CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter offers concluding thoughts on the research process that attempted at studying at a broader level, whether Anna FM as India’s first campus community radio can live up to the mandate stipulated by the Indian government, which is to broadcast programmes essentially on health, education, environment and community development focusing on the participatory aspect that community radio essentially stands for: for, of and by the community; and at a specific level demonstrate the role of campus community radio (Anna FM) in inculcating everyday science awareness among marginalized women.

This thesis traced the history of community radio broadcasting at a global level and the evolution of the sector in India. On a more focused plane, the thesis presented an overview of the global campus community radio movement with the purpose of locating Anna FM’s pedigree as against other forms. An analysis of CCR across the world, its similarities and differences with Anna FM were discussed, as also the different participatory approaches that can impact knowledge and behavior change. The different approaches to community radio research in different contexts have also been analysed. More importantly the role of participatory communication in the context of women’s empowerment has been discussed with illustrations from women-centric community radio initiatives across the world.
The research question: ‘to demonstrate that participatory science communication through campus based community radio can inculcate Everyday Science Awareness among marginalized women’ has been answered through the meticulous design and implementation of a field experiment with control to establish the effects of participatory radio on participant’s awareness and knowledge of the issues and topics. The repeated application of the method to six separate themes comprising the Science for Women program provided an opportunity for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the method and to develop a robust survey instrument. The introduction of the thematic camps, weekly live quiz shows and community skits in the form of off-air participatory outreach activities to supplement the core on-air activities lent a rare opportunity to bond with the community through interpersonal communication that played a significant role in inculcating everyday science awareness in women.

As revealed in this study, Anna FM to a great extent reflects and shapes the richness of the campus community radio model and is the university’s platform to express its social concerns and execute its social responsibility beyond its academic core. This thesis has shown the connection between participatory approaches, university resources and public private partnership both from within and outside the campus, as they intertwine to form a rare form of synergy between campus, community and supportive partnerships. The methodology has been that of an experimental design with the researcher, a radio practitioner herself, co-ordinating and monitoring every aspect of the SFW project in minute detail with both media student volunteers and community volunteers, at each and every stage of the project, practically leaving nothing to chance. Guided by the participatory approach to Community Radio, this thesis has drawn from a range of related thoughts and ideas from CR practitioners and experts in the sector.
The review of literature points to theories and research studies that corroborate and align with the findings of the present study and a couple of studies that partially confirm or contradict. McQuail’s (1987) interpretation of the ‘development media’ and ‘development participant media’ theories and also the principles of the Democratic-Participant Media Theory which is “concerned with the right to use media for interaction in the small-scale settings of the community and favours multiplicity of media and horizontality of communication at all levels” find expression to a large extent in the findings of the SFW initiative, through the effective use of participatory on-air and off-air interventions. The findings present an SFW model that emphasises the endogenous character of development which does not come from outside but through a participatory process of social change within a given society (Rogers 1976) as is evident in the cultural pride, self esteem and decision making ability that manifested in the participating respondents (Dagron 2001).

The findings of the SFW project give rise to an ideal model for development communication that has integral participation as its core goal as summarized by Dagron (2001) influenced by Paulo Freire’s thoughts on social change communication. The outcomes of the SFW project as reflected in the findings based on quantitative and qualitative analysis have been made possible by instilling a sense of belonging (community ownership), where participating respondents played a significant role in the planning, design and programme aspects of the entire project (horizontal organization), where every activity was designed in participatory mode with no top-down campaigns (dialogic process) and where each intervention of the project design was determined by community dialogue through focus group discussions and personal interactions (need-based initiatives). More than just enhancing everyday science awareness through the sharing and transfer of knowledge, the SFW project has been able to create among its participating
women respondents an independent and critical conscience capable of influencing and changing society and to take control (Freire 1973).

The findings of the SFW model align with the paradigm of ‘another development’ (Melkote 1991) that sets forth the importance of cultural identity of local communities and of democratization and participation at all levels. More importantly, the Freirian notions of dialogical communication are central to the model which focuses on participation, cultural identity and empowerment and endorses what McQuail (1987) referred to as ‘multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, deinstitutionalization, interchange of sender-receiver roles and horizontality of communication links at all levels of society.

