JOURNAL OF ELT AND EDUCATION
ISSN: 2618-1290 (Print), 2663-1482 (Online), Volume 4, Issue 4, December 2021, Page: 97-102
Published by, Hello-Teen Society & Center for Academic Research and Development (CARD)

Received: 19/10/2021 Accepted: 28/11/2021 Published: 30/11/2021

Exploring Woman Issues in Community Radio

Research Paper

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[**Citation:** Islam, K. M. A. (2021). Exploring Woman Issues in Community Radio. *Journal of ELT and Education*, 4(4): 97-102.]

Abstract

Community radio appeared as an essential part of planning and thinking for development. This is considered the voice of voiceless people, inspiring them to do better, encouraging them to get involved in policy making, etc. As the importance of woman's development gets a strong voice throughout the world, it is more than responsibility for community radio to play a significant role in promoting women's issues. Since rural women suffer many social, cultural, and economic obstacles, community radio should stand as a watchdog and an active tool to eradicate those hurdles by highlighting women's issues through various programs. This paper examines some women-related community radio programs in Bangladesh that present some significant women issues such as child marriage, empowerment, rights, etc. The results show that community radio telecasts programs on domestic violence, child marriage, etc. However, issues like cybercrime and sufficient time allocation should be considered.

Keywords: Access to Information, Child Marriage, Participation, Empowerment

1. Introduction

For the utmost development of rural people, the role of community radio is undeniable. The rural people can feel directly connected with community radio as it can penetrate the micro-level of a society. To clarify more, the rural people have easier access to it than other mainstream media. Koala (2008) states that community radio has specific objectives for a particular community targeting their active participation in the development process.

For the last few decades, community radio proved its power in changing the attitude and behavior of rural people through various programs and activities in national and international contexts. In the stream of changes and creating awareness and educating people about various issues like health, education, agriculture, etc., community radio's role is being appreciated nationally and globally. Apart from this, community radio plays a significant role in promoting freedom of expression that is very much related to sustainable development.

Due to different languages, cultures, education and financial conditions, and lack of facilities like electricity, mainstream media cannot reach the rural people properly. On the other hand, the mainstream media is urban-oriented. This kind of media cannot get rural people in natural disasters. Thanks to these reasons, the rural people face deprivation of useful and necessary information. Sensing this reality, the quantity of community radio got importance, and it is thought to be more potent for rural development than any other media.

In the modern age, woman's development got a strong voice worldwide. Thus, it is challenging for community radio to change women's lives by promoting their issues. Because women in rural areas lack proper information and face a lack of participation in the decision-making process, many

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scholars focus on the active involvement of women in community radio to promote more women's issues for the betterment of their livelihoods.

According to the statistics provided by Bangladesh NGO's Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), there are 403 women out of 874 employees working in 17 existing community radio. As a result, it is expected to have tremendous importance and coverage on women's issues. It is believed that all sorts of deprivation can be eradicated through the proper and meticulous presentation of women's issues. It is also recognized nationally and globally that no sustainable development will be met without equal participation and society.

The study's objective is to identify whether all of the issues on women are covered in community radio. The paper aims to help all concerned, including policy makers, think about the program's further improvement and development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Woman Issues and Community Radio

The issues that speak about women's aspects for their improvement and development in health, nutrition, education, rights, etc., are understood as `Woman Issues'. The paper emphasized the programs aired in community radio in Bangladesh to analyze it. So, the article discussed the present condition of the programs with further recommendations to be added.

The word `Community' indicates a group of people who have common interests, traits, and characteristics living together within a specific society. Khan et al. (2017) observed 'Community' as ``a collective or a group of people sharing familiar characters and interest.``

Though the emergence of community radio in Bangladesh is new, its concept and operation started in Latin America in 1947. Community radio extended its steps towards the African and Western Worlds. Its emergence in Bangladesh has a long history of struggles as Bangladesh NGO's Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) has spent almost 12 years to begin community radio. Responding to the demands, the government of Bangladesh announced Community Radio, Installation, Broadcast, and Operation Policy in 2008. Under this policy, the government approved 14 community radio at the first stage. At present, 17 community radios are on operation in various areas of Bangladesh. The chart given below presents a clear picture.

Table 1. Community Radio in operations at present in Bangladesh (Source: BNNCR)

Name	On Air Date	Location
Radio Padma	22 July, 2011	Monafer Morch, Rajshahi
Radio Nalta	13 July, 2011	Nalta, Kaliganj, Satkhira
Lokobetar	27 May, 2011	Sardar Road, West Barguna, Barguna
Radio Pallikontho	25 October, 2011	MatarKapon, Moulivibazar
Radio SagorGiri	23 November, 2011	Sitakund, Chittagong
Radio Mahananda	29 October, 2011	Belepukur, ChapaiNawabgonj
Radio Mukti	7 December, 2011	Central English Road, Surtapur, Bogra
Radio Chilmari	2 November, 2011	Chilmari, Kurigram
Radio Jhenuk	20 November, 2011	Pabahati, Jhenidah
Krishi Radio	1 Janurary, 2012	Amtoli, Barguna
Radio Sundarban	22 April, 2012	Amadi Bazar, Koira, Khulna
Radio Naf	21 February, 2012	Teknaf, Cox's Bazar
Radio Bikrampur	1 May, 2012	East Dewbhogh, Munshiganj
Borendro Radio	8 March, 2012	Ukilpara, Naogaon
Radio Meghna	18 February, 2015	Kulsumbagh, Charfasion, Bhola
Radio SagorDwip	12 November, 2015	Hatia, Noakhali
Radio Sarabela	12 July, 2016	College Road, Gaibandha

