



## Role of Local/Community Radio on Rural Development

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### Abstract

*This paper renders role of local/community radio on rural development in general and rural community development process in particular. By applying library based research method, necessary informations are generated through literature review. This paper highlights that community radio has brought positive impacts particularly in seven thematic areas (i.e. suitability, agricultural transformation, promoting participatory democracy, voice of voiceless, information/discussion forum on local issues, empowering unprivileged rural people and contribution on good governance). Thus, better to offer radio programs by the local level authorities in such thematic areas for strengthening rural development process in general and rural community development process in particular.*

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**Key words:** Role, local/community radio, community development, rural development

### Introduction

Development is not easy to define as there have been divergent views among the academicians, development experts and researchers regarding the concept (Asemah et. al. 2013). If we look at the history, development has been conceptualized from various perspectives, in which various indicators such as social change, modernization, progress; alternations in life-styles, Gross National Product (GNP) etc are associated. With the change of society, there has been also change in the concept of development as well. Various paradigms of development had a different notion about development. In the 1950s and 1960s development theorists and practitioners conceptualized development as economic development which can be achieved through industrialization and urbanization (Narula, 1994). In the 1970s development included the improvement of quality life with programs of nutritional status, maternal, child health, primary health care and transformation of individuals as well as the social system. In the 1980s, it further incorporated issues like poverty eradication, land reformation and providing, minimum basic needs in its concept. Similarly, during 1990s it stressed on technological development (Narula, 1994).

Recent development thinking has moved away from objectives of raising the GNP industrialization and modernization. There is, however, largely consensus that development is process of improving the living conditions of society and its' people. These days development is linked with prevention of degradation of environment, preservation of scarce natural resources or finding alternative to them, population control, and so forth. It covers a wide range of human endeavors such as improvement of quality of life with programs of nutritional status, maternal and child health and primary health care, transformation of individuals as well as the social system (Narula, 1994). The

essence of development is the development of people with change in their attitude, triggering the change of habit (Asemah, 2010).

## **Media and Development**

Media is widely taken as a tool to promote and create awareness and help people positive behavioral changes in the society. It has been often credited for development of society. Nonetheless, role of media has been a subject of considerable speculations. There are divergent views as some believe that media plays absolute dominant role in development but other argues that media can't do alone. There various theory regarding the role of media in the society. The Media Development Theory is widely cited in terms of role of media in development. Denis McQuail, one of proponents of this theory argues that media are agents of development and social change in any community and asserts that important role to play in the development process especially in the developing countries (McQuail, 1987). In doing so, the theory says that media should always support the efforts led by governments by carrying out program which facilitates positive behavioral change in the society (Asemah et. al., 2013). "The theory of media and development has several variants.

The contribution of mass media can take several forms. They can help to promote diffusion and adoption of many technical and social innovations, which are essential to modernization. They can teach literacy and other essential skills and techniques. They encourage the state of mind favorable to modernity especially the possibility to imagine an alternative way of life," (McQuail, 2002). The Development Media Theory emphasized the media to develop the society as it has the capacity to positively affect the society. It is vitally important to utilize the mass media to bring social changes and political and economic development in a society (Asemah et. al., 2013). Hence, this paper tried to appraise role of local/community radio in rural development process in general and community development process in particular.

## **An Interface: Local/Community Radio and Rural Development Process**

The term 'rural' refers the territories which lie outside of urban areas (Asemah et. al. 2013). It is a location which falls under disadvantageous geographical conditions, residents live in relatively shabby houses which are dispersed and public services and facilities are virtually non-existent. Rural areas usually have limited or absence of facilities like electricity and water supplies, access roads, transportation services, public health and educational facilities and other public infrastructures (Asemah et. al., 2013). Due to the lack of development infrastructures and basic facilities, the locals of the rural areas often face several problems. The economic activities are limited to farming, animal husbandry, fisheries and home manufacturing. Educational level and literacy rate also low, people have limited or low opportunities to work and per-capita household incomes are remains also low.

The term Rural Development means as overall development such as social, economic, political and cultural of rural society so that its people could live a dignified life. The all the interventions aimed at improving productivity, increasing employment and thereby incomes, having food security, access to shelter, education, health and housing is termed as rural development (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010). Rural areas often suffer from isolation and often face lack of communication with the other part of the world. Information and communication is often termed as power in this 21st century which is vitally important for development of people. However, the rural areas are often detached from all kinds of information and a digital divide is created which discriminate themselves from the outside world. In

this context, Mass Media are the ones which link them with the rest of the world and provide a source of information that is happening around the world. Rural people need information about the happenings in and around the society which makes their living better (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010).

Rural society is often termed as conservative dealing with in any issues such as approach to health and education, farming practices and others. Unless and until a fundamental change in the way people's approach to education, employment, entrepreneurship, farming practices, rate of new technologies adaptations, transportations, and market access among others, no development is possible. For this, rural communities need to be informed on the importance of adapting these new practices. For this, mass media can be a source of information and awareness. Information and awareness is considered as the catalyst of change in any society.

