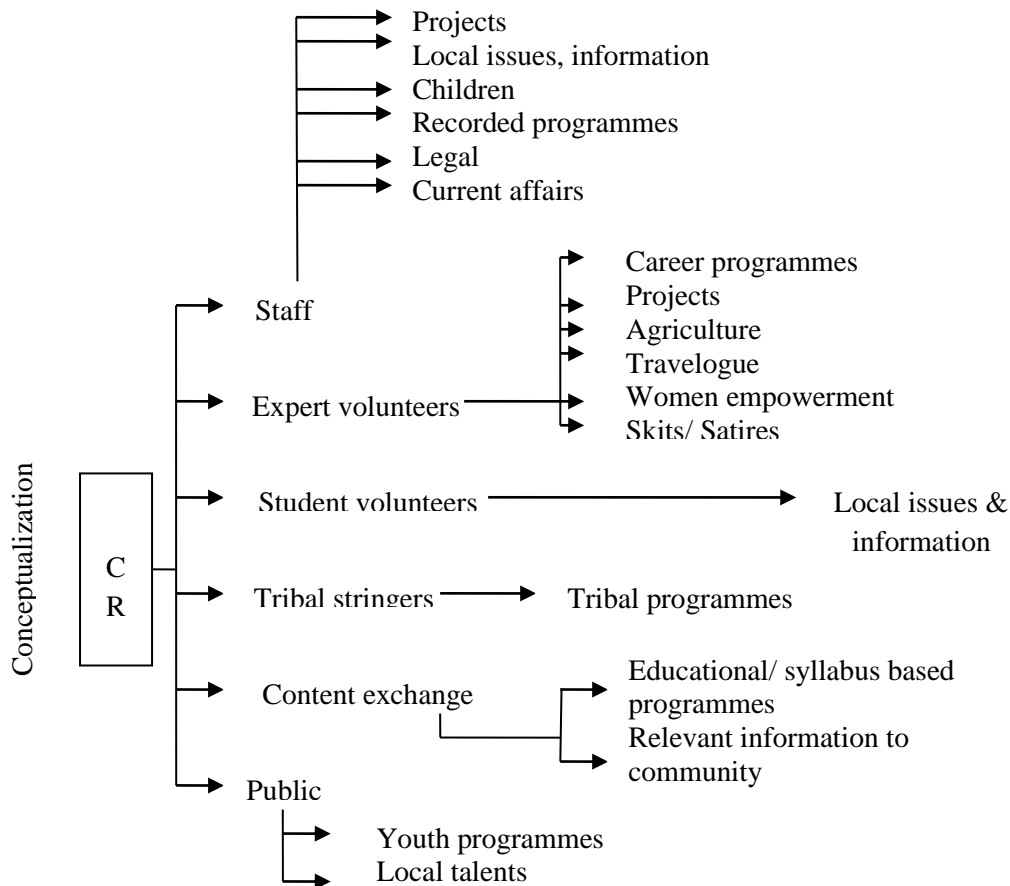


The Content Development Process

The AMARC charter states that community radio should promote and protect cultural diversity and inform their listeners on the basis of information drawn from a diversity of sources (Pavarala & Malik, 2007). The areas of operation of Mattoli include awareness building, empowerment of rural poor, community health and healthy life style, communal harmony and promotion of endangered cultures.

The content advisory committee of Radio Mattoli comprises of experts from various fields. The station consists of 16 staff and more than 80 volunteers, categorized as expert and student volunteers. The content for each programme is developed under the guidance and supervision of Assistant Director of programmes. Entire staff is involved in programme production, either directly or indirectly. The idea for each programme as said by Mr. Albin, one of the student volunteers is taken from the personal, day today experiences, topics of relevance, interest and importance to public. Books, newspapers, specialized magazines, internet and expert opinions are the main sources of data and statistics.

Fig.2: Content sources of Radio Mattoli



Books, newspapers, specialized magazines, internet and expert opinions are the main sources of data and statistics. The station director, Fr. Joseph Therakam handles a program titled ‘Jana Vaani’, a platform for the local people to voice their concerns, needs and problems. He observes that while the mainstream media turn a deaf ear to the voice of the majority of the population, the programme helps to bring issues to the visibility of authorities concerned and get necessary solutions. There are programmes devised to serve general as well as targeted audience. In collaboration with Education Department of Wayanad District, they have started Radio Mattoli Clubs in schools. About 100 school clubs are formed. Members of these clubs are given opportunity to broadcast their programs over Mattoli.

