

GOOD PRACTICES 57: MARCH 2023

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY-RADIO BUNDELKHAND FM 90.4: APNA RADIO APNI BAATEIN



Radio Bundelkhand's efforts to empower women farmers using digital technologies have significantly impacted the lives of many women in the region. Vaishali Kanojia and Kirandeep Kaur from Development Alternatives describe how this was achieved.

CONTEXT

Over 48% of India's rural population is female, according to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011 (SECC). They play a vital role in the rural economy by working as farmers, daily wage workers, traditional knowledge disseminators, and entrepreneurs, among others.¹ They are also responsible for managing the household, childcare, elderly care, caring for the sick and providing nutritious food to the family. About 80% of economically active women work in the agricultural sector, with 48% working as self-employed farmers and 33% as agrarian labour². Despite this, women are often discriminated against and deprived of equal access to education, health, work, and freedom. Even when employed, they are usually paid much less than male workers. While 85% of rural women work in agriculture, only 13% have land ownership rights³.



The United Nations selected Radio Jockey Varsha Raikwar at Radio Bundelkhand as one of the Climate Warriors for a year under their campaign.

¹ Raghavan, T. S. (2023, February 21). Over 48 p.c. of rural population is female. Retrieved from The Hindu: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article60334439.ece>

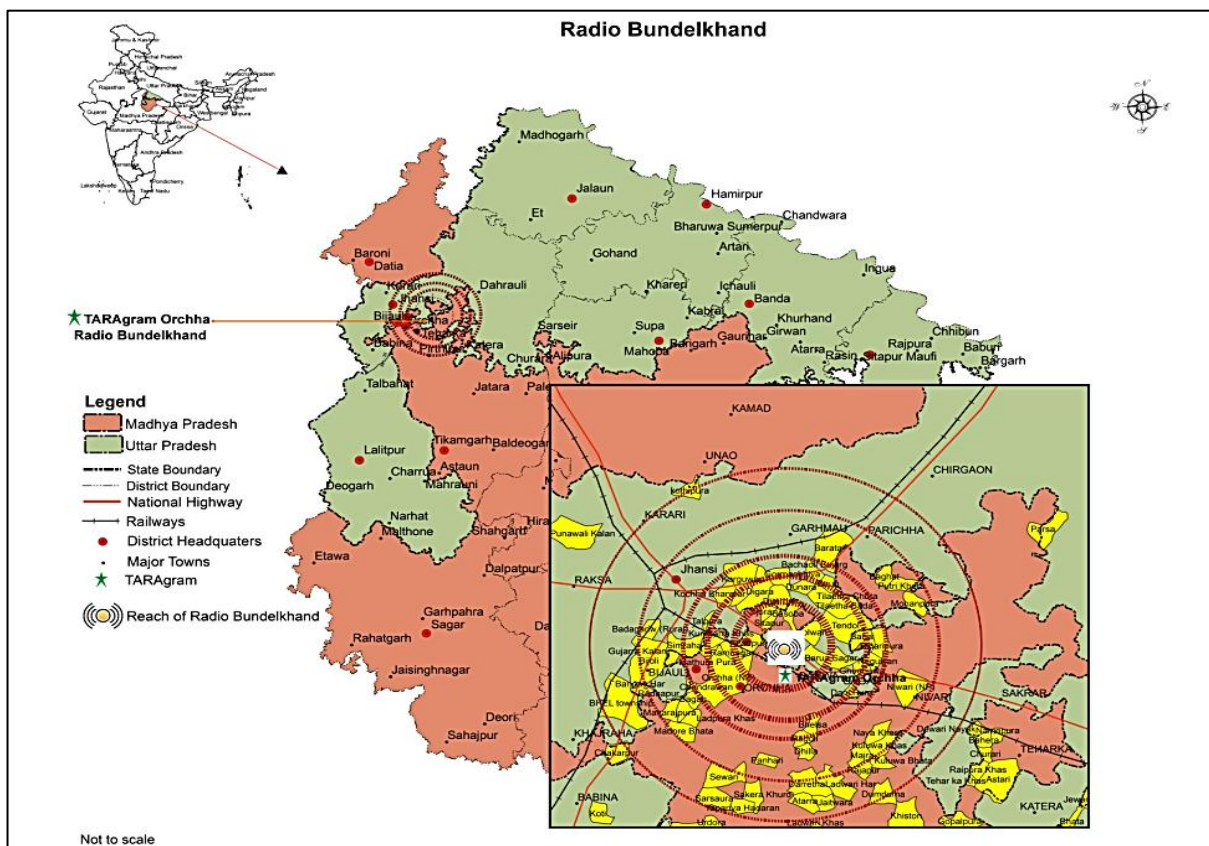
² OXFAM. (2023, February 21). Retrieved from Move over 'Sons of the soil': Why you need to know the female farmers revolutionising agriculture in India: <https://www.oxfamindia.org/women-empowerment-india-farmers#:~:text=Agriculture%20sector%20employs%2080%25%20of,only%20about%2013%25%20own%20land.>

