

Radio Ujjas: Giving voice to the women of Kutch

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Executive Summary

Community radio is a democratising force in any country as it gives marginalised communities a voice of their own. This is more so the case in India where tribal, underprivileged and minority cultural groups face a crisis of identity vis a vis the mainstream cultures. In India, radio has gradually shifted from being a government monopoly to a highly-commercialized broadcasting service. Owing to the pressure exerted by media advocacy groups and NGOs for making information accessible to people at the grassroots, the Government of India in 2006 declared airwaves to be public property to be used for promoting public good and reflecting plurality of ideas.

Radio Ujjas is the community radio initiative of the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS), an organization working for the advancement of rural women in Kutch district of Gujarat. Radio Ujjas was a landmark initiative since it was the first one in the country to use the All India Radio, a government platform, for airing its programmes at a time when community radios were not even recognised by the Indian government's laws on broadcasting. It heavily utilises community support to decide its programme content, produce its shows and regularly monitors community feedback.

In a region as vast and geographically typical as Kutch, Radio Ujjas has emerged as a model for using information and communication technology for development. The level of literacy, particularly among women, in many parts of the district is abysmally low but, at the same time, about 90 per cent of the families own a radio set. Combined with the portability of a radio set, the latter is an effective medium for entertainment and information; it is greatly preferred over other communication media like newspaper and television. Radio Ujjas has developed various participatory, local-language radio programmes in an effort to generate and reflect on debate about local concerns, needs, priorities and issues. The centrality of local

folklore, music and characters highlights the aim of remaining true to Kutchi culture while providing important information and supporting literacy efforts. The range of Radio Ujjas's programme themes includes, among many others, education, fishing, *panchayat*, girls' rights, violence against women, and displacement. It played a significant role in mobilising resources and uplifting the morale of people in wake of the Bhuj earthquake of 2001.

Currently, Radio Ujjas operates from the Bhuj and Rajkot AIR stations and enjoys a listenership of over 75 per cent. It has acquired government clearance for a radio station of its own. The proposed radio station will reach over 7000 people within a 10 km area.

Background



Figure 1: Map of Gujarat with Kutch district highlighted

According to Census of India 2011, Kutch is the largest district of India. Table 1 gives a brief profile of the district.

Area (sq km)	45, 652
Population	2, 090, 313
Male	1, 096, 343
Female	993, 970
Density of population (per sq km)	46
Sex ratio	907
Literacy rate	71.58
Male	80.60
Female	61.62

Table 1: District profile: Kutch
Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Gujarat. 2011

Kutch has distinct geographical features. 51 per cent of its land is covered by desert and with scant and irregular rainfall, the district is constantly under threat of drought. During the droughts of 1985-88, KMVS was set up in 1989 in response to the enhanced subversion and violence faced by women in times of greater economic pressures. KMVS was initiated as an independent organization of rural women that would work towards developing women's capabilities and harnessing their collective strength. From its inception, KMVS has concentrated on building local leadership and creating women's groups or *sangathans* in remote and less accessible villages. Today, KMVS has grown into a dynamic organization of over 70 staff members and 15000 rural women workers who are organized into *mahila mandals* (women's groups), spread across 4 talukas in 175 villages. The *mahila mandals* in the villages are organized and federated into *taluka sangathans*, which in turn all federate into the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan.

Given the variety of issues that women face, KMVS evolved into an organization with issues-based units for education, health, savings and credit, marketing and design support, legal aid, *panchayati raj*, environment, natural resources management and communication.

The move towards radio-based medium

One of KMVS's most effective programmes has been their community radio initiative called Radio Ujjas. Several reasons contributed to its establishment.

Radio Ujjas emerged out of KMVS's focus on adolescent girls' education, basic functional literacy with *sangathan* (women's group) members, and development of context-specific educational curricula for literates and neo-literates. The literacy programme was initiated in Khavda Paschim block of the district, about 30 km from India's border with Pakistan. It led to the creation of 'Ujjas Mahiti Kendra' (Ujjas Information Centre), out of which members began publishing a newsletter called 'Ujjas'-

meaning light. Its principal objective was to disseminate locally relevant information about and among village people, particularly women. From a 2-pages pamphlet, the newsletter has now grown to carry 20 pages. It is in simplified Kutchi and Gujarati and designed to be easy to read. Approximately 2500 copies are circulated in an effort to both inform *sangathan* members of *sangathan* activities and to provide Kutch's people with perspective on the experiences of rural women.