As Wayanad is an agrarian society special focus is given to agriculture programmes. General information for farmers, discussions on current affairs, announcements on climate, market rates and those from agriculture offices etc are aired on a regular basis. The market

rates are given in by the traders from all parts of Wayanad. Special programmes under the title ‘Gaveshana Kendrangaliloode’ speaks on the latest happenings and innovations in the field of farming with the inputs from various agricultural institutions such as Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR), Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI), Central Tuber Crop Research Institute (CTCRI) etc.

Sustainability

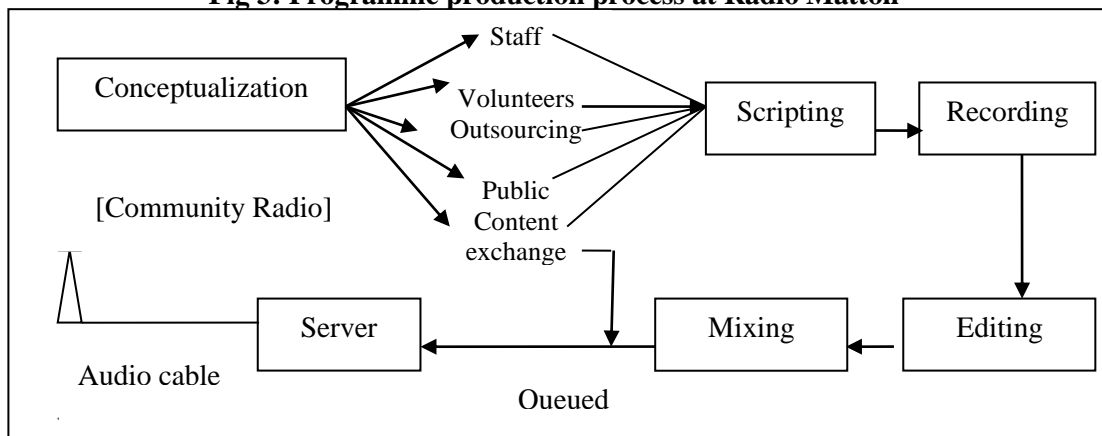
Various government departments and external agencies fund many of the programmes produced by Mattoli. ‘Njattuvela’ and ‘Vayalnadu’ are programmes done with assistance of Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) financed ‘Vardhini’, a programme series on subjects related to agriculture and allied activities, animal husbandry, women, child and tribal empowerment and entrepreneurship development. A weekly programme ‘Haritham Urjitham’ aimed at promotion and development of coffee in Wayanad was supported by Indian Coffee Board. ‘Jeevani’, a documentary series done with the financial assistance of The Kerala State Horticulture Mission and ‘Ksheera Vani’ with the assistance of Dairy Development Board. The operational cost is met also through ads and commercials. Studio renting for professional music recording and mixing is a nominal source of income.

The in charge of project documentation and co-ordination, Mr. Krishnakumar said that project funds are the main source of finance for Radio Mattoli and these are evaluated and documented on a regular basis. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting honoured Radio Mattoli with the topmost position in the category of Sustainable Model, in the National Community Radio Awards, 2013.

Programme Production

The regular staffs of Mattoli deal with the day to day administration and technical works. Being a community radio creates restriction for it to hire ample number of paid reporters. So, the need of people to work on voluntary basis is inevitable for a community radio.

Fig 3: Programme production process at Radio Mattoli



The programme sources of Mattoli are:

- Internal programme producers
- Volunteers
- Tribal stringers

- Public
- Content exchange

The staffs are trained experts in their respective fields. The programme producers take up projects funded by external organizations as well as cover their own beats. Expert volunteers are like the regular staff of Mattoli, but without wages. They also have certain beats assigned. The expert volunteers are senior persons from various fields of life. Most of them have regular slots. Student volunteers are trained and guided by experts and internal staff of Mattoli.