### **The Focus: Local/Community Radio for Rural Community Development**

Nepal is predominantly a rural country where significant percentages of people still live in rural areas. Since other forms of mass media do not exist and survive, local or community radios are common mass medium operating in the rural areas in Nepal. Experts often have different views regarding local and community radio. Local radio is not the same as community radio in broad sense. There are clearly distinctions. In principle, a community radio is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. They are not operated for profit making rather to give a voice to voiceless, marginalized people of rural society (Girard, 1992). There are basically three kinds of community radios operating in the rural community in Nepal, namely, radios run by Cooperative such as Radio Lumbini, radios run by Local Administration such as Radio Madan Pokhra and Radio run by NGO such as Radio Sagarmatha (Wabwire, 2013). However, the basic notion of all the radios are same; small community owned and managed, serving the community and no-commercial and non-profit making in purpose. There are other kinds of radio also operating in the rural areas owned private company which is generally referred as commercial radio. Theoretically and legally (in registration or getting licensing), there is no clear distinction between private and community (run by cooperative, local administration unit and NGOs) in Nepal, their approach and motive is somewhat different. Nonetheless, unlike national radio stations, these radios broadcast relevant information to the communities where they operate. Therefore, be it commercial or community, by and large they are familiar with the needs and desires of their community members, and providing information as per the need of the people.

Nepal is considered a pioneer in terms of development of local radio in south Asia. "Nepal has been among the countries in Asia where the community radio movement has been most successful and it played a vital role in disseminating information and promoting dialogue for peace," (AMARC appeals, 2005). FM radios are the leading media that are contributing in rural communication and it is being more widespread and effective with the emergence of local and community Radio stations. Various studies conducted by researchers in Nepal and beyond have clearly demonstrated that local radio can contribute a lot to the community to make life of the community people better. Local/community radio contributes to promote participation, share opinion, knowledge and skills improving and diversification and in catering to health and cultural needs of the rural communities, especially in the developing countries (Wabwire, 2013).

## **Objectives**

- To look at an interface between local/community radio and rural development process.
- To appraise role of local/community radio in rural community development process.

## **Material and Methods**

This paper highlighted role of local/community radio in rural development process through the help of secondary sources of data. Hence, this is library based research in which required data are collected through books, articles as well as published and unpublished reports and documents.

## **Discussions: Suitability**

The rural communities are often separated by mountains, valleys, gorges or rivers. Since, transportation and communication infrastructures in all these areas are underdeveloped or semi-developed, local/communities radios are an appropriate medium in these remote and geographically and culturally diverse areas. These radios use technologies which are appropriate and affordable. Operation cost also relatively low in comparison to other media such as print and television. Radio is cost-effective medium with comparatively simple technology, and more suitable for illiterate people (Pavara & Vinod 2003). Most of the times, radio is the only mass medium available in the rural communities. With poor transportation systems and low purchasing power, it can be the most appropriate medium of mass communication (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). Radio is oral mass media and therefore, low literacy level of rural people cannot limit the access. As it has low production and distribution costs, it can be affordable, sustainable, effective, powerful and local. It can cover large numbers of scattered populations. According to Ambekar (2004), people can listen to its programs without disturbing their household chores and other activities. In most of the rural areas, it is the only source of information about employment, livelihood options, agricultural practices, access to market and market prices of agricultural produces.

In this context, local radio can become the most effective medium of communication for community members in isolated villages (Banjade, 2007). Thus, this medium can reach out to the most remote communities and to people from all walks of life (Buckley, 2006).

## **Agricultural Transformation**

The term rural development is often discussed together with agricultural development. In Nepal, most agricultural communities live in rural areas and most people in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The basic life necessities like food, shelter and clothing is fulfilled by the income generated from agriculture. In order to develop the rural areas, it is important that the agricultural sector is developed. Development implies change and change in the attitude of the farmers is one of major indicator of rural development. Farming is a major economic activity or profession or livelihood option for rural people. However, the productivity is low due to low level of awareness or education of rural people. For this, the major cause is lack of scientific knowledge of farming. For reaching the basic agricultural information to users in rural areas today, local radios are only and easy medium which could contribute to promote the agriculture sector in rural areas (Khanal, 1989). The pivotal role of local radio therefore becomes handy.

Local radios help passing the vital information for agricultural development for example information on better farming methods, improved seeds, timely planting, agro-forestry, better harvesting

methods, soil conservation, marketing, post harvest handling and diversification among others (Wabwire, 2013). It also informs rural people about appropriate modern technologies and improves and implements indigenous technologies. Further, local radio gives farmers an opportunity to interact with each other and other relevant authorities like farm workers, crop and animal experts through programs like live talk shows, phone-in programs and on location broadcasts (Banjade, 2007). On the top of that local radio enables communities to articulate their experiences and to critically examine issues and policies affecting their lives. These policies can be debated and discussed and immediate feedback can be given for relevant authorities to take action (Banjade, 2007).