However, KMVS realized that its (print) medium to reach people at the grassroots was not sufficient in a district where female literacy rate was very low (40.89 in 1991).¹ In some areas, the literacy rate among women was as low as 0.5 per cent.² For this, radio was identified as a medium that could transcend barriers of illiteracy among the local people, particularly women. Hence, KMVS *sangathan* women from Mundra *taluka* prepared a programme on education in Kutchi language and it was aired by All India Radio (AIR). However, it was soon realized that AIR's programmes were planned centrally, often making it difficult for KMVS to get its community-based programmes included.

Radio Ujjas grew out of the need to voice concerns relevant to the region at the appropriate time. For instance, agriculture-related programmes were relevant only in the farming season. KMVS followed the stipulated guidelines to buy airtime from AIR in order to broadcast their own programmes. KMVS paid INR 3,600 to AIR for airing one programme of 30 minutes duration. At the same time, in order to gauge the reach of radio in Kutch, KMVS carried out an extensive household survey in the whole district, which revealed that the primary livelihood options for people in Kutch include agriculture-related activities, cattle-rearing, fishing, and handicrafts. It was identified that approximately 90 per cent of people in the district own a radio and at least 70 per cent regularly listen to radio even when they are at

¹ Census of India, 1991

² KMVS survey findings

work. Radio provided people with information as well as entertainment. This encouraged the idea of a community radio owned and operated by KMVS.

To start the community radio programme, KMVS built on its long presence in Kutch doing development work with women and trained some of them to be community reporters for its radio programmes. Drishti Media Collective provided support by means of training for working with electronic media. Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A) helped KMVS with record-keeping techniques, user feedback collection and impact assessment. Finally, the initiative was funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Objective

Radio Ujjas aims to use the medium of radio to allow people of Kutch to gain access to information, education and entertainment on issues of immediate relevance to them, in their local Kutchi language.

Working Design

Radio Ujjas is operated by a team of 8 members, drawn from different villages within the district. All of them have passed class X and have a fair understanding of local community issues.

Content selection

The content for radio programmes is selected after due consultation with the community members. Village-level reporters and volunteers organize meetings to know the community's perspective on issues most urgent to them. These discussions often throw up concerns common to many villages. The Radio Ujjas team then deliberates on the most appropriate format of the programme for putting across these concerns.

Listeners' feedback on radio programmes frequently results in identifying new themes and issues to work upon. With a broader avenue for voicing their views, community members now

themselves demand information. In 1993, the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution provided women with 33 per cent reservation of seats in panchayats. With this development, the *sangathan* women who were also involved in the functioning of their respective panchayats demanded training and information related to day-to-day panchayat administration. The result was a serial conceived in docu-drama format in Kutchi language and was titled *Kunjai Paaje Kutchji* (Saris Crane of Our Kutch). The programme was started in December 1999 and aired 53 episodes.

Programme production

Once programme content has been identified and partner organizations contacted for information, the team then carries out extensive research on existing programmes on similar themes, and conducts household surveys to gather data and assess listener profile. The format of the programme is decided on basis of the topic. Phone-ins, interviews, discussions among experts and community members, popular vote, quiz, songs, responding to listeners' letters have been the different formats in which Radio Ujjas's programmes have been made so far. Once the format of the programme is decided upon, a meeting is held with community members to discuss it as such. Auditions are then held to identify singers or actors for the programme. Community members receive remuneration for their work, which ranges from INR 250 per hour of voice over to INR 2000 for singing or playing musical instruments.

Once the programme has been created, a test run is done within a small gathering of villagers randomly selected and their feedback collected.



Figure 2: A Radio Ujjas team member during a programme recording
Source: KMVS

Training

Every member of KMVS receives perspective-building training upon their initiation into the organization.

