

## Radio for Harmony

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In its 6<sup>th</sup> edition of The Radio Festival, this year's theme for the World Radio Day is Radio and Peace.

The absence of war and conflict is a precondition to sustainable peace. After the end of the Second World War, on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1945 the Constitution of UNESCO was adopted, I quote "...since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" With a focus on education, scientific temper and culture, the work of UNESCO has since focused on how radios could play a positive role in informing, minimizing conflicts and tensions, facilitating free flowing and respectful open dialogues among people in the community with different viewpoints to share their perspectives, creating a conducive environment for peace. Radios, as other media is a powerful tool for creating and furthering a political agenda, a propaganda tool and a tool of democratization.

Radios continue to be an important source of reliable information and knowledge amidst the cacophony of sounds that reverberates across multiple mediums, especially the social media space. The three tiers of broadcasting, be it the public service broadcaster, the private sector broadcasters or the community radio stations that have used the FM frequency band to reach a select audience have to abide by the broadcasting code and play a responsible role in ensuring that the radios do not trigger conflicts but truly as brokers of peace.

In periods of natural disasters and calamities, community radios have played a very crucial role of informing and supporting the state in reaching information to the affected citizens, and in responding to the needs of the community.

Independent radios play a crucial role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. When radio stations fall prey to false propaganda, further fake news, rely on hearsay or rumours, it can become inflammatory. Added to it, if radio broadcasts without fact finding for accuracy checks, or investigations, it can result in triggering disharmony and conflicts or unrest among the communities. Often, when communities experience gaps in governance and service delivery, and their experience is in variance with the claims of delivery of government services, there is need to have a balanced reportage. The community radios have to play a responsible role in identifying and locating the gaps in the delivery and bring the local leadership in an open dialogue with the community.

The formats that community radio stations use to bring this to a reality is through innovative and collaborative styles of delivery of content for the discerning listeners. Call-ins, talk shows, listener's forum, narrowcasting dialogues, etc. allow the otherwise quiet or silent minority raise their concerns

to the decision makers, thus creating space for communities' voices to be heard. It also helps to create democratic processes to respectfully listen to each other's disagreements and contrary experiences.

Even where social media has reached nearly 38% of the populace with access to affordable smart phones, there continues to be a socio-economic and gendered divide on its use. While the number of digitally connected devices have reached a whopping 2.2 billion in 2022 in India, up from 1.6 billion in 2017, the critical equity and access questions emerged as a big challenge.

In light of the recent Covid 19 lockdown triggered a lot of reasons for local stresses and conflicts. Triggered by reverse migration, loss of jobs and livelihoods and need to work from homes, created increased stresses, domestic violence and denial of access to education, as schools got online. It is a slow and cautious return to normalcy. Community radios played a pivotal role in enabling citizens to avail and access services during the lockdown, and also thereafter.

Often times, access to information was available only through FM radios (accessible even on simple mobile phones) and community radios played an yeomen service in creating awareness about policy and guidelines during the lockdown, often working from their own homes. They also partnered with other agencies of the government in enabling that information reached the last mile.

The radio is here to stay. However, the community radio sector, in particular, as a whole, needs to supported technically, financially and with capacities to become brokers of sustainable peace. They have struggled through this pandemic and the aftermath, and need the skills and wherewithal to catapult them as champions of peace.

As DRM roadmap for radios, and particularly in the FM band kicks in by the government in, it will be important to delicense the analog frequencies and allow a licence fee free assignment of frequencies for the remote and distant communities so that the community radios can live, thrive and create long lasting peace.

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