

Connecting Grassroots Voices to Policy Processes

Community Radios Bridging the Information Divide

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Key Messages

- Climate resilient development will need to look at new and improved information channels and dissemination strategies that facilitate climate change adaptation at community level. Community radio is an effective medium in bridging this information and communication gap for climate risk communication and facilitating bottom up adaptive planning
- Community radios represent voices of the marginalized communities amplifying views and concerns about context specific issues and facilitating public platforms for debate and discussion. Hence, it is ideally placed to be an effective tool to communicate climate change issues in the local context.
- Community radios have the potential to play a significant role in linking community adaptation practices into policy making processes at state level, for knowledge sharing and for making climate policies more rooted to community needs.
- Public extension institutions can use existing radios for climate risk communications in agriculture sector and move effectively through partnerships for exchange of knowledge and information.
- Capacity building of community radios for climate change journalism and climate change communication is crucial for effective engagement.

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Community Radios Bridging the Information Divide

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as a new threat to the livelihood and food security of vulnerable communities all over the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC's 4th Assessment Report predicts that temperature rise of 1-2.5 C may lead to reduced crop yields in tropical areas leading to food insecurity, and water stress making these communities more fragile.

Local communities from vulnerable regions in particular need to adapt to increase their resilience in the face of change. However, communicating climate change to the vulnerable communities is a major challenge. Studies suggest that research being conducted has had limited success in its uptake at the local level, partly due to challenges of communicating scientific research in ways that are appropriate for local stakeholders and failure to meaningfully engage existing local institutions and cultural practices. Another concern is that vulnerable communities in climate sensitive rural areas are poorly linked to scientific researchers and policy makers. Limited research currently exists on how to develop strong communication models for multi-stakeholder engagement and exchange of information on climate change adaptation.



Community Radios (CRs) play an effective role in communicating climate change information to communities and connecting communities to scientists and policy makers. Community radio is a platform which provides voices to the communities to express their concern and discuss their issues. Given its localized connect it not only discusses issues and strengthens local governance but also has the potential of connecting to policy makers to highlight their issues which needs attention in states' policy making processes. Climate change also requires local understanding feeding into policy processes to facilitate creation of robust policies and programmes for addressing climate change issues. Community radios are aptly placed to address this.

Gaps in Communicating Climate Change Impacts Locally

Increasing uptake for climate change adaptation and more inclusive adaptive planning to address the uncertainties and climate risk will require greater investment in climate change communication. Climate resilient development will need to look at new and improved information channels and dissemination strategies that facilitate climate change adaptation at community level.

There are several technical and institutional barriers in dissemination of robust climatic information to grassroots and vice` versa to scientists and policy makers. Some of the barriers identified are:

- **Institutional barriers to meteorological information:** The institutional divide between scientific bodies and government departments restricts information flow to grassroots. This creates difficulties in data availability and simplification for local utilisation. Further delaying disaster risk reduction and fund relief release for droughts, floods etc. at the most crucial times.
- **Complexity of scientific information on climate change:** Scientific knowledge about vulnerability, climate impacts and adaptation options is not available in simplified languages/terminologies and in planning and implementation timescales that decision-makers, communicators and information seekers understand and are equipped to utilize. Members of vulnerable communities cannot read and understand the highly technical IPCC reports. When translated into local languages most terminologies do not have equivalent terms to express hence, not of much use for non-literate communities.
- **Absence of area specific localised climatic predictions:** Currently research in climate predictions is dealing with limited accuracy, downscaled temperature and rainfall projections are only available at spatial resolutions consisting of two to three districts. Area specified predictions are required to give a clear picture of climate change impacts for specific agro-climatic zones.
- **Absence of localised agromet information:** The centres providing agromet services at the local level are still absent. KVVs (Krishi Vigyan Kendra) have installed agromet devices in some model villages. However, the information provided by such installations is

highly restricted and does not cover other villages in the district.

- **Inadequate information delivery mechanisms at grassroots level:** There are not enough information centres at the grassroots level. The communication gap is further aggravated due to limited extension agents present at the rural level. Moreover, these extension agents primarily disseminate information on developmental issues related to agriculture, sanitation, health etc. They still lack the understanding of relation between these developmental issues and climate change.