Programme promotion

Every time a new programme is launched, the Radio Ujjas team works with KMVS's local *mahila sangathans* to publicise it in the villages. This is done through posters, announcements over loudspeakers, pamphlets, short street plays, organizing meetings with villagers and words of mouth.

Monitoring and evaluation

The impact of Radio Ujjas's programmes at the grassroots is closely monitored by KMVS at various levels. For this, surveys are conducted in three phases: first, at the launch of the programme; second, after 10-12 episodes have been aired; third, once all the episodes of the programme have been aired.

This multi-phase monitoring enables team members to ascertain whether the programme is reaching the target audience and having the intended impact. Adjustments to the content as well as format can then be made midway to ensure its reach and effect.

Feedback mechanism

Listeners can provide their feedback on Radio Ujjas's programmes by writing letters, calling in or even visiting the KMVS office to discuss their concerns.

Finances

Radio Ujjas is financed by KMVS and its partner organizations. However, financial sustainability remains an issue. There are plans to include airing of advertisements in Ujjas's programmes after three months of the proposed station's operations. These advertisements would be based on local culture, news, announcements etc and would be charged INR 1 per second of air time. According to Government of India broadcasting rules for community radios, an hour of programme broadcasting can at most include 5 minutes of advertisements.

Methodology

KMVS was started in 1989 and has completed more than 20 years of operation. Based on its extensive involvement in the entire district of Kutch in diverse fields like community radio, health, handicrafts, enterprise development, legal issues, and savings and credit, there is ample reason to believe that KMVS has positively impacted the lives of thousands of families in a positive manner.

Kutch is spread over a vast area and radio is an effective medium for disseminating information among people who are largely illiterate or can only understand local Kutchi language. KMVS's community radio model has inspired those in Dang and Jharkhand; hence, its impact is clearly visible even outside the district. Moreover, KMVS's Radio Ujjas was the first community radio programme in India to use AIR airwaves. Even though the impact of the community radio initiative is clearly identifiable and measurable in terms of listener feedback etc, the programme has not been sufficiently documented.

In order to analyze the programme impact and verify good practice, existing documentation on KMVS's community radio programme was studied. This largely included media articles and short case studies by other NGOs. Generic discussions on existing broadcasting laws, and particular community radio-related laws, in India were studied through academic papers. Based on these studies, a set of unique features and benefits of Radio Ujjas was identified. These were confirmed and elaborated upon, and challenges were discussed, through multiple in-depth telephonic interviews with the Programme Coordinator, Radio Ujjas in Bhuj and with a community member belonging to Nakhatrana block in Kutch.

Key Stakeholders

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS)

KMVS is the primary stakeholder in Radio Ujjas. Radio Ujjas started with support from three other partner organizations apart from KMVS- Drishti, IIM-A and UNDP. Once the training and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place, KMVS overtook the operations of Radio Ujjas- research, training, record-keeping, content selection, programme production, finances, partnership-building, and feedback monitoring.

In 2006, a community radio was started in the tribal district of Dang in Gujarat with help from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). The episodes were produced in the local Dangi language and enlisted huge support from the community members. The Ujjas team's expertise with production, publicity and monitoring of community radio programmes was sought for the same.

Partner organizations

Partner organizations are involved with Radio Ujjas in two capacities- (a) they provide content for the latter's programmes in terms of using their local influence within the community to spread awareness among people about Ujjas and

influence them for participation, and (b) they play a recipient's role as well: the Radio Ujjas team works to spread among these organizations a notion that communication media can be used for development; the team often follows this up by helping the partner organizations in preparing programmes for narrowcasting among their communities of influence.

Partner organizations work with smaller communities and specialize in particular issues like political advocacy, agriculture, irrigation, gender etc. Hence, they are well-placed to provide valuable information for specific content as well as strong grassroots influence. For instance, KMVS worked with the Gujarat Green Revolution Company (GGRC) for the Government of Gujarat's irrigation programme. Similarly, along with its partner NGO Sahjeevan, KMVS sought to educate women in natural resource management.

Community members

The primary role of Radio Ujjas is to build participatory models of democracy and development in Kutch. The community members participate in Ujjas as planners, producers and performers. They also provide feedback by way of writing letters, phoning-in to the programme, asking questions related to issues of immediate relevance to them etc.

