

Development Programme

Community Radio for Change

Thomas Joseph Therakam*

The role of the community radio as a tool for developing / developmental communication has been widely discussed and debated all over India and abroad. Community radios are being looked upon as an alternative to the mainstream media because of its potential to address social issues at the grassroots level. Often the main stream media fails to reach the bottom line of the social strata and identify their core issues. This is where the community radio plays a key role; the role of a facilitator.

Radio Mattoli

Community Radio Mattoli (90.4 FM), the lone FM broadcasting radio station of Wayanad, located at Dwaraka, Mananthavady in Kerala is a community radio service initiated on 1 June 2009, and is licensed by the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi. Radio Mattoli functions as a socially responsible media with the prime objective of becoming a credible source of information that has direct and immediate relevance to the community living within its transmission zone. It provides farmers, tribals, dalits, women and children with an opportunity to speak out, and be heard. We have 17 hours of daily broadcasting from 6 am to 11 pm to cater to the information requirement of the people. Our radio signals cover 85 per cent of the Wayanad district, having a population of 816,558.

The programmes aired, open up possibilities for everyone especially the marginalized sections, to express themselves socially, economically, culturally and spiritually in order to become masters of their own destinies. We provide an avenue for the free flow of beneficial information aimed at bringing socio economic changes in the society. Radio Mattoli serves as a catalyst for integral development of individuals and societies, and operates as an avenue for the free flow of beneficial information aimed at bringing socio economic changes in the society.

The prime objectives of Radio Mattoli are:

- To provide a platform for the marginalized community to voice their concerns.

* Community Radio Mattoli, Dwaraka, Nallurnad Post, Mananthavady 670645, Kerala, India. Email: radiomattoli@gmail.com

- To act as a catalyst for integral development of individuals and society.
- To act as a harbinger of socio economic development of the community.
- To bring about a positive social change in the society.
- To enhance the knowledge 'spectrum' of the community.
- To cater to the information requirements of the community it serves.

What makes Radio Mattoli different from the other forms of media is its willingness to do the role of facilitator to make the authorities act on instances of public grievances. Radio Mattoli never shies away from taking responsibility as a media for social change. Radio Mattoli's interventions resulted in swift actions from authorities to address various issues.

Strategies as Development Communication Tool

Community Radio, one of the most dynamic tool for development communication has its own richness and importance as a versatile media. Radio Mattoli is the only FM broadcasting station in Wayanad. The prime objective behind setting up Radio Mattoli is to bring about a positive change in the socio, economic, cultural, educational development scenario of Wayanad district. The relevance of Radio Mattoli can be understood within the context of the findings by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2006. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Wayanad as one of the country's 250 most backward districts. Since its inception in 2009, radio Mattoli has been donning the role of a harbinger of socio cultural and economic development of the society through its information rich programmes. Being a dynamic media, the Radio can reach the masses effectively. Its portability, and cost effectiveness make it an affordable source of information for all strata of the community. Radio Mattoli is not just a broadcasting station, but a true beacon of knowledge to the masses.

The needs of the local community which are often neglected by the mainstream media could be adequately addressed by this community radio through various participatory communication. Suggestions and contributions from the community add flavour to the content and enrich the radio programmes extensively. Radio Mattoli dedicates special slots during all religious festivals, to give equal representations to people from different faiths. Community participation towards programme making is immense here. Radio Mattoli has always been giving expression to people's thoughts/creativity by greatly encouraging the local community to be part of its programme making policies. This instills an emotional attachment, and a sense of ownership among the local community. Radio Mattoli has succeeded in winning the confidence and affection of the people in Wayanad as a credible media for social development. For the people of Wayanad, Radio Mattoli is a means to give expression to their voice 'in their own radio station.' This is the greatest recognition for us, which we value the most...!

We strongly believe that the true objective of a credible media is "To Convince, Not to Confuse." It takes great courage to use simple, crisp local language for presenting serious topics / issues in the broadcast media. For us, the proper understanding of the broadcast topic / issue by the listener is of prime concern; not the ultra sophisticated language being used. We can confidently assert that, it is this simplicity in the style of presenting the programmes that won us accolades from the public. People always opine that, this simplicity and warmth make them increasingly attached to Radio Mattoli. The feedback we receive from the public through letters and phone calls prove this fact. The expectation level of the Mattoli listeners is increasing each

day, and we are committed to meet it's a guide, friend, partner Radio Mattoli has always been with them; as one among them.

