



Monthly newsletter on issues
of sustainable development

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES



Community Radio: Providing Voices to the Voiceless In India

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Radio Bundelkhand is a community radio station that empowers the local community in the Bundelkhand region of India. The editorial discusses the radio station's work in climate change adaptation and other development information in the region and its transforming actions and decisions at the grassroots towards a more climate-resilient and sustainable society.

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The power of community radio lies not just in legality but in its ability to amplify the voices that were once silenced, truly embodying the essence of freedom of speech and expression. In this article, Vaishali Kanojia talks about community radio emerging as a powerful catalyst for change in rural India. From its evolution as an underground endeavor to becoming a legal force, she discusses the role it has played in shaping the narratives of marginalised communities.



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The views expressed in the articles in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Development Alternatives.

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Radio Bundelkhand - *Apna Radio Apni Baatein*

Community radio is an effective communication tool that helps in creating an impact on the community in terms of development. It broadcasts materials in the local language that are acceptable and relatable to the community members.

Bundelkhand, a water-scarce region, has been utilising this power of mass media through its radio station called Radio Bundelkhand, an initiative of Development Alternatives and Bundelkhand community residing in the Niwari district, Madhya Pradesh. Set up in 2008, Radio Bundelkhand is a community radio that now has emerged as a people's radio station that provides them with a platform to air their aspirations and concerns and showcase their talent. Radio Bundelkhand is the first community radio station in Madhya Pradesh and second in India. It is a participatory and collaborative approach to empower and build consensus for change.

Being collaborative in its approach, Radio Bundelkhand uses the power of the local community, where the people come forward to design and develop entertainment and informative radio programmes according to their needs. Radio reporters are selected from within the community and trained in radio programming and broadcasting. There are live phone-in programmes and recorded programmes to encourage rural participation.

Currently, Radio Bundelkhand directly covers **150 villages, reaching out to over 400,000 people** of Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh and Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh, India, through its 11 hours of broadcast and indirectly reaches out to lakhs of people through its mobile application. The themes covered through the radio station include agriculture, health and nutrition, climate change, sports, news, entertainment, etc.

'Shubh Kal', a programme and a local people's movement towards resilient futures, is one of the longest and most successful running campaigns of Radio Bundelkhand, which aims to create awareness and design, implement and disseminate knowledge on climate change and related issues in the Bundelkhand region. The Development Alternatives created this programme as a response to the climate change issues faced by the communities in the Bundelkhand region.

The programme has improved, connected and



Community feedback session with Radio Bundelkhand

empowered communication between the farming community, scientists and policymakers using the community radio as an interface tool and the local media as an amplifier. The Shubh Kal Initiative has become a programme and campaign that uses 'Communication for Development' or C4D methodologies to build climate and livelihood resilience across rural communities in the central Indian Bundelkhand region. UNITAR, SDC, CDKN, UNESCO, UKAID, NABARAD, Ford Foundation, La Caixa, Loreal Foundation, Azim Premji, etc., have supported the 'Shubh Kal' programme.

Using the platform and power of this programme, our female radio jockey today is not only the voice of climate change in Bundelkhand but was also selected as 17 among climate leaders in India by the UN in 2020. In 2021, she was selected for National Geographic's One for Change campaign, in which only 10 people from all over India were selected. Since then, she has been featured in many documentaries. She was also invited as a speaker at the Dharitri Youth Conclave in Odisha in 2022.

Today, Radio Bundelkhand has become a catalyst for climate change adaptation and other development information in the region, transforming actions and decisions at the grassroots towards a more climate-resilient and sustainable society. □

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Community Radio's Transformative Journey in India

Introduction

In the vast and diverse tapestry of rural India, where the echoes of progress often struggle to reach, community radio has emerged as a powerful catalyst for change. Originating as a grassroots movement in the mid-20th century, community radio has evolved from an underground endeavour to a legal force, shaping the narratives of marginalised communities. As we delve into the history and importance of community radio in India, we witness a transformative journey that resonates with empowerment, inclusivity and the undying spirit of rural communities.

