



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

IPDC



Recommendations for the integration of Community Radio into the Kerala State disaster management planning & response process



A. Background

In the beginning of August 2018, unusually high levels of rainfall in the southern Indian state of Kerala led to unprecedented flooding across a number of its districts. Some estimates have estimated the flooding to be the worst faced by the state in nearly a century¹.

As of mid-September 2018, it was estimated that 483 people had died in the floods, and more than a million people evacuated². According to estimates by the Govt of Kerala, the floods affected more than one-sixth of the state's population³. It has been suggested that this has been the worst flooding in the state since the great flood in 1924. The Govt. of India has since declared the floods a Level 3 Calamity, or a 'calamity of severe nature'⁴. Of the 14 districts in the state, the brunt of the flooding was faced by 10 districts: Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Mallapuram, Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Allapuzha, and Pathanamthitta.

As part of its response to the unprecedented humanitarian disaster in Kerala, in September 2018, a joint task force of the United Nations agencies offered its expertise to the Govt of Kerala to conduct a **Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA)**, to assess and quantify the damage suffered by the state; and to suggest how to rebuild infrastructure and processes in a more disaster-resilient fashion. Under this effort, UNESCO's Cluster Office for India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives dedicated a multi-sectoral team to examine (among other things) the impact of the Kerala floods on the education infrastructure of the state; its cultural heritage; and the environmental impact of the floods.

UNESCO's **Communication & Information Sector (CI)**, as part of its mandate to support alternate media and voice, as well as access to information, has been a key advocacy body for community media in South Asia. Over the last few years, it has focused significantly on the use of community radio in South Asia for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster resilience⁵.

As part of UNESCO's involvement in the PDNA effort, the CI sector decided to review the impact of the floods on the community radio stations in the state of Kerala; the role they played in DRR activities and flood relief before, during and after the floods; and the potential for partnerships in order to maximize DRR and community resilience against disaster.

Subsequently, UNESCO's **International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)** Fund provided an extraordinary grant for the implementation of a more detailed consultation with the community radios in Kerala state; and a detailed capacity building process for the stations. This intervention, rolled out in 2019, was designed and implemented by the New Delhi-based **Ideosync Media Combine**, an organization with extensive experience in the community radio sector, in partnership with the Kerala SDMA and UNESCO. Ideosync has previously engaged with the Uttarkhand SDMA in 2017 on the same issue, and was directly responsible for assisting in the development of UKSDMA's community radio policy.

¹ Baynes, Chris (15 August 2018). "Worst floods in nearly a century kill 44 in India's Kerala state amid torrential monsoon rains". From The Independent. dated 15 August 2018. Retrieved 2nd October 2018.

² "483 dead in Kerala floods and landslides, losses more than annual plan outlay: Pinarayi Vijayan". From the Indian Express dated 30 August 2018. Retrieved 2nd October 2018.

³ "Sudden water release by Tamil Nadu from Mullaperiyar a reason for deluge: Kerala to SC - Times of India". From the Times of India dated 24th August 2018. Retrieved 2nd October 2018.

⁴ "Centre declares Kerala floods 'Level-3' calamity; demand to call it 'national disaster' either ignorance or mischief - Firstpost". From www.firstpost.com dated 21st August 2018. Retrieved 2nd October 2018.

⁵ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/special-themes/disaster-risk-reduction/>. Accessed on 04/10/2018.

B. Rationale

An informed community is a resilient community. Since the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) issued policy guidelines for the set up of community radio stations (CRS) in 2006, a valuable hyper local resource to create and share information has been available to marginalized communities, who often fall outside the realm of mainstream media.

Today, there are approximately 250 operational CRS in the country. Operating on the principle of **“for, with, and by the community”**, a CRS has the implicit trust of the community, providing access to information via a relatively low cost technology that overcomes literacy barriers. A community radio also provides a voice to the voiceless; encourages and preserves local culture; and provides a unique opportunity to communities to participate in their governance.

From the perspective of **disaster risk reduction & mitigation**, communities are often the best judges of their own vulnerability and have with them a vast repertoire of traditional knowledge and practices that inform their coping mechanisms. In this sense, community radios, as local media speaking within localized contexts and in the local dialects, present the perfect opportunity to preserve and spread these traditional coping mechanisms for disaster possessed by communities. Simultaneously, they are in the best position to provide state-of-the-art information on DRR and DRM related infrastructure, processes and protocols to the common man, as they are situated in and speak directly to communities at the grassroots. The utility of community radio in times of disaster has been proven many times over, including the sterling work done by them in the wake of the **Uttarakhand floods of 2013**; and the large **Nepal earthquake of 2015**.