Community members play a very significant role in pushing for some issues over others. For instance, after the Indian government provided for 33 per cent reservation to women in panchayats in 1993, women from different blocks in Kutch demanded information on day-to-day administration in a panchayat. Concerns like violence against women, their reproductive rights, rights-based issues of fishing community, among many others, have consistently figured as significant topics of interest. These decide the course of Radio Ujjas's programmes.

Lessons Learned

Overall impact

The participation of audience, scope and reach of Radio Ujjas's programmes have increased over time. The people's section of Ujjas's programme has grown in space over time- from a 5-6 minutes short section called *Kutch Kuchhato* in *Kunjali Paanje Kutchi* where interviews with villagers were featured, it has reached a stage where two of three segments of *Kutch Lokji Vaani* provided substantial space even for women to dialogue and debate the traditions and customs that affect women. Today, most of Radio Ujjas's programmes have flexible content. The format and issues raised have the potential to change with every episode, depending upon the urgency of communities' needs.

According to the Ujjas team, their most significant achievement has been that Radio Ujjas was the first community radio initiative to use a government platform for airing its programmes.

programmes in local Kutchi language, only Radio Ujjas has been able to utilise available resources, procure new ones, conduct adequate research and finally consolidate its efforts to sustainably establish an avenue for the community to voice their opinions, find reliable information regarding their problems and seek guidance from.

Moreover, KMVS reported that AIR listenership substantially increased due to Radio Ujjas's programmes. The latter successfully created a space for community-based issues in a government, centrally-managed radio platform. KMVS today has about 12 years of experience in demonstrating efficacy of communication in development.

For its path-breaking programme *Kunjali Paanje Kutchji*, KMVS received the highly respected Chameli Devi Award in 2000.

BHUI EARTHQUAKE- ROLE OF RADIO UJJAS

Kutch is a disaster prone region. It is seismically active, suffers frequent cyclones and a drought almost every 3 years.

After the disastrous earthquake in Bhuj on January 26, 2001, despite massive damage to KMVS's nodal presence in Bhuj, Ujjas played a significant role in motivating people to rebuild their lives. The 2001 earthquake was the first time when immense financial and material help was siphoned into Kutch by government, non-government and private organizations as well as individuals. This instilled a sense of low self-respect among people, propelling them into a habit of asking for help.

Immediately after the quake was started the bi-weekly broadcast of a 15-minutes radio programme titled *Tu Jiyaro Ai* (To be alive!). The programme, launched in March 2001, was supported by the Drishti Media Collective. It was in the format of a magazine, featuring a range of interviews, songs and profiles to capture and air the enormous complexity of the issues that the earthquake had thrown up. Organisers drew on the village reporters, *sangathan* members, newspapers, and phone calls to find details and figures regarding the damage and the reconstruction activities.

Along with the huge amount of money in the name of aid came unfair appropriation of the funds. People in remote villages, with no access to information about the help available, continued to languish. To make information available to people in every part of the affected region and counter corruption, Ujjas started its third programme titled *Kutchi Lokji Vaani* (The voice of the people of Kutch) in July 2002. The programme received a record 1935 postcards within a year; 49 per cent came from Muslim families and 4 per cent from women.

Horizontal model of communication

People of Kutch have been marginalized for long owing to a variety of factors like the varied geography and culture of the region, its fragile ecosystem, low literacy levels, the effects of migration on women, poor health and lack of education and the role of women as producers in terms of the social dynamics. Many organizations are engaged in development efforts in Kutch; their efforts, however, usually are restricted to a top-down provision of services to people. Community members' involvement extends only to their being recipients of development programmes' benefits. Radio Ujjas has transcended the barrier of illiteracy and encouraged a horizontal exchange of information- a participatory interaction between the community and the radio station rather than a vertical, one-way communication method, delivering information from a medium to the public.

The most important aspect of Radio Ujjas is broad participation by community members- often on a volunteer basis- and the ownership and control of its activities by the community through a team that is representative of the community and responsive to the diversity of its needs.