From Piracy to Legitimacy

Until 2002, community radio operated in a legal grey zone, a space where free speech advocates, academics and community members fought for its legitimacy. The turning point came in 1995 when the Supreme Court declared that **'airwaves are public property and must be used for the public good'**, thus laying the foundation for the legal recognition of community radio in India.¹

Following the Supreme Court's ruling, civil society groups seized the opportunity to champion the cause of community radio. The Bangalore Declaration emerged, articulating the need for a third tier of broadcasting—community radio. Subsequently, the **Pastapur Declaration in 2000** emphasised the non-profit, localised and community-owned nature of community radio. These declarations became pivotal in fuelling the burgeoning community radio movement in India.

Government Policies: Paving the Way for Community Radio Diversity

In the dynamic narrative of India's community radio, government policies have emerged as pivotal architects, sculpting the landscape and expanding the scope of this transformative medium.

In a landmark move, the Government of India in December 2002 took a decisive step by approving a policy that granted exclusive licenses to well-established educational institutions, including prestigious entities such as IITs/IIMs.² This not only laid the foundation for the legal framework of community radio but also signalled an early emphasis on educational institutions as torchbearers of this innovative broadcasting medium.

The turning point arrived on 1 February 2004, with the launch of Anna FM—a pioneering campus 'community' radio station initiated by students at Anna University.³ This marked a historic stride, affirming that community radio was not merely a legal concept but a tangible reality. However, despite this milestone, the voices of marginalised communities lingered on the periphery, highlighting the need for further evolution.

While the 2002 policy reflected positive intent, its limitation became evident as eligibility remained restricted to educational institutions. The evolving dynamics of India's media scene necessitated a shift towards greater inclusivity. Recognising this need, in 2006, the government introduced

¹<https://www.gktoday.in/community-radio-in-india/>

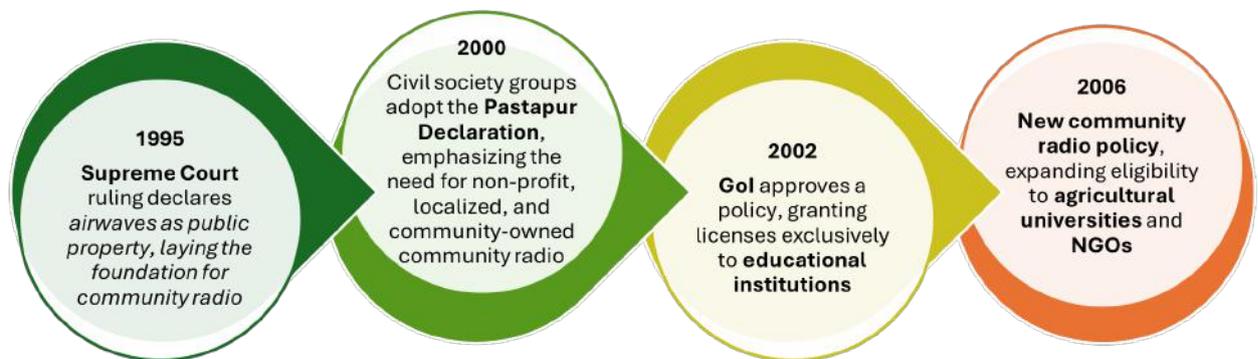
²<https://mib.gov.in/sites/default/files/ConsolidatedPolicyGuidelinesforsettingupCRSsinIndia.pdf>

³<https://www.annauniv.edu/MediaScience/AnnaFM.php>

a fresh community radio policy, expanding eligibility beyond traditional educational institutions. Recognising the agrarian backbone of many rural communities, agricultural universities were now included as potential license holders. This inclusivity extended beyond academia to embrace civil society institutions, particularly non-governmental organisations (NGOs).⁴ This marked a significant paradigm shift, acknowledging that community radio could thrive when entrusted to organisations deeply embedded in grassroots movements and community development. Under this new policy, the FM band 88–108 MHz became a canvas for a diverse range of voices, breaking free from the confines of exclusivity.