2.2. Related Studies

No study on women-related programs of community radio in Bangladesh was found. But there are some studies on the participation of women in community radio. Anwar (2015) surveyed woman's

involvement in community radio of Bangladesh. She stated that engaging women in community radio in Bangladesh faces many challenges. She also argued that many rural women have no radio sets, and most of those who have set cannot buy the battery.

Moreover, Mansap and Wellmanee (2011) emphasize the active participation of women in community radio, arguing ``Women can be directors, broadcasters, and listeners in the community radio sphere.`` Though 40 percent of community radio broadcasters are women, most tend to run programs targeting a general audience (Mansap & Wellmanee, 2011).

Balan and Norman (2013) surveyed 100 women of an Indian village. They found that one-fifth of the respondents (20%) were eager to listen to education, children, and health and nutrition programs. The majority of the respondents were from the age group of 10 to 39 years, and their education qualification was less than Higher Secondary level. More than one-tenth of the respondents (12%) liked women and youth programs (Balan & Norman, 2013)

Nirmala (2015) stated that the radio could be the source of women's empowerment and tools of changing their lives. It can give them a voice by creating awareness of all aspects of human lives. The same notion was also found in `Harnessing the Potential of Community Radio in Empowering Rural Women in Malawi', where Mghagama (2015) opined that community radio could empower and transform women's livelihoods. It argued, ``It empowers them to fight back the domestic violence, male preference attitudes with men gives them the courage to speak their opinion on all issues, to express their interests. It gives them the confidence to live their life.``

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The study followed the Agenda Setting Theory developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. According to the theory, mass media sets agenda of public discussion and popular thoughts. They asserted that mass media could transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda (Griffin, 2008).

As the paper tended to analyze community radio programs and identify the missing links, the theory is much more relevant here. As the community radio has the power to change the attitude and behavior of rural people and create awareness among people, its coverage on women issues is significant to be agenda for rural people.

3. Methodology

Two stages of sampling are followed here. Based on random sampling, 10 community radio has been selected. Those are Radio Nalta, Radio Lokobetar, Radio SagorGiri, Radio Mahananda, Radio Chilmari, Radio Jhenuk, Radio Naf, Radio Bikrampur, Radio Borendra, and Radio Meghna. Due to time obstacles and availability of information, the sampling process embarked on 10 radios only. Following the purposive sampling, 20 regular women-related programs in these radios were selected for analysis. Important to mention that there are two types of programs community radio broadcasts. One of them is regular and another is issue-based. The regular programs are aired weekly and monthly.

On the other hand, the issue-based programs are not aligned with scheduled time. When any issue appears as necessary, community radio arranges programs on the issue instantly. In this study, the regular programs were focal points, not issue-based programs.

Following the qualitative method, the programs were analyzed here as the paper aims to identify the programs' issues. The analysis was conducted on secondary data provided by the BNNCR office. Some data was also collected by interviewing the station managers via phone calls.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Programs and Woman Issues

Following the facts, 20 programs on various woman issues are aired on 10 sampled community radio. The duration of those programs is between 10 to 30 minutes. Some programs are aired monthly, and some are weekly. The chart given below will give a clear picture:

Table 2. Program Frequency (Source: BNNCR)

Name of the Programs	Radio	Time	Time of Airing
GhoreBaire	Radio Nalta	30 mnts	Weekly
NariPokkho	Radio Lokobetar	30 mnts	Weekly
AmraoPari	Radio SagorGiri	20 mnts	Weekly
AponShokti	Radio Mahananda	25 mnts	Weekly
NarirKotha	Radio Chilmari	20 mnts	Weekly
JagoNari	Radio Jhenuk	15 mnts	Weekly
JhinukerDorpon	Radio Jhenuk	10 mnts	Weekly
DekharMajheOdekha	Radio Jhenuk	10 mnts	Weekly
Ghor Mon Janala	Radio Jhenuk	30 mnts	Weekly
ValoThaki	Radio Jhenuk	25 mnts	Weekly
BonchitoNari	Radio Naf	20 mnts	Weekly
NariKontho	Radio Naf	20 mnts	Weekly
ShwapnerAlo	Radio Naf	20 mnts	Weekly
AraBachite Chai	Radio Bikrampur	15 mnts	Weekly
SonaliShwapno	Radio Bikrampur	15 mnts	Weekly
NarirKhomotayon	Radio Bikrampur	15 mnts	Weekly
ShochetonataiMukti	Radio Borendra	20 mnts	2 times in a month
Ongona	Radio Borndra	20 mnts	2 times in a month
ShofolNari	Radio Meghna	30 mnts	Weekly
Ma, Amar Ma	Radio Meghna	20 mnts	Weekly

It is shown that most women-related programs are aired on Radio Jhenuk, covering all of the existing and possible issues. Then Radio Naf and Radio Bikrampur are in second place in covering the programs.