Encouraging a critical attitude in local people

Radio Ujjas has utilised KMVS's long-standing rapport with community members to produce behavioural changes among them. Educating people through entertainment, including with soap operas, dramas, songs and folklores, the Ujjas team has clearly observed positive changes in people's attitude towards set traditional patterns in the society. For instance, Jethiba from the highly orthodox Darbar community stood by her decision not to marry after Ujjas aired a short programme on women's right to have a say in choosing their life partner. Another listener, Rugariba from Bhadrashwar, reported her decision to abandon her husband owing to his infidelity.

Ujjas aimed to jolt people of Kutch out their habit of uncritically accepting treatment meted out to them by the economic and social elite groups in villages, government officials, or corporate interests. This goal has been successfully achieved in many parts of the district and among various social groups. For instance, Kutch has more than 400 kms of coastline, making fishing one of the most viable livelihood options for its people. The fishing community now has a radio programme dedicated to their concerns where they can phone-in to discuss their problems and rights.

Enhancing transparency and accountability

Access to public information inevitably checks corruption by making public aware of what is owed to them. The impact of Radio Ujjas is all the more evident in Kutch since it is a region with practically no other access to information with potential to reach as many people. Owing to the district's proximity with Pakistan, channels of communication are very restricted in Kutch. According to the KMVS team, this often results in people not being aware of their rights and entitlements.

After the Bhuj earthquake in 2001, Radio Ujjas included a *Pardafash* (expose) section in its programme *Kutch Lokji Vaani* to unearth socio-political scams, irregularities and corruption in rehabilitation work. The government had set five categories indicating the degree of damage to the building, with G1 being the least and G5 showing maximum damage. A village named Simanivanh was thoroughly damaged in the Bhuj earthquake and should have been included in the G5 category. The villagers understood the situation inversely and insisted that the engineers put their village in G1 category. The engineers did not correct them. Consequently, the villagers received the amount of money meant only for minor repair, which is what was due to G1 category houses. On being approached by the community members, Radio Ujjas exposed this large-scale corruption and ensured that the villagers got their due.

Unique model of operation for a CR

KMVS operates on a model different from the other popular community radio programmes in India. Most of the community radio initiatives rely on narrowcasting of their programmes. In 2001, a Bangalore-based media advocacy group, Voices, started an audio production centre, *Namma Dhwani* (Our Voice) at Budikote in Kolar district of Karnataka. It has been narrowcasting programmes made by rural men and women trained in basics of radio production. Similarly, the Deccan Development Society (DDS), an NGO working with poor, rural women, set up a community radio station in Zaheerabad area of Medak district, Andhra Pradesh. The DDS women take the audiotapes of their programmes for narrowcasting in the villages.

However, the Radio Ujjas model departed from this path much earlier in 1999 by airing a 30-minute programme made by them in the Kutchi language on All India Radio's Bhuj station by purchasing a commercial slot. This model has now been used by the Centre for Social Justice

to set up a community radio in Dang in Gujarat in 2006.

The way forward

The proposed radio station will cover 26 villages within an area of 10 kilometres. Two reporters, a male and a female, from every village would correspond for the radio programmes. Each of these villages has approximately 50 households with an average of 4-5 members per household.

A programme titled *Lik Buchani* is proposed to be on air from September 2011. The main theme of the programme is to spread awareness among voters in wake of the upcoming *panchayat* elections in Kutch, to inspire women to contest elections, and to take up issues that newly elected women *panchayat* members would face. This programme is the first time since *Kunjil Paanje Kutchi* that new issues related to *panchayat* elections will be taken up for public discussion. The programme will be aired once every week from Rajkot AIR Akashwani.

Research was carried out by the OneWorld Foundation, Governance Knowledge Centre (GKC) team.

*Documentation was created by Research Associate, **Aditi Dayal***

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Appendix A – Interview Questionnaires

RADIO UJJAS TEAM

Background

1. In which areas was Radio Ujjas introduced? What is the current geographical scope of the project?
2. Who are the current stakeholders in the project? What are their roles and responsibilities?
 - a. Were any partner organizations involved in it at that stage?
3. KMVS started Radio Ujjas in 1996. At that time, community radios were not recognised by the Government of India broadcasting laws. How did KMVS get AIR Bhuj station's platform for airing its programmes?
 - a) This (broadcasting in lieu of narrowcasting) was an unconventional approach to community radio at that time. What prompted the innovation?