Apart from these, certain programmes are outsourced to experts from the field the programme demands. There is also programme content sharing. Radio Mattoli airs programmes, which are commonly relevant to its community members. For the time being, content sharing is done with State Institute for Education Technology (SIET), other community radio stations at Community Radio Association India (CRAI) Kerala chapter, Gyan Vani and Akashvani.

The programme schedule of Mattoli is divided into three modules. The morning module is from 6-12pm, afternoon from 12-6 pm and evening module from 6-11pm. Fresh programmes are broadcasted in the evening slot. Almost all programmes are repeated twice, first in the morning module next day and second in the afternoon module, third day. This ensures, to an extent, that the audiences do not miss any programme which is relevant to them.

Tribal Participation in Radio Mattoli

As per 2001 census, there are 35 scheduled tribes in Kerala and they contribute for 1.14% of the state's population. In the state, 37% of the Scheduled Tribes are concentrated in Wayanad district. They form 17.43% of the population of Wayanad. The tribes found in Wayanad district are:

1. Adiyar
2. Cholanaikar
3. Kaadar
4. Karimpalar
5. Katunaicken
6. Kurichchan
7. Kuruman
8. Malayarayan
9. Paniyar
10. Uralikurumar
11. Vettakuruman
12. Wayanad Thachenadan Moopan

Each of these tribes has their own dialects, distinguished from each other with the name of the tribe prefixed with the term 'bhasha', Malayalam equivalent for 'language'. Even though the tribes live in a scattered manner in Kerala, the Puthur Grama Panchayat in Attappady Block in Palakkad district and Noolpuzha Village in Wayanad district has more than 50% of tribal population.

96.1% of the Tribals in Kerala are rural dwellers. Mattoli has programmes developed and broadcasted in the tribal dialects, emphasizing their development, health and preservation of native languages and culture. The new generation is not much interested in these and hence their scriptless dialects are on the verge of extinction, says Mr. Sasikumar the Tribal Programs in charge of Radio Mattoli.

Thudichetham

As an effort to preserve and promote the native culture and language of Tribals, a 15 minutes duration slot titled 'Thudichetham' is broadcasted. The programme content in this slot is developed by the members and volunteers from Paniya, Adiya, Vettukuruma and Kaatunaikka tribes.

A study by Kerala Social Service Forum on the suicides in Wayanad revealed the fact that high incidences of suicides happened in the tribal groups, especially among the Paniyas. This was in contrast to the popular belief that suicides never happened among tribal groups. So special project programmes for creating awareness against alcohol are broadcasted on Mattoli. Information relevant to the Tribals is broadcasted weekly, in four dialects. This aids the Tribals to understand and participate in the development programmes being designed for them. The announcements by Tribal Department are also aired on Mattoli.

Apart from these, health and other relevant programmes translated from Malayalam are also broadcasted. Translation to local dialects poses a challenge as most of the Malayalam terms lack a corresponding term in their dialects. Thus, Mattoli has a key role in preservation and development of indigenous dialects. Currently less than 10 Tribal volunteers are engaged with Mattoli. Though financial constraints prevent the incoming and of sustenance of more of them, it is applaudable that the Tribals are brought to the mainstream communication network.

Major Findings

Content development with the participation of Tribal communities in their language helps to:

- Highlight the tribal perspective of development and encourage to embed the same in Local Self Government development policies
- Preserve the script-less language of tribal communities
- Bring the tribal members to mainstream communication network

Conclusion

Radio Mattoli takes care to ensure community participation in all phases of production- content generation, programme preparation and post production activities. It is also taken care to ensure the participation of targeted audience like farmers, women, children and Tribals.

The Tribal programmes aired by Radio Mattoli helps this immensely marginalized section to have a platform to bring out their perspective in issues concerning them. They are also enabled to participate in the development process being carried out for them. Radio Mattoli acts as a facilitator for the preservation and development of their language and culture. Preservation of native dialects is made possible through the participation of respective tribes in the content and programme development. As Tribals are getting mainstreamed, the erosion of their culture and tradition is accelerated. In the process, their native languages are losing importance as tokens of cultural transmission and are facing threat of getting lost forever. Radio Mattoli's unique content development style helps in the process of developing, conserving and transmitting the language, culture and tradition of the Tribals for generations to come.

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