As of 2024, the community radio landscape in India continues to evolve. Efforts are underway to broaden eligibility beyond educational institutions, addressing the diverse needs of communities. The power of community radio lies not just in legality but in its ability to amplify the voices that were once silenced, truly embodying the essence of freedom of speech and expression.

In a country as diverse as India, community radio stands as a testament to the potential of grassroots movements, legal victories and the undying spirit of communities to reclaim their narrative. The airwaves once deemed limited, are now echoing the stories of the unheard,



Transformation of community radio in India

Radio Bundelkhand: Pioneering Change in Bundelkhand Region

Amidst this transformative journey, Radio Bundelkhand stands out as a trailblazer, marking the first community radio station in the Bundelkhand region, India. This station exemplifies the power of community radio to amplify local voices, preserve cultural heritage and foster positive change in geographically challenging areas.

These policy shifts have profoundly impacted the community radio landscape in India. The once-restricted corridors of educational institutions have expanded into a vibrant symphony of voices, encompassing agricultural insights, community development initiatives and the rich tapestry of civil society endeavours.



Narrowcasting session in Bundelkhand: A united voice against climate challenges

marking a transformative journey from silence to resonance. Community radio, with its roots deeply embedded in the fight for free speech, has become an indispensable tool for empowering rural voices and reshaping the destiny of India's rural communities. □

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⁴<https://mib.gov.in/broadcasting/community-radio-stations>

Financial Sustainability of Community Radio Stations

Introduction

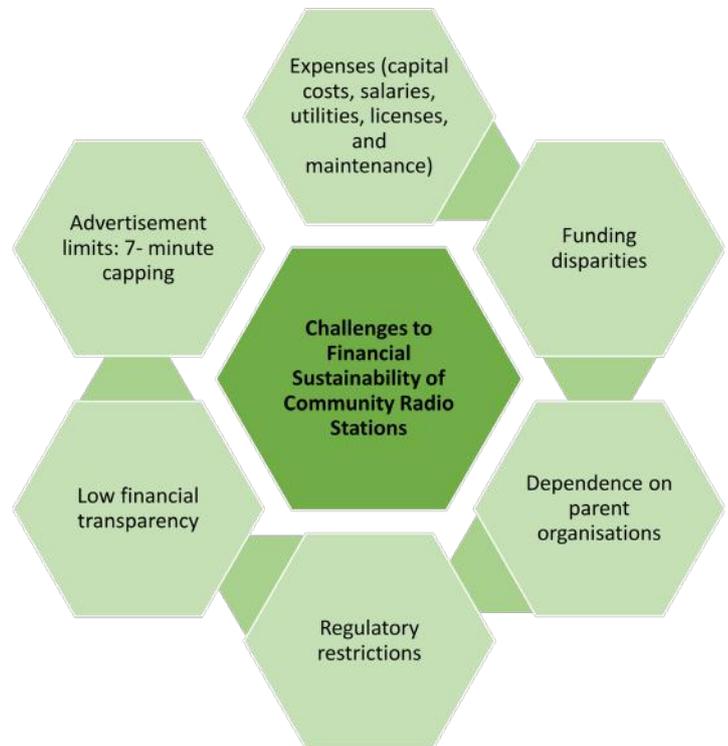
The community radio station movement in India gained momentum through an organised effort to build a collective identity among citizens. These stations were conceived as instruments for local empowerment and actively engage communities in development and social change issues. At the core of this approach is participatory interaction, where community radio serves as a crucial tool to address various community challenges, allowing people to identify problems and collaboratively create solutions. The sustainability of community radio stations is crucial to their continued positive impact on communities and their active engagement in local issues.

The sustainability of community radio is a complex issue that hinges on social, organisational, technical, legal and financial factors. The primary concern is the financial performance and future funding sources, given many stations' reliance on donor grants. Nair (2011) underscores the challenge of communities managing stations post-donor support, leading to sustainability concerns. This article delves into the financial aspects of community radio, identifies key challenges and offers recommendations for enhanced sustainability.