It is important to note that the evolution of the SFW project idea was a gradual and spontaneous expression of a sense of belonging that women folk in the listening zone of Anna FM displayed during a yearlong interaction with them soon after the station launch and before the SFW project. This regular weekly live interactive chat show was aired on Anna FM every Saturday evening just outside their homes or at places near to where they lived on issues of social concern determined by them. Initially strangers, they hardly knew each other even though they were long time neighbours, typical of an urban setting where people generally keep to themselves and not interfere with each other. And it was only through Anna FM and during these live shows that they came together to make friends, share, learn, understand, unlearn and address issues of common concern. And truly only where this sort of a sense of community is already well established the contribution of community media to community-building process works best (Hollander 1982; Stappers et al 1992) and conversely, in residential areas short on social capital, it seems as if community media can do little to ‘make things better’ (Jankowski et al 2001).
The findings of the SFW project are synchronous with the community media methodology which consists in helping people formulate their problems or to acquire an awareness of new options. The concept of interactivity, with the small media as its operational instrument, has made possible the endogenous acquisition of knowledge and skills within the framework of a search for solutions and the communication process. This has been made possible by the integration of needs analysis and evaluation mechanisms in the communication process to ensure that the SFW project functioned as a communicative instrument integrated into the social ecology of a community.

With regards to the participatory experimental research design adopted in the continuous evaluation of SFW, the findings reveal that this design has proved to be an attractive option in the study of community media (van Vuuren 2006). When the research questions, project design, survey format and data collection methods are evolved through focus group discussions, interpersonal communication and informal interactions with the researched, the research process itself gets simple, clear, transparent and demystified, as seen in the SFW study findings.

As against the practical observation that contradictions of power and participation limited effectiveness of the Honduras project (Tamminga 1989) in contributing to social change, the experience at Anna FM demonstrates that when two communities participated at Kannigapuram and Kotturpuram, an healthy competitive environment evolved, with an eagerness to outsmart the other in terms of showcasing indigenous knowledge. In fact, this led to an innovation of sorts, when the weekly phone-in interactive live show became a bridge between the two communities to know, understand and collaborate better on sharing knowledge and resources. Strangers until then, this additional effort with two student media volunteer teams coordinating
with the two communities at their locale with WLL phones, seemed to forge mutually beneficial partnerships between local communities and pave the way for long term solutions to common issues.

As the SFW study findings reflect, meticulous care went into accommodating multiple interests of the community, ranging from addressing civic issues and self-help group formation to health camps and environment campaigns, through regular feed forward and feedback studies, focus group discussions, live phone-in interactions and frequent interpersonal communication to better handle the challenges of perspectives in conflict important to a critical examination of campus community radio (Salter 1981). Again, the SFW experience at empowering communities through participatory radio clearly points to a complete positive influence beyond socio-economic and educational divides which is a typical example of recognizing individual strengths and making best use of indigenous resources as against marginalizing and struggling in power relations (Huesca 1994).

The thesis demonstrates that community volunteers play an important role in production of programming with opportunity for horizontal communication between individuals and groups in the community (White 1990) similar to the experiences in United States, Italy, France, Sweden, Latin America and Britain. The findings of the SFW study further shows that social mobilization through animation for participatory development through the production of community skits and off-air outreach activities facilitated the establishment of a strong rapport with the community and created awareness among communities about ‘the reality in which they live’ (Josiah 1994). The findings also demonstrate the importance of community access than conforming to standards of professionalism (Dunaway 2002) through the project’s focus on community involvement, creation of support systems and a spotlight on human rights (Mostert and Zyl 2004) and viewing the
participating respondents as collaborators than as passive receptors of expert information and advice (Sood et al 2004). In addition, SFW’s focus group discussions have helped understand the beneficial impact of such development projects on the participating respondents similar to the experience of a case study on campus radio Turf (Osunkunle 2005).

Through the findings of the SFW project, it’s evident that campus stations based in educational institutions are almost always dependent on student and community volunteers whose commitment is demonstrated in the hundreds of voluntary hours that represent the core of community media development providing a ‘new means of understanding the use and function of radio’ (Monk 1997). Serving twin purposes, SFW has demonstrated that Anna FM can be an ideal training site for media students and also offer useful access to members of the community in areas where it broadcasts as a democratic means of participatory communication, illustrating the strong connection between community radio and educational institutions according to several studies conducted in Denmark during the mid 1970s (Jankowski et al 1991).