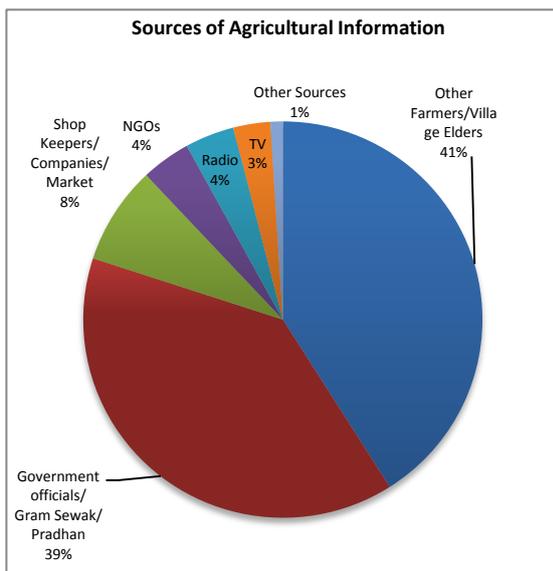
For many farmers, their only option to receive beneficial information and scheme assistance is to travel directly to the appropriate extension agency. Unfortunately, the spatial distribution of the locations where farmers can access information directly such as Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), or Agricultural and Irrigation Department offices is widespread. In order to receive assistance farmers have to navigate many administrative obstacles and procedures. This combined with long travel distances, further reduces farmers' interest in seeking these benefits. The other option which farmers avail is that of interpersonal communication with the 'identified' progressive farmer which is skewed

and imperfect with ample scope of information loss and bias.

Sometimes villagers' get information from non-government organisations but this is very rare. Information related to different farming inputs are sometimes also disseminated through companies, seed or fertiliser sellers with the hidden agenda of maximising their sales.

The extension agents go to communities for providing information on government schemes and programmes. They do not have the skills for understanding climate language and are not equipped to take adaptive practices from the community to the policy process making adaptive planning more rooted to community needs.

Community radios can contribute effectively to all these processes. The community radios can play an effective role in disseminating agromet advisories and can disseminate adaptation options to the grassroots. Trained community radio reporters can also be utilized to assist in outreach in areas where RAEOs are unable to reach. When interacting with grassroots implementers and government authorities the community radio journalists can share locally relevant adaptive practices which can feed into their planning process.



Sources of agricultural information for decision making among respondents

(Source: DA-Swiss Climate Resilient Development in Bundelkhand Region of Madhya Pradesh: Information and Communication Needs for Climate Change Adaptation (2013))

Community Radio- An ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Tool for Communicating Climate Change

Community radios represent voices of the marginalized communities amplifying views and concerns about context specific issues and facilitating public platforms for debate and discussion. The management, content, programmes and broadcast schedules of community radio involve participation of community members. Community decision-making bodies demonstrate a sense of ownership in their own development agenda and are empowered to express opinions, debate issues and carry out dialogue.

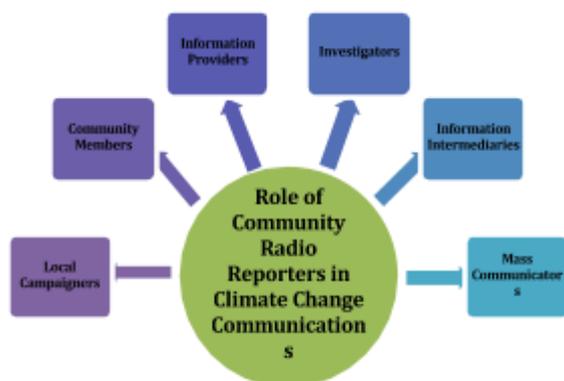
Community radio is a community media for engagement and discussion on various development issues and is ideally placed to be an effective tool to communicate climate change issues in the local context.

Research findings from climate change communication pilot models experimented by Climate Airwaves initiative in Ghana and Shubh Kal - From Information to Knowledge and Action in

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Bundelkhand in Central India have evidenced that knowledge support and communication models using community radios can effectively bridge the knowledge gap between local stakeholders and help in meeting the information needs of the marginalised communities and taking their voices to scientific community and policymakers.