Understanding the Problem

Community radio stations face a recurring challenge of financial sustainability, as they need to cover various expenses such as capital costs, salaries, utilities, licenses and maintenance. To remain viable, these stations require diverse revenue sources. However, there are fund disparities among them, with some heavily relying on parent organisations. This can potentially hinder their autonomy.

Certain community radio stations often rely on diverse funding sources, such



Challenges to financial sustainability of community radio station

as parent organisations, government support and community-generated funds. This funding diversification is usually linked to the organisational capacity and financial diversity of the radio stations. However, challenges persist, particularly in community-generated funds such as membership fees, local advertising and community donations. Regulatory restrictions within large NGOs and government-supported institutes hinder funding source diversification. Expenditure patterns, especially high staff salaries and low financial transparency impede trust and donor confidence, hindering fundraising opportunities.

The absence of financial transparency, in community radio stations undermines trust, hinders engagement and jeopardies donor confidence, impeding fundraising and grants. Transparent financial practices are vital for building trust, attracting support and

ensuring long-term revenue, contributing to sustainability and autonomy.

The Policy Guidelines for Community Radio Stations in India (2022) have allowed eligible organisations to seek funding from multilateral aid agencies. Here, it is important to note that foreign funding requires clearance under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976. While sponsored programme transmission is restricted, limited advertising and announcements related to local events and services are allowed, capped at 7 minutes per broadcast hour. Revenue from advertisements should be allocated to operational and capital expenses, with any surplus requiring permission for alternative use.

Recommendations

To ensure financial sustainability, it is important to promote fund diversity. Encouraging stations to explore funding beyond parent organisations, with NGOs playing a pivotal role in capacity building and project development is essential. As per the Community Radio Association (personal communication, August 31, 2022), increasing the existing 7-minute advertising limit on community radios to 12 minutes per hour is recommended. This change aims to motivate community radios to explore advertising opportunities within their communities, diversify revenue sources and enhance sustainability. The Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC) should lift the existing community radios from booking advertisements below BOC-prescribed rates, allowing flexibility in advertisement rates.

Community empowerment is vital, emphasising the need for increased community involvement in community-generated funds. Local audit and scrutiny mechanisms should be developed to ensure transparency and accountability (Ideosync Media Combine, 2015). Investment in capacity building through staff and volunteer training is crucial to improve project development skills, enabling stations to attract external funding. Regulatory advocacy is essential to drive changes that facilitate fund diversification, particularly

within large NGOs and government-supported institutions. To build trust, it is vital to implement transparency measures, such as maintaining separate bank accounts and regularly disclosing financial details.

Conclusion

It is essential to ensure that community radio stations are financially sustainable for their continued positive impact on local communities. Strategic interventions are recommended to foster a diverse funding landscape, empower communities, invest in capacity building, advocate for regulatory changes and prioritise transparency. Further research is needed to compare the effectiveness of 'project-based funds' versus service-based revenues for fostering financial independence and the practical viability of independence from parent institutions. Implementing these measures will help community radio stations navigate financial complexities, strengthen autonomy and significantly contribute to community development and positive social change.



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Facilitating Trellis Farming Through Radio Lalit Lok Vani

Radio Intervention

Mankesh, a resident of Dharampura, embarked on a journey to create her own livelihood and support her family's sustenance and children's education. She initiated **trellis farming**, which proved to be a lucrative venture for her. Over the past few years, the Bundelkhand region has been grappling with water scarcity, making traditional farming challenging. Mankesh explained that water scarcity had made traditional farming difficult.

One day, the team from Radio Lalit Lok Vani visited Jakhaun to interact with farmers for their programme 'Khet Khalihan', which is broadcasted on the radio. During the visit, Mankesh was also present and the radio reporter Kashiram engaged with the locals. He **discussed trellis farming** and after the discussion, Mankesh expressed her interest in trellis farming to Kashiram.