Working Design

Organization

4. How many members does the Radio Ujjas team have and what is their profile (gender, age, native area, education, work experience)?
5. Where is the Radio Ujjas station based? What is the frequency at which its programmes are broadcasted?

Control and ownership

6. Are there any partner organizations that work with KMVS for Radio Ujjas? If yes, what are their roles?
7. What is the exact role of community members in Radio Ujjas? Is there any remuneration for their services?

Programme content and format

8. Which topics are mostly covered in Radio Ujjas programmes? How are these topics decided upon (e.g., community feedback, focus group discussions)?
9. In which language(s) are your programmes produced? What are the different formats of your programmes (e.g., interviews, discussions, songs, phone-ins)?
10. Please provide a complete and detailed list of programmes that Radio Ujjas has produced till now- name, year(s), theme, format, number of episodes, public reception.

Training

11. What kind of training is provided to the community radio team in terms of technical production skills, developing content, basic training on issues of development, gender etc? Please provide details of these trainings- module, resource persons, funding, target groups.

Technology

12. Please provide exact details of the technical equipments that are utilised by Radio Ujjas (e.g., transmitter, antenna with a feeder cable, studio equipment, studio console, monitoring equipment)?
13. For the transmitter system, the government has specified an Effective Radiated Power (ERP) of 100 W, which can be increased to 250 W subject to certain considerations. What ERP does Radio Ujjas operate on? How does it impact the reach of your radio programmes?
14. Similarly, the government-specified tower height is a maximum of 30 m and a minimum of 15 m in order to prevent possibility of biological hazards of Radio Frequency (RF) radiation. What is the height of the tower installed for use by Radio Ujjas?

Publicity

15. In large measure, the reach and impact of community radio programmes depends on their pre-airing publicity. What efforts are made to encourage community members to listen to and participate in the radio programmes?

Financial sustainability

16. What are the main heads of community radio operating costs (e.g., equipments, studio costs, salaries, travel) and how are these costs met?
17. How are the radio programmes funded?
18. Does Radio Ujjas broadcast advertisements? If yes, of what kind (e.g., messages issues in public interest by the government, NGOs)? Is any revenue generated from them?

Monitoring of programme reception

19. How does KMVS assess the impact of its radio programmes on the ground? Are there any monitoring mechanisms followed by KMVS?
20. According to our research, a significant problem that community radios face is related to the positioning of transmission towers- detailed surveys are often not done to assess the real reach of their stations. Did Radio Ujjas face any such problems? If yes, how was it overcome? If no, how was the proper orientation of transmission towers achieved?
 - a) How is the community's feedback collected (e.g., letters, phone calls, personal visits to the studio)? How is this feedback utilised?
21. Can you briefly explain the process involved in developing a community radio programme. Impact

22. What is the approximate number and profile of people that Radio Ujjas reaches- gender, occupation, village, age, disability?
23. What is the target transmission area (by government standards, CR stations are aimed at covering 5-10 km) and how much of this is currently covered by Radio Ujjas?
24. Bhuj is a disaster prone region. What role did Radio Ujjas play after the earthquake in 2001?
25. Are there any challenges in running community radio program. If yes, what are challenges? How are these overcome?
 - a) Technical issues
 - b) Licensing/administrative process
 - c) Human resource training
 - d) Financial sustainability
 - e) Censorship efforts on part of the government etc
26. What have been the major achievements of Radio Ujjas (e.g., awards, any CR initiatives that are modelled along the lines of Radio Ujjas, instances of community members taking action based on Radio Ujjas programmes- education of girls etc)?
27. Are there any programmes in the planning? Are there any plans for expansion to more villages?
28. Please provide the following data:
 - a) Dedicated listenership since 1996, on a per year basis
 - b) Number of consistently active community members
 - c) Names of villages whose members are most and least active in relation to Radio Ujjas programmes