³ Down to Earth. (2023, February 22). Retrieved from Down to Earth 'Nearly 85% rural women are engaged in agriculture but only 13% own land': <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/video/agriculture/nearly-85-rural-women-are-engaged-in-agriculture-but-only-13-own-land>

Bundelkhand region in Central India has a patriarchal society, where men are the decision-makers, and women are expected to stay at home, taking care of the household and family⁴. The situation gets restrictive as we move into rural Bundelkhand, where women work with a long *ghunghat* (veil) even within the home. Some women help their husbands in the field, but they, too, are required to wear the *ghunghat*. Despite these factors, women from Bundelkhand, like those in other parts of India, want to learn to read, write, participate actively in financial activities, and voice their opinions.

Development Alternatives (DA) with its Community Radio -- Radio Bundelkhand FM 90.4 -- has empowered many women and helped them rise above their barriers (<http://radiobundelkhand.org/>). In fact, women are the backbone of Radio Bundelkhand, as they confidently carry out roles ranging from reporter to presenter and resource person. They actively participate in the programming, from developing ideas for radio programmes to sharing their talent and presenting the radio shows.

RADIO BUNDELKHAND (FM 90.4)



Map showing the reach of Radio Bundelkhand 90.4 FM

Radio Bundelkhand 90.4 FM, a community radio, is an initiative of Development Alternatives. The aim of the initiative is to provide a voice to the community in Bundelkhand region. The radio station was established on 23 October 2008 in the Development Alternatives Appropriate Technology Centre at TARAGRAM ORCHHA in Madhya Pradesh. Radio Bundelkhand is the first Community Radio Station in Madhya Pradesh and the second one in India. Since then, it has been airing shows for women, youth, farmers and vulnerable groups, and it reaches out to more than 120 villages within a radius of 15 kilometers.

⁴ Development Alternatives. (2023 February, 2023) Retrieved from Alternative Perspective: Radio Bundelkhand: The Voice of Women in Bundelkhand: <http://www.perspectives.devalt.org/2015/03/01/radio-bundelkhand-the-voice-of-women-in-bundelkhand/>

The media's presence in rural Bundelkhand is either government-driven or its ownership is in the hands of private individuals, with no scope for the local community's involvement. There was virtually no communication platform for rural people in very backward regions to voice their concerns about drought, migration and farmers' suicides, obtain information, and find solutions.

In this context, Radio Bundelkhand has emerged as a people's radio station that provides a platform to air their aspirations and concerns and showcase their talent. Its participatory and collaborative approach empowers and builds consensus for change. Radio Bundelkhand broadcasts transmissions 11 hours daily between 07:00 am and 6:00 pm. The timings have been fixed in consultation with the communities based on their daily routine; women prefer morning sessions, while men prefer evening slots.

The content for its programmes is prepared by the organisation based on secondary and primary research through audience polls and expert advice. The content is gathered with the help of experts and other stakeholders in various fields and converted into infotainment programmes. These curated programmes are then broadcast on the radio station. The information is shared daily, biweekly and weekly depending on the themes and project deliverables.

Among the other modes of intervention (explicitly prepared to provide extension and advisory services) are [Radio Bundelkhand Mobile applications](#), YouTube Channel [Radio Bundelkhand](#), a WhatsApp group for the community and community radios.

Development Alternatives and the community jointly manage Radio Bundelkhand. The programmes are produced with the participation of the local people. Its participatory programming and broadcast model are a mix of awareness, information, and entertainment along with the objective of promoting local self-governance. All the programmes are designed on the basis of feedback from communities.

WOMEN-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

- **Har Ghar Poshan Abhiyaan:** Radio Bundelkhand has empowered the community by creating awareness about malnutrition under the 'Har Ghar Poshan Abhiyaan', the central government initiative to counter widespread malnutrition. The programmes were produced with the help of the health department of the districts of Jhansi and Niwari, as well as Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). The programmes are narrowcast in villages, making women and men aware of the problem⁵.

Under the programme, the community has been made aware about the importance of nutrition through information related to health and nutritional requirements, pregnancy check-ups and nutritional care, and early and timely breastfeeding. The programme sensitized the community regarding anaemia and how to overcome it, how to monitor the physical growth of children up to five years of age, the importance of adolescent education, hygiene, cleanliness, and sanitation.