For the past four years, Mankesh has been engaged in trellis farming, with support from the Community Radio Lalit Lok Vani. She narrates, 'When I got involved in this work, the team of Radio Lalit Lok Vani facilitated collaboration with the Agricultural Science Center (KVK), providing me with tools like a hoe, bamboo, ropes, among others. I started farming crops like bottle gourd, ridge gourd, pumpkin, beans. I sell vegetables in the market every day, generating a substantial income for my family's sustenance. Additionally, I attended training on trellis farming organised by KVK, where I learned various techniques related to trellis farming. Initially, I was unsure if I could do this work, but with the support of my husband and other family members, I succeeded.'



In conversation with Mankesh

The training emphasised the maintenance and care of the trellis model. Adhering to these practices, Mankesh turned trellis farming into a successful business. She acknowledges the role of Radio Lalit Lok Vani in introducing her to trellis farming and creating an opportunity for her to enhance her livelihood. She believes that trellis farming is a beneficial venture for the economically disadvantaged, and those who undertake it can improve their livelihoods.

During her interview, Mankesh mentioned, 'We have 2 acres of land where we are practicing trellis farming and sustaining our livelihood. I regularly listen to the programmes on the radio and implement them. If I need any information, I contact Lalit Lok Vani or KVK.' □

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Lalitlokvani, community radio station has a reach of about 200 villages which reaches a population of more than 300000. Which includes men, women, children, youth, students, artists, shopkeepers, farmers, cattle rearers, disabled, etc., which includes about 400 More folk artistes have joined the radio and are performing.

Orchestrating Dreams: Ravi Parihar - Radio Bundelkhand Taps Local Talent

The town of Orchha, famously recognised as Raja Ram's kingdom, is nestled in the Niwari district of Madhya Pradesh. Mr Ravi Parihar, a resident near Orchha Panchayat, resides with his close-knit family—a mother, wife, two brothers and two nephews. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree and harbours a profound passion for playing the tabla, a percussion instrument, and demonstrating his skills within his community.



Studio recording with Ravi Parihar

In the early chapters of his musical journey, Ravi's recognition was confined to a small circle and financial avenues were limited. The turning point arrived in 2008 with the establishment of Radio Bundelkhand, a community radio station in TARAgam Orchha. This marked not just the advent of a broadcast medium for the people living nearby but a transformative platform that empowered individuals to voice their aspirations and concerns and, importantly, showcase their talents.

Undeterred by uncertainties, Ravi found the courage to step into the radio office. Welcoming staff and a pleasant atmosphere fuelled his enthusiasm and he realised the untapped potential the radio offered to showcase his skills. Armed with newfound determination, he acquired details about how he could contribute to the community radio station, setting the stage for a remarkable journey.

Subsequently, Ravi, accompanied by his colleagues, ventured into the realm of song recording sessions. Within these sessions, the rhythmic beats of his tabla not only resonated within the walls of the recording studio but also found their way into the hearts of listeners when the songs were broadcast. Now familiar with Ravi's talent, the local community reached out with invitations, asking, 'Brother, can you come and play the tabla at our party?' A simple condition, 'Brother, you will have to pay,' not only validated Ravi's artistry but also marked the beginning of a significant increase in his income.

The transformative power of the radio, particularly Radio Bundelkhand, became evident. It was not just a medium for entertainment; it became a catalyst for change in Ravi's life and the lives of many others. This radio station emerged as a bridge between talent and recognition, aspirations and achievements. It served as a beacon for those who sought to make their voices heard and talents acknowledged.

Ravi Parihar is now a respected tabla player in Orchha. Invitations to play at Bhagwat Katha events come not just as a recognition of his musical prowess but as a celebration of the journey that began with a simple visit to a radio office. His gratitude extends to Radio Bundelkhand, the catalyst that propelled him onto a stage where his talent found its rightful audience.