Radio Mattoli pays attention to the concerns / issues of the community. The main stream media often fails to recognize and address people's concerns at the grass root level. This is where Radio Mattoli becomes the cynosure of the common people.

Radio Mattoli functions as an alternative to main stream media. We always look deep into those areas which are often neglected by the main stream media. People of Wayanad depend upon Radio Mattoli for specific information/guidance that has a direct impact on their lives. The watchful eyes of Radio Mattoli never fail to capture the plight of the marginalized sections of the society. Radio Mattoli pays heed to the problems of the weak so as to provide possible solutions with its capacity as a media for social change.

Radio Mattoli truly understands that the prerequisite for bringing about a positive social change in the society, lies in the ability to understand the real pulse of the society. A society can find harmony only if its social chord is fine-tuned to perfection as far as social justice and social equality are concerned. Often, complaints of social inequality and injustice are mostly raised by the women folk in our country. Radio Mattoli takes note of this issue seriously. Ever since the inception in 2009, we have been constantly devising multi-pronged strategies to address this concern. We found that only if the marginalized sections in the society are instilled with confidence and assurance, then, they come out in the open to voice their concerns. To make them speak out, it is imperative to win their confidence. Participatory communication is the best strategy to win the confidence of people. By involving them in the communication processes, they get confidence to speak out and gain assurance that their voices are heard.

To ensure the engagement of the public in the various radio programmes, we constituted a panel of expert volunteers, accredited volunteers and student volunteers. Women, students, government employees, retired hands, and self employed people who represent different sections of the society constitute the panel of accredited and expert volunteers of Radio Mattoli. They contribute their services at different levels in the programme making of the radio. Besides, we encourage everyone in the society to come forward and participate in any of its aspect of community broadcasting for the social good of the people.

We employed multipronged strategies to ensure community engagement in the radio programme making aspects. The strategies are as follows:

'You Are the Right Person to Talk': Approach to Ensure Maximum Community Participation

Radio Mattoli programmes are exclusively meant for the empowerment of people. To empower them, their concerns and real issues have to be understood. We strongly believe that, to understand the real issues faced by them, the best solution is to make their own personal accounts. We follow the strategy 'You are the Right Person to Talk.' Each person will have different experiences—good or bad—to share. By attributing the prerogative 'You are the Right Person to Talk' to them, we strongly believe that they can confidently talk about their concerns/issues. The contents of the programmes are packaged carefully in simple language considering the socio cultural background of the people of Wayanad.

Dynamic Programme Formats to Ensure Community Participation:

The strength and uniqueness of Radio Mattoli programmes can be attributed to the active participation of community members in the different levels of radio programme making. To

facilitate community participation in the programmes, we device different programme formats such as:

- Radio skits
- Interviews
- Phone-in-programmes
- Panel discussions
- Awareness programmes on varied subjects

The logic behind this is simple. Different people have different talents and capabilities. To explore the real potential of people, and to ensure their participation we follow different formats of the programme. The idea is to provide ample opportunities to people to participate in the radio programme for social good. Radio skits provide platform for those who are good at presenting issues/topics dynamically. Interviews enable people to share their ideas or knowledge on any particular issue or topic. Panel discussions facilitate opinion sharing at a broader level. Awareness programmes for women bring in expert hands under one umbrella to participate in panel discussions, interviews, and phone-in programmes. In short, community engagement is at its best in the programme making aspects of Radio Mattoli.

Recognitions Received by Radio Mattoli

National Award for Sustainability 2013

Radio Mattoli is the recipient of the coveted National Award for Sustainability. Radio Mattoli Station Director received the prestigious award from then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Manish Tewari at a function held in New Delhi in 2013.

Manthan Award South Asia and Asia Pacific 2012, Jury's Special Mention

Radio Mattoli achieved a golden feat by winning the Manthan Award South Asia and Asia Pacific 2012 Jury's Special Mention in Community Broadcasting category. We take great pride in this achievement, as there were a total of 470 entries from ten countries including India. This proves the calibre and immense potential of Radio Mattoli as a credible media for the development of communication.

Recognition by UNICEF

Radio Mattoli received a golden feather in its cap when a study published recently by the UNICEF ('The Abiding Voices: Sustainability of Community Radio in India' 2012) adjudged Radio Mattoli as one of the best community radio stations in India. This recognition stands as a testimony to the immense potential that the community radios possesses, as a powerful media for social change.

Social Intervention of Radio Mattoli

Radio Mattoli pays great attention to people's concerns and issues. What makes Radio Mattoli different from other media is its willingness to do the role of the facilitator to make the authorities act on instances of public grievances. Radio Mattoli's interventions resulted in swift actions from the concerned authorities to address various issues.

