ABSTRACT

The launch of ANNA FM, India’s first Campus Community Radio (CCR) in February 2004, is a landmark in the history of Indian Radio Broadcasting, enabling students, faculty and the community to play an active role in democratising the airwaves. The Community Radio Policy 2002 envisages CCR to broadcast programmes on Health, Education, Environment and Community Development with total community participation.

The present study is an attempt to demonstrate through Anna FM’s ‘Sakthi-Arivaayadi - Science for Women’ (SFW) project, catalysed by the National Council for Science and Technology Development (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India (GOI), that participatory science communication through Campus Community Radio can inculcate ‘Everyday Science Awareness’ amongst marginalised participatory women respondents in the Anna FM listening zones of Kannigapuram and Kotturpuram.

A simple random sample of 314 women from the two slum tenements of Kannigapuram and Kotturpuram in the Anna FM coverage zone was chosen for the study, as the women folk there were already introduced to Anna FM and its programs through a weekly live phone in talk show for over a year before the project launch and showed interest in engaging themselves in participatory development efforts for larger community benefit.

An Experimental Design with Control, being suited for the present study, the 314 respondents were randomly assigned in equal measure, to the
Experimental and Control Groups as ‘participating’ and ‘non-participating’ respondents respectively. Prior to the project launch, an extensive community mapping and baseline study was conducted to understand the demographic, socio-economic, health and media profile of the respondents and their specific needs and constraints. A pre-broadcast survey in the form of a prototype production research was also done to ensure greater acceptability of programs by the participant groups.

As part of the SFW project a 365 episode community radio science serial was produced in magazine format, for a duration of 15 minutes each in Tamil, comprising expert interviews, vox pops, skits, songs and jingles from July 2005 to June 2006 with several themes namely i) Health, ii) Nutrition, iii) Home Gadgetry, iv) Effective Fuel Utilization, v) Environment and vi) Food Processing.

Each theme comprised a topic for broadcast every day including a weekly live phone-in interactive feedback and quiz session and a weekly Community Skit produced by the participating women respondents based on the knowledge assimilated during the previous week’s programs.

In addition, outreach activities in the form of an i) Health Screening Camp ii) Environment Awareness Workshop iii) Basic Computer Training iv) Earth Day Debate and v) Community Radio Broadcast Skills Training were organized to reinforce the content learnt through the SFW broadcasts and also to share the knowledge with rest of the community.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation through the administration of monthly pre and post test survey schedules, including participation in
weekly live phone in shows, community skits, focus groups discussions, training camps and workshops, followed by a quantitative and qualitative analysis, points to an overall increase in ‘Everyday Science Awareness’ levels inculcated on the different themes.

The study reveals that i) the project has created a positive impact on the participating respondents in terms of inculcating Everyday Science Awareness on the broadcast themes ii) the women folk are now more confident, have better control of their lives and feel empowered to take decisions for the family and iii) they are now capable of sharing the newly acquired scientific knowledge with other members of their communities by independently producing radio magazine programs and willing to organize similar outreach activities, with continued support from Anna FM.

For a 365 episode year-long project, SFW is a cost effective exercise, as the outcomes of the participatory initiative are already having a multiplier-effect, even after the project is theoretically over. With the passage of time, the 157 SFW respondents, now empowered as community radio broadcasters, have become generators and communicators of indigenous scientific knowledge.

And a core team of 32 community radio producers from Kannigapuram and Kotturpuram are now actively inspiring an entire community into collective action towards holistic community development through their weekly Anna FM programme productions.