

TRAI CONSULTATION PAPER ON CR IN INDIA – RECOMMENDATIONS

From the People's Power Collective & Mandakini Ki Aawaz Collaboration – Village Sena Gadsari, via Chandrapuri, Rudraprayag District, Uttarakhand

People's P.ow.e.r Collective (P.P.C) is a registered, public trust; a non-profit organization, working in the Community Radio (C.R) sector in India. P.P.C launched its training and capacity-building programme in Uttarakhand with its partner organisation, Mandakini ki Aawaz (M.K.A) in June 2013. M.K.A will begin broadcasting soon (i.e. SACFA clearance has just been received and GOPA/WOL is in play).

Based on our first-hand experiences in the field as part of P.P.C and M.K.A's collaborative effort to bring community radio to these remote and isolated villages of Rudraprayag District, both teams have drafted a list of recommendations that have been broadly classified under three main heads – ***Radio in a Box, Repeaters in Hilly Terrains and Permission for News on Community Radio Channels.***

1. Radio in a Box

- a. The floods of June 2013, severely affected the Mandakini River Valley Region. During the floods, both P.P.C and M.K.A teams worked alongside other community members, helping relief operations in the region. The biggest challenge faced by the local community and all disaster management teams on the ground at the time, was the lack of relevant and timely information in the local language. A broadcasting radio station would have been a great asset to the catchment community at the time and could have played a responsible role in Disaster preparedness (a continuous and ongoing process), Relief, Rehabilitation and Responsible Reconstruction of the region.
- b. Considering the complete lack of connectivity during times of disaster (like roads being cut off, unavailability of phone networks, power cuts etc) what will enable M.K.A and other broadcasting C.R station to be truly effective during such crises, will be the 'Radio in a Box' facility. Radio in a Box serves the crucial purpose of communication immediately post a disaster and is most effective for the first 30 days. Owing to its easy set-up and function of mobility, it is highly effective in disaster scenarios.
- c. We believe that C.R could work in collaboration with disaster management agencies such as NDMA and NDRF and other state level agencies, to truly be of service to its catchment community in times of need. We understand that security is one of the biggest concerns preventing the government from allowing community radio stations to be in possession of mobile transmitters. In the spirit of working collaboratively, one possibility could be that either the district administration or any other government agency could hold onto the mobile transmitter and authorize community radio stations in the region to use them during times of crises. C.R has the potential to be a great resource to Disaster Management agencies during times of disaster because C.R Stations already have an existing network in the community and the relationship between the community radio station and the community is a deeply personal one, founded on mutual trust. This kind of relationship could prove to be invaluable to Disaster Management agencies, NGOs and organizations interested in reaching out to the community and ensuring responsible relief, rescue and rehabilitation processes.

2. Repeaters in Hilly Terrains:

- a. While the C.R policy in India allows C.R stations to broadcast to a 5km – 10 Km radius, the terrain in the hills means that the broadcast radius of C.R stations is often limited to less than 1-2 km. This often means that one half of a village is able to listen to the C.R station and the other half of the village which falls on the other side of the hill cannot. In order to even reach out to the basic 5 km radius, it is necessary to allow C.R stations in hilly terrains to use repeaters.
- b. M.K.A is the only radio station in the Mandakini River Valley, which is a disaster prone region, with earthquakes, floods, forest fires, landslides and gale winds almost regular features. The M.K.A-P.P.C collaboration has received a lot of encouragement from the district administration because of C.R's potential as a tool for disaster management. In order for C.R to be effective even as a tool for disaster management in Rudraprayag District, it is essential for M.K.A to be allowed to broadcast till the Kedarnath region, at least until another broadcasting radio station is established in the region. We urge the government to assess need for repeaters on a case by case basis and consider M.K.A and other



C.R stations in a similar situation eligible for repeaters, in order to ensure the C.R station is able to serve its catchment community effectively and to its allowed capacity.

3. Permission for News on Community Radio Channels

- a. In media shadow/dark regions, information in any form is hard to come by. In the hills of Rudraprayag, newspapers often don't reach remote villages and levels of illiteracy, often means that many cannot access news through newspapers; erratic power supply and poverty hinders access to television news. Even for those who have access to these sources of news, local news is impossible to access, because remote areas are simply not covered by any media. In such a scenario, C.R becomes the primary and sometimes only source of news for many villages - especially local news in the local language.
- b. When the government opened up the airwaves to NGOs in India, it was done in the spirit of democratizing the airwaves and making available to communities, a simple, easy-to-use, cost-effective medium that could empower them and galvanize change. The refusal to allow responsible and balanced community journalists to broadcast news to their communities seems counter-intuitive to the very spirit of C.R. At a time, when private corporations are being allowed to be major stakeholders in television networks and run television news channels, it seems unfair to deny grassroots organizations the opportunity to broadcast news.