Uniqueness of community radio's multiple roles in communicating climate change

Different roles played by community radio reporters put them in a unique position for climate change communication at rural level:

- Reporters from a community radio are not just information providers but are **investigators** and **information linkers**.
- Community radios function within 10-15 km radius, giving it an added advantage of being extremely localized.
- The role of grassroots information providers such as gram sewaks, Technical Support Groups (TSGs) and Panchayat members is limited to specific news, schemes and short term information. This is not sufficient for communicating information and knowledge on climate change which requires an inclusive yet localized approach creating climate change awareness and long term behaviour change. If trained effectively, a skilled cadre of community radio reporters can play multiple roles in meeting climate change information needs at the grassroots.
- Information on grassroots concerns and issues, community needs and indigenous adaptation interventions goes unreported where community radio can investigate these issues from within the communities. As **community members** the reporters are easily accepted by the community, hence a better picture of the ground realities can be presented to the scientific experts and the policy makers.
- As a member of community radio, the radio reporters not only act as **information**

providers for climate change related knowledge but can also act as **intermediaries** between stakeholders such as scientists, local government authorities, communities and planners. As journalists the community radio reporters interact with a wide range of officials and scientists, this helps them to mediate a two way information flow to the community.

Maximizing the Potential of Community Radio for Communicating Climate Change – Recommendations for Policy Action

Informing the communities about climate change risks and adaptation requires a cross-sectoral approach which addresses the issue across different scales of developmental agenda. These radio stations works across a span of different departments' viz. agriculture, irrigation, water resource, forest, energy, health, livestock, social welfare and planning reflecting the special interests and needs of the communities. Thus community radio stations have potential to communicate climate change concerns most effectively.

Community Radio and Farming Communities

Community radio journalists belong to the community, speak local dialects and are aware of the community issues facilitating farmers to communicate their concerns and queries with ease. They also identify talent from within the communities and engage them in developing folk songs, radio dramas, jingles, poems and short messages for climate change creating an infotainment format by the community and for the community. Participatory approach utilized by the community radio journalists helps them to engage community members in discussions on climate change. It also makes it easier to identify community's understanding on climate change impacts, concerns and solutions.

Community Radio and Scientists

Scientists can utilize the potential of community radios in getting an improved understanding of community's perceptions and information needs on climate change issues and find it useful interacting with the community radio journalists. Community radios also help in communicating scientific knowledge in a localized and simplified manner facilitating extension services of scientists.

In future, such information will also help scientists in designing more locally relevant adaptation strategies.

Community Radio and Government Authorities

Community radios inform the communities about government schemes, policies, subsidies and benefits. Besides this, community radios also contribute in advertising the efforts of government, helping to build communities trust on government schemes and policies. Subsequently, the radio reporters can also play an important role in providing feedback to government authorities on how climate change is impacting local development and what are the community resilience building mechanisms. These would help government put in place policies which are imbedded in the reality of community.

Community radios bring together the key stakeholders on climate change issues in the region and also facilitate government, science and community dialogue in real time and space.

Information should be provided to communities in an appropriate format preferably in audio-visual, rather than in written form¹. Combined with field demonstrations, better communication with the grassroots through community media like community radio will increase dialogue between different stakeholders.

There is a well-developed system to disseminate agro-meteorological data to the grassroots *on paper*. However, farmers continue to rely on traditional knowledge for indicators. Community radio and other forms of community media need to work more closely with KVKs and ATMAAs to disseminate and validate scientific information in a timely and cost effective manner. This feedback captures traditional practices and informs scientists on a need to validate and break myths regarding traditional indicators of climate information.

The State Knowledge Management Centre on Climate Change (SKMCCC) to be established under State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) in Madhya Pradesh can be an effective means of engaging the community radio. Community Radios can bring forth the voices from the grassroots for cross-learning of adaptation measures and

integrating the voices into the planning processes at the state level. The potential of community radio can be harnessed most effectively if knowledge, monetary, capacity building, monitoring and administrative supports are facilitated for increased up-scaling.

General recommendations for strengthening the role of community radios in climate change communications are as follows:

- There is a need to facilitate and support a network of community radios in the country which would have a portal and connect community radios enabling exchanges of content, expertise and experiences in climate change/disaster risk reduction.
- Resource agencies can be identified who can provide training and capacity building for climate change communication to both the new and established community radio stations across the country.
- A knowledge network or a map of community based organizations who are already engaged in promoting climate change awareness through community communication systems including community radio needs to be developed. Community based organizations like Development Alternatives in Bundelkhand, Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh and Dhan Foundation in Tamil Nadu are already addressing the issue of food security and climate change or disaster preparedness through community radio.