Ravi's tabla has become more than a musical instrument; it is a symbol of resilience, creativity and the transformative power of platforms like Radio Bundelkhand. The radio station that once seemed like just another building near Taragram has become the epicentre of a cultural promotion, where voices are amplified, talents celebrated and dreams realised. □

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Radio Kisan Vani Sironj - Broadcasting Innovative Practices in Agriculture

In the heartland of Sironj and Lateri regions, where concepts like organic farming and soil testing were once alien to farmers, a transformative force has emerged: Kisan Vani Sironj. Established in 2008, this community radio station has played a pivotal role in revolutionising agricultural practices in the region, reaching over 200 villages.

Ramlal Ahirwar's Journey to Productivity

Mr Ramlal Ahirwar, a seasoned farmer from Berkhedi Jagir, was alarmed by the declining productivity of his fields. Unaware of soil testing, he grappled with low yields from his farm. The turning point came when he tuned into a Kisan Vani Sironj programme on soil testing. Intrigued, Ramlal reached out to the radio station for more information. Armed with newfound knowledge, he conducted soil testing on his fields. The results were transformative; his crops thrived and Ramlal's agricultural fortunes took a positive turn. Today, he is a testament to the impact of targeted agricultural information delivered through community radio.

Anil Kumar Jain: Embracing Organic Farming

Anil Kumar Jain, a farmer residing in Custom Path, Sironj, faced escalating costs and losses due to excessive pesticide use. The concept of organic farming, however, was a revelation to him. The Kisan Vani Sironj programme enabled Anil to learn about the benefits of organic practices. Intrigued by the prospect of reducing costs and achieving better crop prices, Anil decided to experiment with organic farming in some areas. The results exceeded his expectations. It helped reduce costs, improved crop quality and enabled higher selling prices. Anil's journey from pesticide-dependent farming to successful organic practices is a testament to the power of informed decision-making facilitated by community radio.



Interview with farmers on horticulture

Kisan Vani Sironj: Empowering Agriculture

These success stories underscore how Kisan Vani Sironj, with its accessible and targeted information, has empowered farmers to embrace sustainable and informed agricultural techniques. Bridging the knowledge gap, this community radio station continues to be a catalyst for change, fostering a culture of agricultural innovation in the region.



Interviewing about vegetable farming



Field visit: informing about diseases and pests



Kisan Vani Sironj listeners tuning in to the radio

Impact Beyond Borders

While the primary focus of Kisan Vani Sironj is Sironj Tehsil, its influence extends to neighbouring tehsils, such as Kurwai, Nateran, Lateri, Ganjbasoda, and Shamshabad, benefiting over 200 villages. With daily broadcasts of 7 hours each, the radio station provides regular updates on market prices, weather information, livelihood programmes and government schemes. The impact of Kisan Vani Sironj goes beyond individual success stories, contributing to the overall agricultural upliftment of the entire region.

In conclusion, Kisan Vani Sironj stands as a beacon of change in the agricultural landscape of Sironj and surrounding regions. By disseminating crucial information, the radio station has not only transformed individual farming practices but also contributed to the collective knowledge and prosperity of the farming community. In the ongoing journey of agricultural sustainability, Kisan Vani Sironj continues to play a crucial role in shaping a brighter and more informed future for farmers in the heartland of Madhya Pradesh. □

By Ankit Rajpoot

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सामुदायिक रेडियो केंद्र किसान वाणी (वर्तमान नाम ISAP इंडिया फाउंडेशन) सिरोंज इंडियन सोसाइटी ऑफ एग्रीबिजनेस प्रोफेशनल की पहल है जिसकी शुरुआत 2008 में की गई थी और किसान वाणी सिरोंज 2008 से लगातार कृषि संबंधी तमाम जानकारियाँ प्रसारित करता आ रहा है किसान वाणी सिरोंज का मुख्य उद्देश्य श्रोताओं तक खेती की जानकारी उपलब्ध कराना है ।

Radio Bundelkhand - Transforming a Radio Jockey into a Climate Campaigner

As a young girl growing up in Bundelkhand, Varsha first witnessed the impacts of climate change when she saw the village ponds being dry for more extended periods every year and the continuous reduction of water in the wells. Varsha was curious about water conservation from a very young age. Her first effort towards water conservation was using wastewater from her house to irrigate a small family kitchen garden. From this initial effort towards mitigating water shortage, she gradually became fully involved in the field of climate change.

