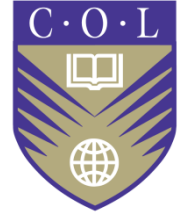


# *Community Radio is the Answer: What is the Question?*

---



*AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference*

*Voices for a Sustainable and Sound Future*

*20-23 February 2010*

*Bangalore, India*

*Session: A UNICEF-AMARC Round Table Seminar on the State of Community Radio in Asia Pacific*

*Sir John Daniel and Ian Pringle  
Commonwealth of Learning*

## **Introduction: Learning for Development**

It is a pleasure to be here in this very international Asia-Pacific gathering on International Mother Language Day and to bring you greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning. We are pleased to have contributed to this conference through the capacity-building workshop that Ian Pringle organised earlier this week.

The Commonwealth of Learning is an intergovernmental body of the 54-member Commonwealth and its focus is learning for development. Ian and I are here because the Commonwealth of Learning believes that community radio is a powerful tool for learning for development, especially informal learning for improving health and livelihoods. The scale of learning challenge is so overwhelming that all viable methods must be harnessed to it.

Community radio is important because it is both a mass medium and a local medium. So our title today is *Community Radio is the Answer: What is the Question?*

Let us give two examples of the question.

## **Major development challenges**

First, there is the surge towards secondary schooling. For 20 years the campaign to attain Universal Primary Education has been a key focus of development efforts. But we have been so obsessive about that campaign that we find ourselves unprepared for its success. We are not there yet but progress towards universal primary education is now rapid. The result is that a tidal wave of youngsters is now surging

towards secondary schooling. Worldwide some 400 million children between the ages of 12 and 14 are not in secondary school. We have a challenge of scale that must be addressed at scale.

To provide these children with the opportunities for learning that can give them some choice in their lives every viable method must be used: expanding conventional public schools and private schools, developing open schools, and using media and ICTs. Community radio can play an important role in giving youngsters the skills that will lead to better livelihoods and getting them into employment or self-employment. It can also help to keep them healthy, which is the second challenge.

The international community has declared its commitment to reverse the spread of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. So far success is limited. This is a crucial issue for the Commonwealth where the rate of HIV infection is twice the world average. Six African Commonwealth countries lose 4% of their teachers to AIDS each year. Some 500 million people develop malaria each year, 90% of them in Sub-Saharan Africa and 6% in India, and as many as 3 million – mostly children– die of it. Newer health threats are equally serious: predictions indicate that 380 million people will develop diabetes by 2025. In Kiribati, diabetes already accounts for 8% of deaths.

There is clearly an urgent need for more learning about health. For resource-poor populations local community media can be a powerful means of promoting learning for health. The timing is perfect, because after a long period when many governments feared community radio as potentially subversive, most of them are loosening up. Our host country, India, is a good example of a country that now sees community radio as a constructive player in development and is encouraging a huge multiplication of stations.

## COL's work with Community Radio

At the Commonwealth of Learning we are supporting this process in three ways.

First, our unit in New Delhi, the *Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia* under the leadership of Dr. Ramamurthy Sreedher, is active in three ways.

Step 1 is helping groups that want to start a community radio find their way through the complex bureaucratic process of getting a licence.

Second, CEMCA is holding workshops throughout South Asia on how to set up and manage community radio stations. This has had a useful impact in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Third, with the support of the Government of India, it is assisting in the production of programmes that help rural women learn about the basic science of everyday life. Dr Sreedher was involved in the creation of India's first community radio station at Anna University and has unique experience in the field.

Second, our *Learning for Farming* programme, under the leadership of Dr Balasubramanian Kodhandaraman, is partnering with community media in various Commonwealth countries in order to link farmers to the information that can help them improve their livelihoods.

Third, Ian Pringle's initiative on *Healthy Communities* aims to increase the capacity of community organisations, NGOs and local public institutions to create and use community radio to improve the

health and well-being of the people they serve. That was the thrust of the workshop he organised here and his specific objective is that by 2012 communities in four regions of the Commonwealth will be using community radio for at least 16 new community- driven health-related programmes.

## Action needed

I urge this conference to embrace, in its Bangalore Declaration, the role of community radio in providing non-formal educational opportunities, especially for non literate communities. Community radio is a focal point for community driven learning, allowing learners to identify their own priorities based on participatory mechanisms of assessment. Radio Dramas, storytelling and interviews in particular, are effective and low cost ways of making community voices an integral part of the learning process. Participatory tools used in the development of learning programs encourage networking and collaboration among key local actors, as well as effective advocacy for open learning and community radio.

At the Commonwealth of Learning we commit ourselves to following up energetically on the recommendations of the workshop that was held here, which were:

- To share knowledge about community-based learning programmes with the AMARC networks;
- To build capacity in community groups for designing participatory educational programming, particularly bringing together radio with other groups in development, health, education, etc. in consultation and research about educational priorities, and educational programme development processes; and
- To experiment and demonstrate appropriate educational community radio programmes for example on maternal and child health, diabetes, etc.

## Conclusion

We conclude where we started. There is a huge challenge of learning for development and all proven means must be used to address it. As a mass medium rooted in local contexts community radio has a vital role to play in this endeavour.

We wish you well and thank you for your attention.