Prakash Kushwaha, a farmer from Rajawar village of Tikamgarh district has proved his risk resilience by adopting *amrit mitti*. **Amrit Mitti** is a no cost traditional method of composting organic waste which **increases soil fertility, maintains soil moisture content and minimizes cost inputs of fertilizers**. He gained the information on *amrit mitti* from the Climate Change Rural Reality Show broadcasted by Radio Bundelkhand. Later, he became a practitioner and promoter of this technique. He has recently conducted demonstration training in *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* at Jhansi and Shivpuri. These institutions are now testing the traditional knowledge for improving soil fertility and increasing soil moisture content.

¹ Huq, S. (2011) Improving information for community-based adaptation, 2012, from IIED: <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17103IIED.pdf>

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The following policy recommendations are specifically targeted at three different types of Government Institutions/ processes for providing the much needed impetus for strengthening the role of community radios in climate change communications:

1. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

- Earmark climate sensitive and disaster prone areas and concentrate establishment of and expedite clearance of licenses for community radio's which cater to such regions. Funds from the newly established Community Radio Fund (CR Fund) can be provided to these start-up radios.
- Existing community radios lack skills on understanding climate change and for developing climate change and adaptation programmes, the CR Fund can also be provided for knowledge and training support of community radios on climate change communication.

2. State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC)

- As climate change impacts differ in ecological regions, agro-climatic regional knowledge centres should be established. The potential of community radio can be utilized to feed grassroots information into agro-climatic regional knowledge centres taking scientific learning to the community.
- These regional centres will feed into the State Knowledge Management Centres for Climate Change (SKMCCC) set-up under the strategic knowledge mission on climate change stated in the NAPCC. The portals set-up under the SKMCCC can be linked to the community radios to feed community learning and adaptation measures. These would facilitate development of relevant policy designs, building greater resilience of the climate vulnerable communities and creating a loop for cross sharing and increasing uptake of adaptation measures.

3. Agriculture Extension Agencies

- Community radios could be used by the KVKs and ATMAs to disseminate scientific learning to reach out to a wider audience.
- Agriculture institutions can provide community radios with knowledge materials such as bulletins, advisories and success stories.
- There is a need to facilitate institutionalized linkages between the community radio stations and mainstream agencies involved in agro-met information and early warning systems at national, state and district level to provide legitimate and localized information.

As an ICT tool for marginalized rural communities, community radios are an effective mechanism for communicating climate change information and connecting various stakeholders. A trained cadre of community radio reporters can therefore act as a link between scientists, communities and local government line departments. Strong community radios will be effective bridges for supporting vulnerable communities build resilience against climate risks and increase the uptake of adaptation measures. ■

About the participant groups



Environment Planning and Coordination Organization (EPCO), Government of Madhya Pradesh is registered under the Housing and Environment Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh. It connects government as well as non-government agencies in solving environmental problems. <http://www.epco.in/>



The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, UK is a leading global organisation for research, teaching and communication on international development. It acts as a development research and knowledge hub, connecting and convening networks throughout the world. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/>



Kings College London, Humanitarian Futures Group - The Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP), works to support organisations with humanitarian roles and responsibilities to effectively anticipate and prepare for long term future crises. www.humanitarianfutures.org/



Third Pole Project is a joint project of the Internews Earth Journalism Network and the bilingual environment news website chinadialogue.net that seeks to improve coverage of climate change issues in the Himalayan region and downstream. The Third Pole – based in New Delhi, Beijing, London and San Diego – designs curriculum and carries out media capacity building and training workshops for local and regional groups across Asia. www.thethirdpole.net/



Development Alternatives (DA) is India's leading civil society organization engaged in research and development. DA set up the first Community Radio in the Central Indian region of Bundelkhand. <http://www.devalt.org/>

Supported by:

Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) supports decision-makers in designing and delivering climate compatible developments by combining research, advisory services and knowledge management in support of locally owned and managed policy processes. www.cdkn.org

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