# Report: Saamaj aur Samvaad Workshop, 22-26 January 2014

A five days long community media workshop entitled 'Saamaj aur Samvaad', which saw participation of youths from various part of India, took place at the Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, Kandbari (Palampur, Himachal Pradesh) during 22-26 January, 2014. The workshop was jointly organized by the Inclusive Media for Change (www.im4change.org) and Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics (http://www.sambhaavnaa.org/). The aim of the workshop was to explore the potential of community media-for communication within the community, communication to the outside world, as well as for the preservation of local knowledge and practices.
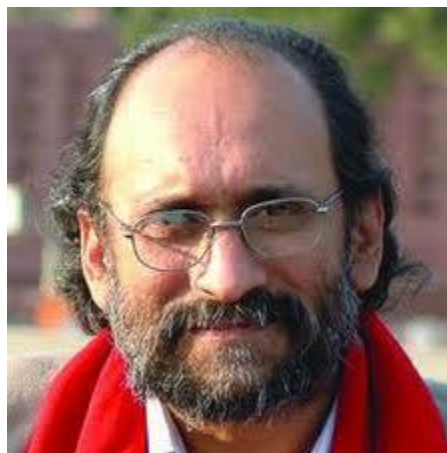
On the first day of the community media workshop i.e. 22nd January, noted journalist and educationist Paranjoy Guha Thakurta gave an exposition of India's print and electronic media to the participants. He spoke on various challenges faced by the Indian media, which includes the pervasive paid news phenomena and monopolization of media despite rise in the number of TV channels (including news channels) and registered newspapers. He differentiated between radio, newspaper and television, and informed how the media industry functions. The primacy of corporate interests in news

broadcasting was clarified by him. Three documentary films made by Thakurta on media ethics, freedom of expression and Radia tapes were screened for the audience.

On the 23rd January, Director of Inclusive Media for Change (www.im4change.org) and former journalist Vipul Mudgal conveyed how India is moving from electoral to participatory democracy. He emphasized the role of Information (Jankaari), Monitoring by community (Nigrani) Participation (Bhaagidaari), Transparency (Pardarshiita) and Accountability (Jawaabdehi) in creating enabling environment for a responsive and participatory democracy. The role of social audit and Section 4 of the Right to Information (2005) Act were discussed as positive interventions. He spoke on the importance of pre-legislative transparency as a form of bottom-up communication (green paper→white paper→Stake-holder participation before tabling it in Parliament→Legislation), based on participation in decision-making, as it happens variously in countries like South Africa, Canada, UK, the US and Switzerland. He connected the dots between participatory governance and participatory communication in which he placed Community Radio/ Media as a crucial link.

Aarti Jaiman introduced the participants to Gurgaon ki Awaaz (http://www.trfindia.org/community_radio.php), a community radio station (available at 107.8 MHz FM since November 2009) that addresses the needs of hundreds of villages, semi-urban clusters, and urban slums that fall within a 10-km radius around Udyog Vihar in Gurgaon (Haryana). She informed that her community radio station gave space to *Hariyanvi*—a dying dialect. Programmes broadcasted by Gurgaon ki Awaaz are women centric, and voice of poor migrant families from Bihar is given equal space. She informed that it takes 3-4 years to start community radio broadcasting because of the stringent rules imposed by the government. The maximum height for radio tower permitted is 30 meter, which is difficult to cover a radius of 10 km because of the existence of high-rise buildings in Gurgaon.

A documentary film prepared by the Deccan Development Society (http://www.ddsindia.com/www/radiostn.htm) about its community (mainly women) run radio station was screened.

On the third day of the community media workshop i.e. 24th January, Navratan *ji*, a farmer turned radio jockey (RJ), from Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Barefoot College, informed about the Tilonia community radio station (available at 90.4 MHz since 2009). The community radio station at Tilonia (http://edaa.in/tiloniaradiofm/), he informed, focuses on Education, Health, Drinking Water, Solar Energy, Rural Women's Development, Environment, Right to Information, Right to Food, MNREGA, Panchayati Raj, Minimum Wages among others. Tilonia community radio communicates with rural communities within a radius of 10-15 km. There are 50,000 listeners amongst communities from over 30 villages who listen to its programmes related to rural development and culture. Tilonia community radio has 600 hours of folk songs in its archives. The recorded music of folk artist Gazi Khan is also available at Tilonia. However, digitization of its music archive is a serious challenge. Navratan *ji* informed that through the community radio, many labourers could receive their *mazdoor* cards so as to avail government benefits.

Shobhit Jain from Samaj Pragati Sahyog (http://www.samprag.org/) shared with the participants some of the experiments that are being done among tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh via community videos. Right from the cost associated with community video project to the training of villagers on film making, he spoke on many areas. Jain said that realistic videos are popular among the villagers as compared to the videos that broadcasted by the Doordarshan. He screened his videos on indigenous & organic agriculture, and millet farming to the participants. He informed that his NGO regularly screens documentaries among the villagers by using mobile video vans.

The documentary film Supermen of Malegaon, directed by Faiza Ahmad Khan, was screened, which was appreciated by the participants.

On 25th January, Manavendra Negi and Saritha Thomas from People's Power Collective (http://www.peoplespower-co.org/tag/mandakini-ki-awaz/) informed the participants about Mandakini ki Awaz, a community radio station, which is narrow-casting its

programmes to the people of Bhanaj at Kedarnath valley, Uttarakhand, thanks to the delay in getting broadcasting rights because of complex government procedures. Negi who is a radio jockey himself, revealed that during the 2013 flashfloods in Uttarakhand, community radio could not be used actively for disaster management because of government policy. However, after the Uttarakhand disaster, the government could understand the potential of community radio in disaster management and mitigation. Previously community radio played a vital role in Japan and Indonesia during disasters. Unlike in Nepal, in India community radio is policy driven. Community radio can play important roles in spreading traditional knowledge of herbal medicine and earthquake proof housing.