- **Rojai Roz ki Baatein:** The programme talks about women's health and health-related issues. The radio reporters collect women's health-related issues from the community and connect them to doctors to resolve them.
- **Stree Ek Khani Meri Bhi:** The programme relates stories of successful, empowered and educated rural women to inspire other women. Radio Bundelkhand also broadcasts

⁵ Community Radio Spreads Nutrition Awareness: https://devalt.org/newsletter/sep22/of_3.htm

programmes where women from the police department provide information about women and the law. Another show offers a platform for women from academia to speak about women and education. For instance, the United Nations selected Varsha Raikwar, a Radio Jockey at Radio Bundelkhand, as a Climate Warrior for a year under their campaign. Varsha's inspiring story attracted much attention and spurred women in Bundelkhand to make changes to their lives.



The Har Ghar Poshan Abiyaan programme aims to raise women's awareness about the importance of nutrition.

- **Khetkhaliyan:** Radio Bundelkhand's 'Khetkhaliyan' is an agriculture-based programme that recognizes the potential of women as farmers. Community radio reporters approach women and make programmes in which they share their experiences as farmers, talking about cropping patterns and techniques they use in farming. The programme seeks to highlight women's role in the field, and the crucial role they play in deciding the market price of produce⁶.
- **Sakhi Saheli:** Radio Bundelkhand has also produced 'Sakhi Saheli', a unique programme that provides women a space to share their experiences. The programme initiates discussions in the community, fosters a dialogue among the listeners even on issues that have never been a part of their routine discussions. This, in turn, encourages acceptance and rejection of ideas and facilitates change.
- **Kaun Banega Shubh Kal Leader:** This was India's first rural reality show on climate change. It promotes climate change adaptation practices such as organic farming, agroforestry, and rainwater harvesting.
- **Gali Gali Sim-Sim:** Sesame Workshop of Sesame Street, in association with Radio Bundelkhand, undertook an initiative to create awareness about the importance of nutrition by creating comic characters in radio programmes.
- **Amma Ki Chowkhe Se:** Introduced by Radio Bundelkhand to create awareness and inculcate the practice of climate-smart, smoke-free cooking in rural India for cleaner environment, the initiative also promotes good health among rural women.

them. Once trained at Radio Bundelkhand, these women can become trainers and build other women's capacities.



Participatory learning session with women

BENEFIT AND IMPACT

Development Alternatives believes that this intervention has enabled them to address and enhance the 6 As of technology significantly:

- **Availability** – Apart from the radio station's fixed schedule when it goes on air, women and listeners can also reach out through via WhatsApp groups and phone calls at any time.
- **Affordability** – Radio is a very cheap and affordable source of information since listeners aren't charged for programmes and the issues they discuss.
- **Awareness** – Our awareness programmes on varied and current issues are invariably based on matters raised by the communities.
- **Accessibility** – Our infotainment community radio programmes reach approximately 15-20 kms and 120 villages with a population of over 20,000. So far, Radio Bundelkhand has penetrated rural communities settled in and around TARAgram Orchha, like the villages of Gundrai, Chandravan, Bagan, Orchha, Sitapur, Azadpura, and Lachmanpura.
- **Ability** – The organization builds the capacity of community radio reporters, village-level volunteer journalists, and print journalists (from local newspapers) to enable them to

better capture local concerns, knowledge and practices from the community. In turn, this is communicated back to local experts and policymakers, to feed into robust policies related to agriculture and climate change.

- **Adaptability** – Community radio has integrated grassroots voices into local scientific research and policy dialogues on agriculture, climate change impacts, and adaptation measures.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING UP

Radio Bundelkhand serves as a tool to empower the community and to serve as a mass communication medium in the hands of rural, illiterate and marginalised communities, who use it for their own empowerment and entertainment, with programmes designed to ensure sustainability. Its long-term vision is new product development/customisation, increasing listenership, corporate tie-ups and development of a revenue model. Radio Bundelkhand is implementing various projects on this platform through other community radio operators in the coming years.

LESSONS LEARNED

Radio Bundelkhand has been aware that women in this geography have very limited livelihood opportunities. Its curated programmes like 'Stri Ek Kahaani Meri Bhi' and 'Poshan Ghar Campaign' have exposed women to their rights, and they are now more vocal and confident in expressing their views on issues impacting them. Women are showing greater interest in farming and are ready to adapt to change quickly. Most farmers have shifted to 100% organic farming, getting them a better price for their produce in the market.

Significant behaviour change has been observed in the communities, with greater awareness about issues that affect them the most. We are also working with other community radio partners working in the area of climate change through nuanced knowledge sharing on sensitive subjects such as climate change. Engaging with other community radios at various levels allows cross-learning, capacity building, and greater scope for participatory content development and programme execution.

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