To the research question as to the role of Anna FM in inculcating everyday science awareness among marginalized women, the answer lies in the synergizing the individual strengths of the two key players in SFW: the women media student volunteers and the volunteer women respondents from the participating community, and the Anna FM experience has been a revelation worthy of admiration and emulation. The SFW study’s findings points to campus community radio’s efficacy as a tool for women’s empowerment, similar to empirical studies of women’s community radio projects across Europe (Mitchell 2001). As in the case of her study (Mitchell 2001a), the success of the SFW project’s participatory science communication initiative lay in giving them unconditional access to broadcasting time and
space on the airwaves and the training and confidence building workshops organised inside and outside the radio station to demystify broadcast technology. The findings also reveal that women community volunteers were the first to display their deep interest and passion in connecting to Anna FM and being an intrinsic part of its training and programming initiatives, as women see basic radio training as the most urgent requirement in Asia and Africa, (Miglioretto 1998), also indicating the liberating power of radio for women’s education (Dighe and Reddi 2007).

From shy onlookers behind doors to eager and enthusiastic volunteers catalyzing collective action, it has indeed been a paradigm shift for the participating respondents. Similar to Bosch’s (2003) case study approach, SFW findings also reflect the impact of entertainment-education and behaviour change effected through specific programs on air and outreach programs. The positive outcomes of SFW can also be attributed to the rare synergy between student media volunteers and community volunteers whose interwoven functions worked to mutual benefit while doing participatory community radio, similar to what Zeeman (2006) argued in his thesis involving the ethnic and tourist community.

The thesis has also explored the role of participatory communication in the context of women empowerment and has drawn from the argument of Carter (2004) that despite high expectation and push by feminist movements, the three models of women’s access to airwaves did not survive critics and challenges that threatened their existence. The findings of Carter are pessimistic but a women-centric radio project with promise has been found in SFW. This scenario makes SFW unique and crucial as it has proved to be an effective medium in giving marginalised women access to participatory media. It displayed the strength to survive when research suggests it should not, and is even more significant in the backdrop of a
developing country like India. The case of SFW offered a novel and robust model worthy of replication in order to understand how it has surpassed all the three models of women’s access to airwaves.

As evident among all the partnerships forged in the SFW project, it's the participating women folk who have been the greatest beneficiaries of all. Blurring all social-economic, educational and digital divides, the examples of Jameela, Joyce, Kala and Sumathy, to name a few, and many more of them have remarkably risen up the social ladder through their articulations at the SFW project, their self-esteem is far higher than earlier and are now catalyzing an entire community into collective action living up to the words of Vigil (1997) that “when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice or a publicity gimmick; that is community radio”.

This thesis has helped understand how universities could make good on its commitment to serving the broader community through participatory community development projects such as SFW. While government extended funding support, Anna University provided access to additional staff including administrative support, technical infrastructure, content support and media publicity. Such campus-community engagement projects such as SFW, while generating media products that support university research, classroom teaching and community development have also provided communities access to university resources such as scholars, students and artists who encouraged local groups to participate and benefit from it towards overall community development. This thesis also shows that a participatory campus community radio initiative can bring together scholars, students, government, social action groups and corporates to strategically collaborate and strengthen communities, generate public scholarship, and inform local decision making. An innovative endeavor with its own upsides
and downsides, this study has delivered an SFW model worth sharing for setting up sustainable community media programs. Constantly trying to leverage available resources, share knowledge, and produce stronger work by forging partnerships with willing partners, the study has identified an intersection of common goals and has helped realise how such shared endeavors can extend mutual benefits to all involved and pave the way for further exploration of new frontiers in development communication research.

The experience at going through the participatory SFW campus community radio project shows that Anna University is today seen as more active and responsive to local communities, researchers like myself have shown that research can be more relevant to public interest, media student volunteers have benefited from field-based learning and Government’s ambition to ensure that its funding of projects serves its designated purpose has paid off. Participant respondents now have the resources that helped raise the quality of their lives through knowledge and behaviour transformation, with opportunities to document their cultures, histories, struggles, and strategies for change.

Interactions at focus group discussions and interpersonal communication with the participating women respondents revealed that they need social animators equipped with facilitation skills and gear to help them identify their strengths and improve their everyday awareness levels on information that can bring about a positive transformation, and also share their indigenous knowledge and resources in aesthetically compelling ways. And as unraveled in this study, it is here that media scholars and educators like us succeeded in finding an ideal opportunity to empower communities with basic community media techniques thereby add real value to decades of broadcasting experience and pass on the benefit to the cause of democratizing the media. A study on such a strategic partnership showcased in the SFW
project is a good example for both academia in the media sciences and the community folk. It has demonstrated how very different parties of diverse socio-economic and educational profiles can mutually benefit by pooling resources and sharing leadership in program implementation and shows how universities can try new approaches to community outreach. And for media scholars and educators such studies have provided a potential new direction for doing the kind of socially engaged media work that they wish to manifest.