There are currently 12 licensed community radio stations in the state of Kerala, with several more in the pipeline. Given the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting’s recently announced (Oct 2018) focus on establishing CR in coastal and disaster prone districts, as well as the aspirational districts around the country, this is an opportune time for the Govt of Kerala to integrate community radio stations into their overall strategic plan for DRR and DRM in the state of Kerala.

C. Recommendations

I. Network building & facilitation of existing CRS / Establishment of new CRs

1. Create a publicly accessible directory of community radio stations, state and district level DRR/relief organizations, and CSOs working on DRR, disaster relief and rehabilitation.

Ideally, this would be managed and maintained jointly by Govt of Kerala institutions as well as community radio stations in the state, so that it can be updated on an ongoing basis to reflect new additions and current contact details for all listed entities and experts. This online resource could also include any national bodies that are known to respond with relief during disasters, and establish linkages and protocols for reaching communities in the shortest possible time through the coordinated efforts of CR and civil society.

2. Financially support the physical establishment of new CR stations in disaster prone and vulnerable areas, and especially in areas of the state which currently do not have any (or few) CR stations. Such support could include costs for the establishment of infrastructure and physical setup of CR; grants to partially offset operational running costs;

and targeted grants to support the production of DRR and relief and rehabilitation related programming. (For a suggested mechanism that may be used to do this, please see **Part I/Point 7** below.)

3. Provide technical and advisory support for the establishment new CR stations in vulnerable areas.

Besides basic setup costs, KSDMA could provide valuable advisory services to CR stations on disaster prone or vulnerable areas through its network of experts, which may include the following:

- a. Help identify places where CRS is required on an urgent bases to address DRR
- b. Hold special awareness programmes to sensitize district and local administrations, as well as local NGOs, to set up CRS in underserved districts of the state; in coastal areas; or zones which may be prone to disasters
- c. Recommend/facilitate the acquisition or lease of land through District Administrations for setting up CRS with an appropriate MOU for land use;
- d. Provide technical architectural and structural design inputs to disaster proof the CR buildings, so that they remain stable and standing in the face of disaster. This may include structural audits of the buildings in which the CR stations are situated by SDMA commissioned experts.
- e. Providing technical assistance to set-up alternate sources of power like solar energy
- f. Providing content related inputs and support, especially from the point of view of identifying priority content areas and technical review of proposed content to ensure veracity and factual accuracy

4. Provide technical and advisory support for existing CR stations, as well as ongoing financial support.

KSDMA and the Govt of Kerala may also like to consider the following steps to support existing community radio stations in the state:

- a. Facilitate the building of stronger linkages and networks between the CR stations and KSDMA and its line departments, by including CRS in all press briefings as a mandate, empanelling them as media partners, and including them in all community-based capacity building initiatives for disaster response. This may also include sensitizing SDMA staff and teams at all levels, as well as other SDMA partner agencies and departments to community radio, its purpose and value.
- b. Actively facilitating the linkage of the CRs to district-level and state-level disaster response processes and authorities, as well as to establish protocols for outreach through local CR stations by the relevant authorities in times of disaster
- b. Provide a continuous flow of relevant information and programme themes to CRS, so that they can provide authentic, verified content to communities before, during and after disasters. This could include supporting the creation of relevant content both through the provision of appropriate expertise, as well as the actual production of content through the provision of programming funds⁶ (also see **Part I/Point 7**).

⁶ At present, several government departments (such as the Science and Technology, Panchayat Raj, Women and Child Welfare, National AIDS Control Mission), Financial institutions (NABARD), multilateral agencies (UNESCO, UNICEF), international Agencies (Commonwealth of Learning, Asia Foundation) support content generation on CRS; and norms and structures for are readily available.

- d. Support for augmentation of the CRS's technical and physical infrastructure such as:
- Retro-fitting of buildings for disaster proofing; securing antennas and towers, so they do not collapse in adverse conditions
 - Acquiring an additional stand-by transmitter for uninterrupted transmission, especially during and after disasters
 - Upgrading technical equipment, helping acquire more field equipment for narrowcasting
 - Switching to alternate power sources such as solar to handle power failures during disasters
 - Additional costs incurred by CRS for extended reach during a disaster – such as additional manpower, increased travel and hospitality expenses, fuel costs, etc.