4.2. Issues Covered in the Programs

There are many issues of women in our society that must be presented for their betterment. Sensing this importance, community radio is trying to play a role in this field. The programs selected in this study also tried to cover some essential issues of women that are discussed below.

4.3. Empowerment

All of the sampled radio are very much conscious of woman empowerment as regular programs are aired on this issue. Without woman empowerment, it is not possible to improve and develop a society. As the rural area is less developed, women's empowerment should be more emphasized. Community radio is shading light on this issue in the format of news, magazine, talk show etc. Radio Naf and Radio Bikrampur broadcast regular programs `Narir Khomotayon' weekly, emphasizing this matter.

4.4. Child Marriage

Child marriage appears once as a curse for our country, particularly in the rural area. Through necessary initiatives of the government and non-government agencies, this is decreasing. But, the statistics are still unsatisfactory. Community radio exerts emphasis on this issue. Radio Bikrampur and Radio Naf broadcast `Sonali Swapno' and `Swapner Alo' weekly. These programs are playing a significant role in creating consciousness among rural people. Apart from this, all of the community radio arrange talk shows, Natika etc., regarding child marriage.

4.5. Torture and Oppression

Woman's torture and oppression are common problems in rural areas. Very, unfortunately, many ones consider it as fortunes and norms. Even most of the women do not know the legal remedy. Thus, community radio focuses on this issue to eradicate this social disease. It creates consciousness among women to tackle all of the oppression legally and socially. Radio Nalata broadcasts `Ghore Baire' which plays a great role in creating consciousness. Apart from this, `Jago Nari' of Radio Jhenuk, `Narir Kotha' of Radio Chilmari, and 'Bonchito Nari' of Radio Naf is playing a role in creating

awareness. Besides, Radio Naf and Radio Bikrampur air regular torture programs on housemaids. Some programs are also aired based on social problems like eve-teasing, harassment etc.

4.6. Health Issues

Due to a lack of literacy and consciousness, most rural women suffer health problems. Even they do not know about the issues of reproductive health. Most of the time, the woman tries to hide the age related problems that affect their health. Community radio focuses on health issues giving huge importance. Some of the community radio sets distinctive programs on this issue. `Valo Thaki' of Radio Jhenuk is one of the specific programs on women's health issues. Besides, Radio Nalta, Radio Borendra, Radio Lokobetar, Radio Sagor Giri, and Radio Mahananda broadcast regular programs on health issues, including HIV/AIDS.

4.7. Economic and Social Development

Community Radio aims to make rural woman economically and socially independent. The programs such as `Amrao Pari' of Radio Sagor Giri, and `Shocetonotai Mukti' of Radio Bikrampur are mentionable here. These programs arrange talk shows, discussions etc., on the issue. Apart from this, all kinds of rights are also discussed in these programs. Other community radios broadcast issue-based programs regularly. Those programs are also structured to promote the ways that can play a great role in women's economic and social development.

4.8. Success Stories

Community radio also promotes development journalism through various programs that cover the success story of woman. `Apon Shakti' of Radio Mahananda, `Ongona' of Radio Borendra and `ShofolNari' of Radio Meghna are mentionable here. In these programs, successful women in any sector are invited to share success stories. This program aims to show other women the way of success so that women can face all of obstacles of society well and erase all of the deprivation to be successful, independent and economically solvent.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no alternative to community radio to provide proper and timely information for development. To improve the lives of rural women in all segments, it is necessary to ensure access to information to them and their participation in the process. Mhagama (2015) states that access to information can empower women and also increase their chances of participating in development activities. Hence, community radio can play a colossal role in connecting the rural women with proper information. Community radio can give the rural woman voices, decision making power and strength to face the social, economic and cultural obstacles. The programs discussed above have a great contribution to the process of woman development, promoting many issues through news, talk-shows, magazines, etc. But, the programs should be much more improved in terms of quality, contents, issues and time duration. The recommendations mentioned below can be noteworthy in this discussion:

a) The duration allocated for the programs is not sufficient to serve the purpose properly. Thus, the duration must be extended following the importance of issues.

b) The issues like extremism, terrorism, cybercrime etc., should be included in the program lists. Men and women are vulnerable to being involved in anti-state activities as some media reports covered such kinds of stories. On the other hand, women, especially rural women, may be affected by cybercrimes. So, community radio should broadcast programs that create awareness of cybercrimes.

c) This study was conducted based on the secondary data of community radio. Empirical research should be conducted taking interviews of women to identify the acceptability, problems, and impacts of the programs aired on community radio.

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