Chapter 20:

**Pausing to Plan at Kumaon Vani**

(Excerpt from Part Four: Praxis in the Commonwealth)

In his chapter, “Pausing to Plan at Kumaon Vani” (20), Ram Bhat provides a snapshot of working with a community radio group in Uttarakhand, India, to develop strategies and tools for use in planning ways to monitor and assess community radio initiatives. This assessment is necessary in terms of understanding whether specific expectations are being met (for example, the number of people participating in particular programmes), as well as of determining whether expected impacts — notably, changes in the community — are being achieved.

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There is a tendency to see planning for assessment as extra work, additional activities on top of actual programme implementation. As a result, planning for assessment is often unwelcome by community radio groups. However, assessment is a critical process for every community station. Without it, how can stations and their stakeholders evaluate whether they are achieving results and, if they are, how effectively and at what cost?

Every community radio station must be able to plan and assess its own work in terms of relationships to, and benefits for, its local community. Understanding relationships — for example, between listeners, content and producers — is essential in framing the work that community radio stations do in terms of social impact, which in turn is a key determinant of sustainability. If radio services are shown to have a social value, the community will be more inclined to believe in the work the station does and more inclined to go the distance to keep the radio running and growing. If done well, assessment will also provide evidence of how things have changed locally as a result of particular programmes, thereby encouraging support (financial and otherwise) for the programme and the station more generally.

Kumaon Vani (KV) (Voice of Kumaon) is a community radio station in Uttarakhand state in India. Licensed to The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), a non-profit organisation working on energy and environmental issues, the radio station has been in operation since 2010. The station broadcasts in the local Kumaoni dialect as well as in Hindi. Hindi is one of India's national languages and is well understood in the region, particularly among young people.

In 2011, Maraa, a media and arts collective based in Bangalore, organised a four-day workshop to build capacity in Kumaon Vani in two main areas: increasing community participation in programming; and planning for outcome assessment. This chapter discusses the latter area.
Recognising the need for carrying out an assessment

At the time of the intervention, Kumaon Vani had been running radio programmes for a little more than a year. While they felt the programmes were well appreciated by the target community, Kumaon Vani staff also felt apprehensive about doing an assessment. Firstly, they were worried that they could not accurately say what kinds of programmes they had produced over the previous year, including how many hours broadcast, the issues covered, and who had participated in these programmes as producers and guests. Secondly, they did not feel able to map out any tangible outcomes resulting from the programming. Most of the core team had strong feelings that the station’s work had benefited the community in some way, but they struggled to pinpoint how and with what issues.

The challenge for Maraa was to introduce ways to plan for assessment that could take place on a day-to-day basis. Strategies for monitoring and assessment needed to be easy enough to implement that a range of station staff and community stakeholders could contribute without the process taking too much time. At the same time, input had to be easily aggregated so that results could be quickly summarised and presented to community members and representatives as well as other stakeholders.

Maraa proposed to:

- initiate planning and assessment for one particular community issue; and
- start planning for a holistic assessment of the community radio.

Assessing community participation

Kumaon Vani broadcasts for two hours every day. To capture what really happens in those two hours as well as all the efforts made between the daily broadcasts, Maraa invited the station’s producers (community volunteers, reporters, etc.) to devise categories of participation in programming. For this purpose, Maraa created a template form with the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Male/ Female</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Above poverty line (APL)/Below poverty line (BPL)</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The producers committed to filling out the form individually for each of their programmes. Aggregating this information over the year then made it possible to report on the radio station’s work according to:

- which topics had been covered;
- from which villages people participated;
- how many men and women participated;
- what castes had been represented in the programmes;
- how many people participating lived above the poverty line and how many below the poverty line; and
- how much time each person got on air.

After a full year of data collecting, the information can be accumulated and presented to the community in the form of a social audit. The aim is to show community stakeholders the volume and variety of broadcasting done (including the participation of community members themselves) and in the process demonstrate the station’s commitment to being accountable for its objectives and operations.

Although this simple effort at monitoring goes some way in tracking what the station is able to produce, it does not provide any evidence that things in the community are different, that behaviours are changing, that a particular situation has improved or that benefits have been accrued from a particular programme. The next step is therefore to demonstrate how
community media can impact, in concrete terms, community well-being and development. As a pilot, Maraa and Kumaon Vani together decided to take up the issue of public distribution systems.

Outcomes for community development

In India, for many people classified as living below the poverty line (BPL), the state subsidises essentials such as grains and cooking oil. Subsidised goods are made available through a network of distribution centres known as the public distribution system (PDS). The system is full of problems, with the poorest of the poor being the most to suffer. Food grains are often not available or, even when subsidised, fluctuate wildly in price and are often too costly for people to buy. There is also a high level of corruption. Food grains often end up being wasted, as do state resources.

After Maraa and Kumaon Vani conducted a participative mapping exercise with stakeholders in Kumaon, it was decided to focus on the following goals for a period of one year:

- All PDS shops will clearly display outside their shops a list of BPL families from within their service area.
- All PDS shops will remain open as per their scheduled times.
- The price list of commodities available at PDS shops will be clearly displayed outside each shop.

Although many problems with the PDS scheme were identified, the group decided to prioritise and focus on these three points, which they felt could be addressed, and to some degree achieved, through a communication intervention by the radio station.

Activity plans focused on: broadcasting a series of on-air announcements about the station’s plans to tackle PDS issues; mobilising villages in and around the station through public meetings; and inviting suggestions for a name for the campaign. The meetings were an opportunity to discuss and plan the campaign, including specific radio programmes for each objective.

At the end of 2012, Kumaon Vani will have mapped, and be in a position to assess, the degree of community participation in the station. Issues of attribution aside, the station will also be in a better position to judge whether targeted campaigns about adherence to public policy and community initiatives have seen any success in meeting the three goals set. The station plans to discuss the results with community stakeholders, the state agencies responsible for PDS, and the various departments responsible for health, family and welfare.
A model for other community media

As this brief account shows, simple, day-to-day, low-cost processes like the ones described here can enable the participatory monitoring and evaluation of educational and change communication pursued through community media. Assessment planning, monitoring and evaluation are all important means of underscoring adherence to ethics associated with accountability and public responsibility.

Knowing that programme quality and outcomes will be assessed encourages producers to be more careful and systematic in defining goals, setting targets, gathering content and producing programming. It all adds up to good value for the producers, the radio station, listeners and the wider community.

Ramnath Bhat is the co-founder of Maraa, a media and arts collective in Bangalore. He started working with community media initiatives in 2003 when he began with VOICES, a media advocacy group. He later helped start Maraa in 2007. Ram has experience in capacity building, research and policy advocacy for community media. He is currently the Vice-President of the Community Radio Forum of India. Email: ram@maraa.in

Maraa is a media and arts collective based in Bangalore. Maraa builds capacity for community media, does policy advocacy and conducts research, including work with wireless Internet, mobile telephony, de-licensed wi-fi, white spaces, frequency allocation and spectrum management.

For further reference, see:

- www.maraa.in