The thesis highlights the fact that experiences from studies such as these can help us learn how to effectively bridge a media practitioner’s mindset with the academic research paradigm, cultivating greater sensitivity to the different needs of the participating community, media students, faculty, staff and administrators, navigating the universities' bureaucratic systems and securing needed resources, while at the same time keeping the community development focus as the highest priority.

The challenges faced in undertaking a study of this nature provided rare insights into the unique resources that community media practitioners and researchers require in this kind of university community media program – a somewhat rare combination of an entrepreneurial spirit, artistic competence, research training, popular education skills and ability to establish rapport with the community beyond social, cultural, educational, economic and digital divides, to name a few.

Nevertheless, as seen through the SFW example, setting up community media programs through universities is a worthwhile strategy in this challenging cultural and economic climate. Even in tough economic times, universities are some of the most resourced local organizations whose mandate matches the kind of community social development work campus community radio station like Anna FM has engaged in and who have resources to make it happen – to generate media literacy, advance civic
engagement, enhance everyday awareness levels and thereby effect improved behaviour change and overall community development.

More specifically, this thesis has lived up to Sreedher’s (2007a) campus community radio hopes, where the

“young student community from educational institutions could very well build new models”,

On the other hand an earlier prediction challenging the potential of campus community radio by Pavarala (2003) that

“…it is unrealistic to expect campus radio stations managed by young students to eschew fun and entertainment”

when reviewed in the light of the current progress demonstrated by media student volunteers jointly with the community in the coverage zones of CCR stations proves beyond doubt that it can be a realistic expectation from young students who beyond their academic commitments have displayed enormous passion and creative will to do participatory community radio jointly with community at Anna FM in general and for the SFW project in particular.

The study also shows that the success of this experiment at Anna FM has had the potential of inspiring policy makers to extend the opening up of community radio airwaves from campuses to non-government organizations as evinced by Parasuram (2007).

“…success in the venture at Anna University was to a very large extent responsible in convincing me of the need to expand the initiative in India...”

Growing slowly and steadily from humble beginnings, the rise of Anna FM in its early years is an example of what strengthening bonds with the community to create a sense of belonging and forging ties for resources from willing partners can do to realize the potential of participatory
development communication through campus community radio. For many of the 38 new campus stations that emerged later, Anna FM has been a source of inspiration and a model to draw upon in aspects ranging from installation and infrastructure to participatory programming, content development and training. More importantly, the implementation and outcomes of the SFW project have impressed and convinced its catalyst NCSTC (National Council for Science and Technology Communication, New Delhi), coming under the Indian Government’s Science and Technology Department, to extend the project, adapted to diverse contexts, to 13 new campus community radio stations across the country.

This shows that the thesis has already proved that the field experiment at Anna FM has catalysed a SFW wave across India’s CCR stations and it would be interesting to know later on how the impact has been at different locations in future studies on the project. To know how transformation can happen over time and what further changes can be effected in the coming years is worth the wait, as women trained at Anna FM’s SFW project are already producing their own programs and inspiring their folks into collective action long after the actual project is over.

The innovative approaches to inculcate Everyday Science Awareness among marginalized women through the judicious combination of on-air and off-air activities has provided the women participants in addition to knowledge, an outlet for creative expression and forge a common identity with media student volunteers. This thesis has also demonstrated that as a campus community radio station, Anna FM is a site for collaboration with potential and willing partners to develop entertainment-education strategies for development communication. By bringing people together to produce programmes, the SFW project has created a community of audience who would further share their knowledge and awareness with the rest of the
community and thereby create a multiplier effect that transforms their lives for the better.

To sum up, viewed in totality the SFW project findings projects the role of campus community radio in inculcating everyday science awareness among marginalized women in a remarkably positive light, while also revealing the intangible subtle benefits manifested in the form of increased confidence levels and self-esteem, better decision-making ability and the power to catalyse an entire community into collective action as a cascading effect. Such participatory initiatives are ‘important arms of university outreach and community enhancement’ (Legg 2004) and Anna FM has ‘turned out to be a milestone in the area of community outreach’ (Menon 2005).