Emergency Veterinary Medical Camp

Radio Mattoli's timely intervention resulted in the conducting of emergency veterinary camps in places such as Thannikkal, Koyileri, Payyampally, and Arattuthara in Mananthavady Grama Panchayath where sporadic hoof disease among cattle had been reported. Radio Mattoli visited the dairy farmers in that locality to take stock of the situation, and immediately contacted the officials in the Department of Animal Husbandry, Kalpetta, and Dairy Development Department to inform the gravity of situation. Radio Mattoli aired a programme highlighting the plight of dairy farmers that evening. The very next day, a mobile unit consisting of a team of doctors and an ambulance was sent to the affected area, and the expert team took necessary preventive measures to check the further spread of the disease. The authorities also assured the people affected that compensatory measures would be taken to address the grievance of dairy farmers in that locality.

Benny Ulloppally, a dairy farmer in Koyileri who lost a cow to hoof disease told Mattoli that, unlike other main stream media who just make a report on the issue, Radio Mattoli took the initiative to call up the authorities and facilitated their intervention to tackle the issue.

Radio Mattoli is Pro Life

A lady in Kalpetta, who identified herself as Reshma was on the verge of committing suicide. But she gave up the intention after hearing the programme titled Thiricharivinte Vazhikal (Paths of Realization) She wrote, "The programme 'Thiricharivinte Vazhikal' by James Pilakavu was a wonderful one. This radio programme was an eye opener for me who had been thinking of committing suicide. The programme has indeed shown me the path of realization."

Ration Card to 350 Homeless Tribal People

Radio Mattoli received a complaint from a tribal lady, stating that she did not have a ration card, as she did not own a house. Radio Mattoli took up this issue and broad casted the letter she sent to our Janvaani programme. A copy of the same was sent to the authorities concerned with a request to correct the situation, which finally resulted in the issue of ration card not only to Leela, but also to all the other 350 homeless tribal people in the Gram Panchayath.

Media Visibility to Innovative Farmers

Radio Mattoli gave media visibility to Eldo Baby from Pozhuthana Grama Panchayath who earns around Rs. 0.5 millions from a meager 75 cents of land he owns. He specializes in cultivating mixed crops, and also in dairy farming. Radio Mattoli prepared a radio feature and broadcast an interview with him. This caught the attention of many people from different quarters, and it brought him the coveted "Best Farmer Award" of Thodupuzha Gandhiji Studies Centre 2010-2011. Today he is an expert resource person of M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Puthoorvayal. Radio Mattoli introduced Eldo Baby's success story to the farming community which brought him wide acclamation.

Radio Mattoli was instrumental in highlighting the achievements of an enterprising student farmer known as Hashique, and a precision farmer Digaul Thomas in Wayanad. These Farmer success stories aired by Radio Mattoli inspired many people to turn to agriculture.

Allotment of Bus Service

Radio Mattoli's intervention resulted in the allotment of a state transport bus service (morning and evening schedule) from Thaloor to Mananthavady via Meenangadi. The people in Meenangadi were facing difficulties in reaching Mananthavadi due to lack of transport. They had

to change a minimum of three buses to reach Mananthavady. The children, aged and working women were the most affected. Their concerns were broadcast in 'Janavaani' (programme where concerns and issues of the public are broadcast), and this prompted the authorities to start a new bus service. It became operational from 25 January 2012.

Extension of Subsidy to Rubber Farmers

Rubber was not a traditional crop in Wayanad owing to the peculiar climatic conditions of the district. However the high price of rubber prompted certain farmers to plant rubber in their land on an experimental basis. The Rubber Board, citing low productivity of rubber in 12 villages, lifted the subsidy given to farmers belonging to that area and limited it to 37 villages that had been identified 'suitable' for rubber. Radio Mattoli on the request of the farmers intervened in the matter, and this prompted the Rubber Board authorities to conduct a detailed study, which made them extend the subsidy to six more villages in the district in 2009.

Conclusion

Radio Mattoli in its continuous journey of media excellence, which has achieved several milestones. Each milestone sets a new benchmarks for us to follow and be a responsible media for social change. We will always stand firm on pressing public issues and try our best to perform the role of a facilitator for the common people whenever they need our intervention. The role of this media wishes to be the reverberating voice of the voiceless. Championing the cause of socially deprived sections of the society has always been a prime concern for us and we are quite happy to acknowledge that our interventions have resulted in the redressal of many public grievances.