Saritha Thomas explained what makes community radio a sustainable project. She informed that megaphones are currently being deployed by Mandakini ki Awaz for narrowcasting. As Mandakini ki Awaz do not yet have a broadcasting license, they are narrow-casting their programmes by taking the content from house to house. Broadcasting is as important as narrow-casting. Staying close to the field is important, Thomas argued. Awareness, policy and funding are 3 important aspects of community radio. Thomas informed that there are 3 sources of funding community radio: funding by the government, funding by private corporations and funding by the community. During disasters, community radio can help in collating data from various sources to avoid duplication of relief works. Sensitivity is quite high in community radio as compared to commercial media.

Disha from Khabar Lahariya (http://www.khabarlahariya.org/) made a presentation through which she informed that it is an eight-page weekly local language newspaper brought out by a collective of 40 rural women journalists. Each week, 6,000 copies of Khabar Lahariya are sold across 600 villages of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, reaching a readership of 80,000. Existing since the last 14 years, KL began as the only Bundeli newspaper in India and now has editions in Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindustani and Bajjika. It connects with its rural audiences through its unique local language content that mainstream media rarely covers. The newspaper has its roots in Bundelkhand, a region ridden with poverty, low literacy, skewed sex ratio, high gender and caste-based violence and poor health, education and employment. In these areas, KL is a space for women journalists in a context where there are none. The women who report the stories also edit, produce, distribute and market the newspaper. Meera Jatav is the Editor-in-Chief and has been working from Karwi since the newspaper was started in 2002. The newspaper is written, edited, produced, distributed and marketed entirely by rural women from backward communities (SCs, STs and Muslims). Khabar Lahariya is not an example of community media but it is certainly an alternative media, emphasized Disha. The newspaper has empowered the women who work for it. The website version of the same is created to mainstream the issues taken up by the newspaper. Created by Nirantar, presently Khabar Lahariya is an independent organization. It has, however, failed to register itself as a newspaper. Therefore, it is unable to attract government advertisements, and runs on subscription.

A trip to a community radio station, which is operating from the Tibetan Children's village at McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala (Kangra) was made by the participants of the workshop on 25th January.

On the last day of the workshop i.e. 26th January, Shubhranshu Choudhary talked about the transformation of media from top-down to bottom-up. Through various anecdotes and examples, he rationalized that just like democratization of society, democratization of media is essential for accountability. Ownership of media used to determine the content it produced once upon a time. However, CGNet Swara has changed the equations (http://www.cgnetswara.org/) since the content is now provided by the people. It is a voice-based portal, freely accessible via mobile phone that allows anyone to report and listen to stories of local interest. Reported stories are moderated by journalists and become available for playback online as well as over the phone (+91 8050068000). Anyone with a mobile phone, radio or computer can become either an active news giver or a news listener to CGNet Swara, informed Choudhary.

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It was pleasure staying inside the campus of Sambhaavnaa Institute, from where the snow clad Dhauladhar range was easily visible. The food served in the mess was relished by all.

A walk through the woods towards the nearby river 'Awa Khand' was extremely adventurous.

The workshop was conceived in its present form and put together by Faiza Ahmad Khan, a Mumbai-based independent filmmaker who's also associated with Al-Jazeera and the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan. Faiza actively participated in all sessions

and used her influence to get the resource persons to come at a short notice. Sandhya and Ira Saxena of Sambhaavnaa Institute and Shambhu Ghatak and Chandan Srivastawa from the Inclusive Media for Change, CSDS, Delhi, also provided valuable inputs and logistical support to facilitate the five-day workshop.

The list of nearly 30 participants who were present during the workshop is as follows:

Faiza A Khan, Al Jazeera/ NAPM, Mumbai
Shambhu Ghatak, Inclusive Media for Change, Delhi
Vipul Mudgal, Inclusive Media for Change, Delhi
Chandan Sivastawa, Inclusive Media for Change, Delhi
Sandhya Gupta, Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, Palampur
Ira Saxena, Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, Palampur
Anupam, Sambhaavnaa Institute of Public Policy and Politics, Palampur
Firoz Khan, …., Rajasthan
Shweta Tripathi, Aajeevika Bureau, Rajasthan
Samreen, Vividha
Saurabh Singh, Inner Voice Foundation
Siddharth, Aa Foundation
Abhinav Gupta, ….
Pawan Gupta, JOSH, Delhi
Yogender Kohli, JOSH, Delhi
Ramesh Lenka, …., Odisha

This list of participants is required to be completed.

The list of resource persons is as follows:

1. Arti Jaiman (Gurgaon ki Awaaz - NCR's only community radio)
2. Navratan (Radio Tilonia)
3. Paranjoy Guha Thakurta (Independent journalist and film-maker)
4. Shobhit Jain (Samaj Pragati Sahyog)
5. Shubranshu Chaudhary (Founder of CGNet Swara)
6. Vipul Mudgal (Inclusive Media for Change)
7. Disha (Khabar Lahariya)
8. Saritha Thomas (Mandakini ki Awaz/ People's Power Collective)
9. Manavendra Negi (Mandakini ki Awaz/ People's Power Collective)