5. Establish regular capacity building programmes for CRs in Kerala on DRR/DRM

While the current intervention supported by the IPDC programme has included a detailed training for the Kerala CR stations on a variety of DRR and DRM related topics, such trainings should be institutionalized, so that stations may be updated on current policies, processes and protocols followed by disaster assessment, relief and recovery processes at state level. It is therefore recommended that KSDMA establish an annual refresher programme for the CR stations, where it provides updates on processes, concepts and protocols, as well as information and training materials it has collated.

6. Establish a CR centered Rapid Response Radio Team

One of the key values to emergency radio is the relative ease with which an emergency CR station can be deployed. KSDMA may consider establishing a **Rapid Response Radio Team (3RT)** comprising CRS, radio experts, and HAM (Amateur) Radio operators in the region. This team would also include radio operators, technologists, NGOs and SDMA officials who can be called upon at short notice to come together to set-up a "disaster radio" in affected areas. SDMA can defray the costs of travel and activity of the 3RT. Such a team could convene at regular intervals in non-disaster times – say, twice a year - to meet and be updated on the SDMA protocols, plans and activities. The 3RT team would be primarily composed of volunteers to be nominated by existing stations.

7. Establish a Kerala state level CR Emergency Fund

As noted in the points above, a possible key contribution from the Kerala state government could be financial support to the CR stations for establishment, or ongoing support for operations and the production of content. We recommend the establishment of a **Kerala State CR Emergency Fund**⁷ with a corpus grant from the state government. The fund may be managed by an **autonomous secretariat** with oversight from a panel composed of representatives of the government and the CR sector, as well as technical experts on CR and disaster who can advise on appropriate deployment of the funds for support activities and grants. The funds could then be used for emergency replacement of equipment; the setup of new CR stations in disaster prone zones; and other activities to augment their DRR capacity.

⁷ There are existing international models for sector or theme specific grant making bodies for community radio. Australia's **National Ethnic & Multicultural Broadcastong Council** is one example. (www.nembc.org.au)

II. Policy actions to support set up and better integration of CR in DRR in Kerala

Along with the support and facilitation actions mentioned above, KSDMA may consider taking the following steps at a policy level (Note: Some of these actions will involve specific advocacy and/or negotiations between the Govt of Kerala and the Union Government's line ministries):

1. Accessing and hosting multiple units of emergency transmission systems like the **Radio in A Box⁸**, a self contained transportable radio studio and transmission system, along with other audio equipment, which can be deployed to emergency zones by SDMA teams as part of its first response efforts. (The temporary station thus set up would be manned by groups like the 3RT proposed above.). Such a process would require engaging with the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing (WPC) of the Ministry of Communications in order to waive the dealer's license provisions (DPL) which only allow specific entities to own and or stock radio transmission equipment.

2. Establishment of a process for obtaining quick frequency clearances for setting up temporary 'disaster radios', through negotiation with relevant Central Government bodies like the WPC and the Standing Committee on Frequency Allocations (SACFA), both wings of the of the Union Ministry for Communications; as well as with the Ministry for Information & Broadcasting to establish **single window clearances** for new CR stations in disaster vulnerable zones (Precedents for such a process have been established during the Chennai floods of 2016, where an emergency radio was established at **Cuddalore, near Chennai.**)

3. Establishing a state level emergency radio frequency during disasters and emergencies: Somewhat like the nationwide standard call numbers for police, ambulance services and fire services, the Govt of Kerala may like to consider a single state wide emergency FM broadcast frequency to be used during emergencies. This could be an easy to remember number which is not currently used by any broadcast channel; **88.8 MHz**, for instance.

There are multiple technical models for this: Conceivably one model could include state support for the set up of alternate broadcast infrastructure at all All Indian Radio, private and community radio stations in Kerala to transmit on this frequency in addition to their existing setups. Another could include repeater setups for each station where their primary broadcast is re-broadcast at the specified frequency. Such a process would require advocacy with WPC wing as well as the Ministry for Information & Broadcasting [see (2) above]. Some parallel international precedents exist; notably the national weather updates provided by NOAA in the United States⁹.

4. Negotiating the expansion of the community radio policy to allow the provision of radio repeaters for emergency radio stations. The CR policy in its current avatar does not include provision for repeaters, though this recommendation has been made to the Ministries for Information & Broadcasting and Communication on previous occasions.