### **Promoting Participatory Democracy**

Local/community radio gives community members access to information because as local radios provides access to the means of communication them. Local radios work as a common forum where people are given the opportunity to express themselves socially, politically and culturally. These radios prioritize important local issues. Mostly educational and developmental information are disseminated and exchanged. Further, it informs about the development activities in rural areas and exposes rural problems to government agencies and NGOs strengthening democratic practices in rural areas. Local radio/community radio encourage community members take the lead for their own cause. They can reinforce traditional forms of communication such as storytelling and group discussion enabling grassroots participation in policy-making and democracy. It also supports community members in introduction of income-generating activities (Banjade, 2007).

### **Voice of Voiceless**

Local/community radios are known as small community owned and locally managed. The philosophy of community radio is considered as the voice of the voiceless. It is considered as the medium which help raise voice of socially and economically deprived people and generally as a tool for development (AMARC, 1981). These radios serve people, encourage expression and participation and value local culture increasing access to information and empowering the communities. It works as a tool for highlighting their fundamental rights of marginalized communities and became the voice of the poor and the voiceless, the landless peasants and impoverished indigenous people (Wabwire, 2013). They demystify the scientific jargon and help explain the research and scientific information in simpler and ordinary language that people can easily understand. They assist the development of local communities by providing relevant information in local languages. One of the major benefits of such radio is empowering local people to speak up for themselves. Since local radios are one and only source of information in rural areas, these radios provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences. Therefore, it gives voice to rural people. These local radios could also expose rural people and local talents, local champions who are serving their communities in various ways.

### **Information/ Discussion Forum on Local Issues**

Since, local radios are set up in the community and for the community members, these radio become well aware about needs and problems of community people due to proximity to the listeners. They know community members and they are always sensitive to what their listener wants. Therefore, local radio stations talk about every specific problem in the communities they serve (Banjade, 2007). They emphasize contents, namely, political and economic news that facilitates community dialogue

and involvement, community and personal messages, information programs, and culturally relevant entertainment. It provides the platform for debates in communities (Patel, 1998). Through access of relevant information and debate, these radios contribute for community empowerment.

### **Empowering Unprivileged Rural People**

Empowerment is a process where people become aware of how power relations operate in their lives (Nirmala, 2015). With more awareness, people gain self-confidence and strength to challenge various social injustices, problems and inequalities within society. The information provided by newspapers, radio, and television shapes their opinions. In rural context, local/community radios work as a substitute for formal education. It contributes on rising awareness regarding women's development, environment conservation, scientific farming, entrepreneurship, employment options and many more.

By providing timely and relevant information on injustice, opportunities, experiences, skills, development issues and public interests, local radios has the ability to involve rural communities, women, dalits, indigenous people and underprivileged people in an interactive social communication process. By providing debate and discussion on the various local issues, it empowers locals on various issues. The process of empowerment enables people to develop in them self-dignity. It enables them to raise voice and fight against injustice, exploitation, abuse, and violence done to them. It contributes to sustainable development by enabling people to take control over their own livelihoods, identifying their needs and problems and providing access to knowledge and information to enable informed choices.

### **Contribution on Good Governance**

In a democracy, the watchdog role of media is vital where it let people know about what is happening in the society (Ashraf, 2014). Media check on the state which is considered as its primary democratic function. Media has an important role to play in shaping a healthy democracy and ensuring good governs. According to Norris, the media has three key roles in contributing to democratization and good governance. Watchdog over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny are often credited for mass media in terms of its very vital function. Local radio too serves as a watchdog on power holders in the society, affording active relationships between local leaders and the members in the society. Highlighting the policy failures, maladministration, corruption and scandals of the local government, local radio fulfils the watchdog role. Buckley (2006) argues that community media can contribute to good governance by identifying corruption and holding leaders to account.

### **Conclusion**

Rural radio is considered very important aspect in the rural area. It helps to cater the information need of rural people. Community or local media have significant role to play in rural development. Although like all other mass media, the basic or direct function of this local radio is to provide the rural community information on various contemporary issues that is happening everyday around the community, country and beyond. It focuses on the programs that would be helpful to the rural and agricultural based people. However, being the single or handful communication media being exist in the locality, it has divergent roles to play ultimately contributing to social change and development of rural community. On one hand, it could be source of education for some members of the community as it provides important lesson learned and share experiences of others while on the other hand, it could also be the medium for inspiration or encouragement for many. It could also be a tool to express

their voices against social injustices and discriminations being faced in the society and empowering themselves. The local radios could also play vital role in checking the widespread crimes, corruptions and other irregularities that is happening in the country and community and play the watch dog role. A community radio is an effective means of social change. It can play a vital role promoting local language, culture, development, co-operation and harmony in the society. It also makes the local people aware of their rights and duties. The community radio gives opportunity to express problems, success, grievances experiences, ideas and talent. All in all, the local or community media provides a forum to rural people, provides important information, awareness, empowers them and contributes to the sustainable development of the society.

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