Varsha longed to become the voice of climate change in Bundelkhand. When she started working in Radio Bundelkhand as a radio jockey, she realised she could use this platform to reach out to all affected by climate change. One of the first challenges she faced while working with climate change was gender discrimination. But slowly and gradually, she overcame this and became the voice of many community members in the village.

Using the platform and power of community radio, Radio Bundelkhand, Varsha has become the voice of climate change in Bundelkhand. She was selected by the UN as one of the 17 climate leaders in India in 2020. In 2021, she was one of the ten people from the country to be selected for National Geographic's One for Change campaign. Since then, Varsha has been featured in many documentaries. She was also invited as a speaker at the Dharitri Youth Conclave in Orissa in 2022.

Radio Bundelkhand 90.4 FM, a community radio, is an initiative of Development



Alternatives, providing voice to the community in the Bundelkhand region in Central India. Established on 23 October 2008, Radio Bundelkhand is the first community radio station in Madhya Pradesh and the second in India. It has emerged as a people's radio station providing a platform to air their aspirations and concerns and showcase their talent.

Its participatory and collaborative approach empowers and builds consensus for change. The radio station is in the Development Alternatives Appropriate Technology Centre. ☐

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Radio Bundelkhand - Shubh Kal Programme's Impact on Climate Change Awareness

In the heart of rural Bundelkhand, the Shubh Kal Programme stands as a transformative force aiming to enhance climate resilience. This initiative, spanning 100 villages in Jhansi and Tikamgarh districts, cleverly merges education and entertainment to illuminate the profound impacts of climate change.

Creating Change Through Edutainment

The Shubh Kal programme's core mission is to instil climate-friendly practices within rural communities. Utilising rural reality shows and an 'edutainment' approach, it tackles apathy towards climate change adaptation. Beyond community engagement, it extends its influence to stakeholders, establishing the 'Shubh Kal' brand and Radio Bundelkhand, reinforcing its institutional impact.

Empowering Rural Women and Youth

The programme aims to empower Bundelkhand's rural women and youth to become climate change ambassadors. Utilising rural reality shows, it imparts knowledge and encourages active participation, fostering a sense of responsibility towards environmental sustainability.

Measurable Outcomes

Tangible outcomes showcase the programme's success. Twenty-five change ambassadors emerged, catalysing positive change in five villages. At least one climate-friendly measure was adopted by 500 households, influencing 15% of targeted households and around 3000 participants.

Broadcasting for Impact

Strategic broadcasting involved active participation of change ambassadors, collaboration with local service centres and continuous follow-up on radio and television. This sustained approach ensured the programme's lasting impact.

Diverse Activities for Lasting Change

The programme's success hinges on active engagement through various activities such



Winners of 'Kaun Banega Shubh Kal Leader'

as song competitions, puppet shows and street plays. These initiatives reached diverse audiences, leaving a lasting impression on the community.

Adding Local Stories to the Narrative

Prakash Kushwaha's story adds a compelling layer to the narrative. In the face of drought, 38-year-old farmer Prakash Kushwaha's life took a turn when he embraced the Shubh Kal Programme. Participating in the 'Kaun Banega Shubh Kal Leader' competition, he championed the creation of organic fertiliser (Amrit Mitti). Victory in the competition not only transformed Prakash's life but also inspired 20 villagers to adopt sustainable farming practices. His journey from distress to a leader in sustainable farming epitomises the Shubh Kal Programme's impact, showcasing how community-driven initiatives empower individuals and reshape livelihoods, even in the face of climate challenges.

In conclusion, the Shubh Kal Programme's success lies in its ability to blend education with entertainment, raise awareness about climate change and foster responsibility within rural communities. □

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Radio Bundelkhand

Apna radio Apni baatein



Radio Bundelkhand - Climate communication radio programme for rural communities, a science-policy-community platform that broadcasts and educates climate change adaptation techniques in 150 villages across Jhansi and Niwari districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh

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