

Communities find knowledge through community radio

The KVK Barh community radio station has generated considerable awareness among people on issues like seasonal diseases, safe childbirth and the importance of using toilets.

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*“Community radio is the voice for the voiceless.
Community radio is the repository of knowledge and
science.
Through the community and through their language.
Community radio provides solution to the social
problems.”*

*-Mritunjay, a radio jockey at KVK Barh community
radio station*

THIS set of beliefs guides Krishi Vigyan Kendra
(KVK) Barh community radio station located

on the outskirts of Bihar’s capital Patna, which was initially set up on May 17, 2011 to disseminate information on agriculture-related issues, is now being increasingly used to air programmes on issues of health, nutrition and hygiene. The station runs on 91.2 MHz FM radio band with programmes aired for four hours in a day. One and a half hour of programmes are aired in the morning and two and a half hour in the evening. *Swasth Charcha* is a 30-minute programme that airs dramas, talks, discussions and interviews on health, nutrition and hygiene with focus on

*An Auxillary Nurse
Midwife (ANM) with the
team of KVK Barh records
a radio programme
on health and girls’
education.*



women and children. Discussions are usually on topics such as contagious and seasonal diseases, ante-natal care, safe childbirth, post-natal care, newborn care, infant and child nutrition, Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND), sanitation and hygiene practices and so on.

These programmes have played a positive role in sensitising the community on various aspects. For example, lack of toilets and their disuse when available, is a huge issue in Bihar. This is known to lead to school drop-outs and poor attendance, particularly amongst girls who have attained puberty. One of the primary schools in the area where the programmes are being aired has a toilet within its boundary, but it remained locked-up and was meant for teachers' use only, as per the school rules.

This situation was brought to the notice of the radio jockeys at the station, and was then discussed and aired through its radio programmes. The radio jockeys also ensured that the community in the villages surrounding the school listened to the programme through their community radio listeners' club. At a follow up visit to the listener's club, the radio jockeys found that the local community strongly felt that students and especially girls should be allowed to use the toilet. A group of local influential people from the community visited the school and advocated for the toilet to be accessed by students as well. Recognising the demand from the community, the school now allows the students to use the toilet.

The involvement of frontline health workers helps to establish that the information provided through the radio programmes is authentic.

Popular radio jockey Mritunjay motivates members from the local community to join as speakers at the station. Local people gather regularly at the station to record programmes on women's education, health and other development issues. They are joined by the Sarpanch (village headman), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), Accredited Social



A group of high school girls regularly listens to the programme, Swasth Charcha, which advises them on the importance of safe drinking water, handwashing and hygiene practices and the need for including fruits in diet.

Health Activists (ASHA) and social workers to discuss how education can create awareness among women on issues of health and hygiene.

Interviews with doctors and experts are viewed as credible sources of information by the community. Similarly the involvement of ANMs and ASHAs helps to establish that the information provided through the radio programmes is authentic. The speakers go back to their own villages and encourage the villagers to listen to the programmes. Both Hindi and Magahi languages are used to develop radio programmes by participants.

Sudha, an ANM in the area, observes that the community radio station has been able to create greater awareness among the community about the health of both mothers and children. She says that even when there are other sources of entertainment, radio continues to be popular. Many older people in the community usually have radio sets that they use to listen to community radio programmes.

“I have noticed that now the community is aware of the services available at the VHSND. They know that the VHSND is held at the Anganwadi centre every week where advice is provided on issues such as immunisation of children, feeding practices and food habits for pregnant women and new mothers and children between the age group of 0-6 years. I have also participated in radio programmes. These programmes focussed on ante-natal care,” says an excited Sudha.

The community radio station in Barh has set up listeners' groups among communities. A group of high school girls says, "We use our mobile phones to listen to radio programmes. We regularly listen to the programme, *Swasth Charcha*, which advises us about the importance of safe drinking water, washing hands before eating, and other hygiene practices and the need for including fruits in our diet. The girls were also invited to participate in a radio programme that was aired on No Tobacco Day. One of them enthusiastically sang the jingle she had developed for the programme. Saying that they like listening to the radio station, they add, "We get to hear our own people speaking through this radio station. This is the best thing about this radio station."

"In Bihar, the success of community radio also depends on how actively it has involved Mahadalits in producing programmes."

Another popular programme is *Dr Chacha*, which focusses on the subject of drug addiction. It delivers powerful messages that create awareness on the ill-effects of drug abuse. Such radio dramas generate listener interest through an engaging and interesting manner. Given the content and the presentation of the programmes, it is a little wonder that the radio station is emerging as a catalyst for positive change in rural Bihar. Community radio officials report that

there now seems to be a better awareness among community members on issues like female foeticide, colostrum feeding and the importance of using toilets.

Bihar is one of the first states to constitute a commission for the poorest among Dalits, called the State Mahadalit Commission. The state distributed six lakh radio sets among Mahadalits to listen to radio programmes on various government schemes meant for marginalised groups. In Bihar, the success of community radio depends not only to the extent to which the radio has been able to include the Mahadalit communities in listener groups, but also on how actively it has involved them in producing radio programmes.

In 2011, KVK Barh, started with approximately 40 listener groups in Barh and 10 more new groups were set up in 2014. The radio station has been successful in reaching out to some of these marginalised communities with programmes on health, nutrition and water and sanitation related issues.

Success seems to be driven by some key factors. When the community hears its own people speaking they are able to easily connect their real-life experiences with the discussions. The programmes also raise the profile of the frontline service providers by making their work not only more credible but also accountable and hence it generates interest amongst the providers too. Apart from participating and recording the radio programmes, the community has also started to produce radio programmes on its own. □

Footnote

The SWASTH programme aims to improve the health and nutritional status of people of Bihar by increasing access to better quality health, nutrition, and water and sanitation services particularly for the underserved groups. The focus of this programme is to strengthen the systems through better planning, organisational strengthening and human resource management, decentralisation and convergence among key departments. The programme also uses community level processes to manage, demand and monitor services.

This story was written by Anannya Chakraborty at OneWorld Foundation India.

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