

RADIO AND SDG s

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I would begin by telling you a story. In 2018, SMART, brought out a publication, 'Communicating the Sustainable Development Goals: A toolkit for community radios'. After an intensive workshop on building content of the SDGs, with around 90 community radio stations we visited a few of the CRS. During one of our visits and interactions with the community members we realised the power of local radios to mobilise community action. A regular listener of the community radio, an auto driver, told us that he had been listening to a series of programmes on water conservation and sanitation, where the RJ would repeatedly say that little actions could make a major difference. While ferrying passengers to different parts of the city this auto driver, spurred by RJ's exhortation, began to click photos of pipe leakage – be it a water pipe or a sewage pipe. He used to click a picture and then WhatsApp it to the radio station with a little audio message about the location and the issue. The station would then promptly call the municipal corporation and insist on the need for urgent action. They also started announcing the name of the listener and giving details of where the leak was. Soon enough the municipal corporation started responding and action was taken. This became a routine where more and more people joined in this community action and in a matter of 6-8 months the results started showing. This collective and participative approach helped even revive some of the old forgotten water bodies. A proactive citizenry, media and government agencies all worked together to achieve the targets of Goal 6 of the SDG- Clean Water and Sanitation.

Community Radios are a powerful tool for community engagement. Limited by the power of the transmitter, they cater to targeted populations in specific geographies with a population of 250,000 - 500,000. Thus, they are the most appropriate medium to mobilise people to work towards meeting the 2030 agenda. Research based evidence bears testimony to the fact that community-driven approaches have a sustainable impact as they empower local communities and promote citizen-centric action. Hence, to propel the agenda of SDGs it is important to engage with citizens and organizations that work on the ground.

However, the biggest challenge of the SDGs, as I see it, is involvement of the community. Though there is a long 'to do' list for governments the most important aspect 'people' somehow is missing. Thus what we as community radios can do is:

1. Demystify the 17 Goals and the targets into as many languages as possible in India. We can localise and contextualise the goals and link them to the aspirations and needs of the communities including households, families and individuals. For example- a water crises in Chennai should elicit a desire to fight the crises?
2. Breach the Silos and break the walls between government, multinational bodies, business, and civil society to successfully meet the vision.
3. Sensitise local bodies like Panchayats to the SDGs. The local government institutions are important stakeholders as they have the power to influence public opinion.
4. Strengthen the linkages between the Goals and set short term goals. The SDGs are interconnected and interwoven. One cannot have No hunger if you still have poverty, one cannot have good health if one does not have access to clean water or sanitation. Again how can one have an assured livelihood if one is not disaster resilient and so on. Thus, a holistic approach towards development is the only answer.

5. Address the asymmetry of information to reduce disparities, discrimination and gender bias. Equal opportunities and a gendered perspective for economic gains will have to be an integral part of each goal for equity, equality and access.

6. The government of India has launched several schemes that are aligned to various SDG goals. Swachh Bharat, BetiBachao Beti Padhao, Janani Suraksha Yojna , Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna, Poshan Abhiyan, Mudra Bank, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, crop insurance and hundreds of other schemes all aligned to 169 SDG targets. What is critical here is that these schemes reach the targeted population. Community radios can make this happen.

7. Introduce the SDGs in all the programming content, they are linked to every activity and aspect of our daily lives. Encourage people to read about them, quiz people in competitive exams, give incentives to corporates for aligning their policies with the goals.

8. Facilitate more discussions, conversations, debates and campaigns to make SDGs a part of our vocabulary. Make an effort to align actions that we take as a community to SDG Goals. With less than 3000 days left to meet the targets, effort should be to focus on health, gender, climate action and poverty alleviation.

9. As the future belongs to the youth, more and more young people need to be a part of this process.

10. Take responsibility for the success of SDGs as they are linked to our stories and our challenges in achieving our dreams. We need to own them, believe in them and become an equal stakeholder, because it is in our interest that we achieve these goals. We cannot delay any further -the work needs to begin now!