⁸ The Radio-in-a Box unit was conceived by a technical team from the Asia Pacific Broadcast Union (ABU) with UNESCO support more than a decade ago as a simple portable transmission studio. UNESCO currently has one unit, which it may be willing to donate if the Govt of Kerala is willing to accept it and house it. Read more at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_in_a_box

⁹ NOAA radio broadcasting uses a dedicated FM service: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NOAA_Weather_Radio

Repeaters would permit emergency stations set up at community level to transcend the limitation imposed by the 100 Watt ERP¹⁰ limit currently permitted,

5. Recommendations and clearances for the establishment of Citizen Band (CB radio) hubs at CR stations. This will allow two way communications between stations and field volunteers as well as parallel hubs established in District Administration and Police Control Rooms at district level, allowing all three to coordinate and interact in the event of failure of mobile and landline telecom and internet networks. Though CB radio does not currently require any licenses in India, a lack of awareness about the process and technology has meant local authorities often question such CB processes when they are established. (also see **Point 6 below**)

6. Creating linkages between wireless networks used by the Police department and the district administration and the CRS: The Police wireless networks are specifically designed to prevent failure, and to survive emergencies and disasters. Establishing emergency access rights to the police wireless network (or similar wireless networks run by the district administrations) – even in reception only mode - would allow the CR stations to continue gathering information and feedback in the event of failure of the telecom networks.

7. Advocacy with the Ministry for Information & Broadcasting to prioritize emergency replacements of equipment: Though the Community Radio Support Scheme currently implemented by the Ministry for Information & Broadcasting with central funds includes provisions for the emergency replacement of equipment impacted by natural disasters, a protocol for such emergency replacements – and fast-track clearance of such equipment – has not yet been properly worked out.

It is recommended that the Govt of Kerala engage with MoIB to provide a structure for such fast track approvals, especially as relates to CR stations in Kerala, so that stations that are impacted by disaster are able to acquire and replace key equipment that may be damaged. (Note: This may also be supported by a state fund set up for the purpose – see **Part I/Point 7** above)

8. Advocacy with the Ministry for Information & Broadcasting to amend the CR policy to allow other types of community groups to establish CRs: Specifically, the Govt of Kerala may like to advocate for the expansion of the current CR policy to include a widened eligibility criteria for CR applications, including **family trusts, Self Help Groups (SHGs), and Kudumbasree women's groups**. Disaster vulnerable areas and zones may not always have appropriate organizations which meet the current policy criteria – which should not prevent stations from being set up there.

9. Advocacy with the relevant departments at state and center to provide CR stations insurance of their equipment: Currently, a number of CR stations, especially those situated in disaster-vulnerable areas, are uninsured because insurance agencies either do not want to cover them at all, or charge high premia for coverage. Intercession by KSDMA with IRDAI¹¹ and other bodies may allow stations to do this at lower cost and with less challenges, making them less vulnerable if large scale equipment damage were to happen.

¹⁰ ERP = Effective Radiated Power, a composite measure of the total signal strength output of a transmission system

¹¹ IRDAI = The Insurance Regulatory & Development Authority of India

10. Distribution of FM radio sets to households across Kerala

While many mobile phones today include FM reception facilities, there is no real substitute for a cheap and efficient transistor radio, which can survive on simple pencil cells for considerable periods of time. However, manufacturers of FM radios are no longer as common as they once were.

The Govt. of Kerala may like to commission the production of distribution of low cost FM radio sets – at least one per household. This could be done by activating public sector units like KELTRON for this task; or by commissioning agencies¹² which specialize in the manufacture of low cost renewable power radios for resource poor areas.

*****:

For additional details and/or clarifications:

Ideosync Media Combine

Email: info@ideosyncmedia.org

Tel: +91-129-4064883/5883/6883

Mob: +91-9810731552/9810273883

Recommendations dated 20th December 2019

These recommendations were developed with support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) programme.

¹² Agencies like **Lifeline Energy**, based in South Africa, for instance. LifeLine has worked extensively in Africa to design & distribute low cost, hand cranked and solar powered FM radios, which can also be pre-loaded with content. Ideosync has had a conversation with Lifeline about this; and the LifeLine team estimates cost of USD 10 or lower per unit for numbers over 50000 units. Units would typically be manufactured in China and delivered to site; and are highly customizable and brandable. See more at www.lifelineenergy.com