5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This is by far the most comprehensive research on a campus community radio station in India and a first of its kind. More importantly this is the first exclusive research on demonstrating the potential of a campus community radio station in empowering marginalized women with Everyday Science Awareness through participatory approaches for development communication. Nevertheless, this research is not complete by itself, given the limitations of the study, and sets the stage for further research in related frontiers.

Being the first airwave to arrive on the Indian campus community radio space, the portrayal of India’s first campus community radio station Anna FM has predominantly been positive, highlighting its success at building bridges with the community through participatory approaches. Further research can focus on the shortcomings that arise out of volunteer management in a demanding field experiment of this nature and aspects
related to improving community participation, building bridges between student and community volunteers, capacity building and training, demystifying media technology with specific reference to women and more importantly monitoring and evaluation.

5.3 POST SCRIPTUM

This study has established the potential of campus community radio (Anna FM) in inculcating everyday science awareness among marginalized women through the implementation of participatory communication projects for the development of the global campus community radio movement and in particular for the CCR sector in India. This SFW model demonstrates that it can be transferred and replicated with necessary modifications suited to diverse socio-economic, geographic and cultural contexts.

From a long standing government monopoly of the airwaves, campus community radio is an emerging phenomenon in the Indian media landscape. It is the promise and potential demonstrated by Anna FM that has catalysed the growth of this sector to where it stands today. More importantly, it is the the success of Anna FM that has influenced policy makers to open up the sector for NGOs. In a sense, Anna FM has redefined campus community radio from being a participatory media tool designated to fulfill the government’s community radio mandate to one with limitless potential waiting to be explored further.

India is a fast growing developing country with a booming economy, vast human resources, growing literate population and an ever increasing middle class sector with sky-high aspirations. But of what use are all these positives if the marginalized are left out of the race; of what use is the media if it does not live up to its community development mandate; and of what use is education and advances in academic knowledge if they cannot be translated to everyday awareness for improving living standards for our folks.
And this thesis has successfully attempted to provide subtle answers to the big questions that loom large at an amazing and brilliant country that is India. With all its diverse cultural heritage and strong position in the world as the largest democracy, democratizing the airwaves and promoting community media to help people, especially women, empower themselves beyond educational, socio-economic, gender and digital divides is the way to move forward.

5.4 EPILOGUE

It is quite a revelation that two years with Anna FM campus radio station as research student has taught me rare lessons that I never got to learn in my two decade experience as a public service broadcaster, particularly with regards to the power of participatory approaches for development communication. That you can create magic in the community with bare minimum infrastructure and a strong sense of belonging is to be experienced to be understood. A 50 watt transmitter, some basic broadcast gadgetry, a mobile phone and a lot of community spirit is all that’s needed to transform an entire community into collective action for larger social benefit.

SFW at Anna FM has helped me realize that if there’s one platform for creative expression where marginalized women can prove their might in advancing their knowledge levels, articulate their thoughts on issues that concern them and through it transform themselves and their community, it is truly here on campus community radio. And as I glance through the photographs placed at the end of this dissertation, I recall with a sense of satisfaction every moment of my involvement with the SFW project, first as a researcher, second as a coordinator building a team of media student volunteers who gave their very best beyond their own academic deadlines and as a woman myself bonding with the participating women community volunteers to instill a sense of true belonging to the entire participatory
initiative. Not to forget the wide network of partnerships forged, both within and outside the campus.

Long after the project is over, interviews with Anna FM’s volunteers get published both on mainstream and neighbourhood newspapers and magazines: a testimony to the profound impact that participatory campus community radio initiatives can have on societal progress. As India prepares to usher in a revolution in the community radio sector, Anna FM as a first campus community radio venture has made an impressive impact of sorts, setting an example for a lot more such stations to emulate, learn, unlearn and grow to greater heights.

A research facility such as this has provided me with a rare opportunity to document the success story of Anna FM, one of India’s rare landmarks in broadcast history. This work is an endorsement of the power of democratizing the airwaves, the strength of campus community radio in development communication and the potential of empowering marginalized women with participatory access to community media.

As a public service radio broadcaster, All India Radio honoured me with a two year study leave grant to undertake this research with definite advantage from the point of view of public interest and I believe that I have made best use of this rare privilege and lived up to the high expectations and trust reposed on me in completing this research and making a useful contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field of community media.