

Issues Related to Community Radio Stations

Rekha Jain

Executive Chair, IIMA-IDEA Telecom Centre of Excellence (IITCOE)

Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad¹

1. What should be the period of permission for CRS to be prescribed in the CRS Guidelines? Is the present 5 year period adequate?

Yes it is adequate. Several other countries such as U.K. and Australia have similar time frames. It gives adequate scope to the broadcaster to establish itself and work in an environment of stable policy. On the other hand, it allows the government to review its policies and change them if required without creating a situation of frequent changes for the licensee. More than 5 years of licence period may stunt innovation in the working of community radios. The needs of the community may change with time and they need to be addressed in regular intervals of time to achieve the very purpose of Community Radio.

2. What should be the period of extension on the expiry of the initial period of permission for CRS?

The license may be extended by 5 years, if there are no contentions for frequencies for community radio services in the geographical area.

3. Should there be any additional terms and conditions of extension/renewal of the permission for CRS?

Before grant of extension, independent third party assessments from the community regarding operations of the community radio must be made. Otherwise, it is possible that a CRS licensee may just take the allocated frequencies without providing effective community services. Effective parameters of performance need to be specified in the license itself. The mid-term appraisal after 2.5 or 3 years should also be considered at this time; else the licensee may have a tendency to focus on operations towards the end of the tenure only.

For a CRS having insufficient funds to cope up with its activities for the next 5 years, transfer of license may be considered. It can be on the basis of similarity of community interests. There has to be a framework to monitor the transfer and evaluate the capabilities of the new

¹ Research assistance was provided by Radhika Dubey, intern, IITCOE.

entrant. Additionally, there has to be a community radio opting to take over the services of the transferor. Transfer of license is operational in Australia, U.K.²

4. Should CRS permission holders be permitted to carry the news bulletins of All India Radio (AIR) in unaltered format and community based non-news and current affairs programs for the categories permitted to FM radio stations?

Yes, CRS should be allowed to broadcast news bulletins of AIR in an unaltered format to disseminate latest news updates. While the categories allowed to FM stations may be considered, there should be a limit on the extent of time for which this is allowed as the primary purpose of the community radio is to broadcast content specific to the community.

5. In view of the availability of alternative revenue/ funding options, is there any reason to increase the duration of advertisement beyond 5 minutes per hour limitation? If yes, please explain with full justification.

No, the present time of 5 min per hour allocated to community radio is adequate as they do not have a commercial model, where they should be generating revenues from advertisements. They must tap into alternate sources of funding like the “Community Radio Support Scheme” fund. So, owing to its non-commercial nature which differentiates it from commercial FM, this time limit cannot be relaxed. Increasing the time limit could also mean dilution of content specific to the community.

- Adverts to promote local businesses already have no limit on their broadcast timing. Methods like, placing a limit on the number of words or specifying time limit can help to counter over commercialization³.
- Agriculture related adverts on community radio stations of ICAR, agricultural universities may be specifically given extra time (time limit may be increased to 7 min per hour).

6. Do you agree with the above proposal for utilization of CRS during natural calamities/ emergency situations?

- Use of CRS could be an integral part of disaster or emergency handling as their broadcasts are most easily accessible to the local population. They can by means of effective coordination with disaster management authority for broadcasting latest updates and educating and inform the population regarding the relevant issues.

² <http://www.acma.gov.au/Industry/Broadcast/Community-radio-and-TV/Community-licensing/licence-allocations-renewals-and-transfers-community-broadcasting#transfer>; accessed on June 01, 2014

³ <http://www.trai.gov.in/WriteReaddata/ConsultationPaper/Document/cp-25aug08.pdf>; accessed on June 04, 2014

- At the time of renewal of the existing license or as a part of a systematic information collection process that TRAI and the Disaster Management Agencies could undertake, community radio stations located in disaster prone areas can be identified. Their usefulness in an emergency can be evaluated by a survey in the form of a questionnaire determining the⁴:
 - Main type of natural disaster they mostly experience
 - extent of damage to the community and the CRS
 - how CRS was operational in preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation
 - alternate sources of power
 - radio receivers in the region
 - radio personnel equipped to deal with disasters (off air and on air activities)
 - funds for journalistic activity, data collection and air program productions
 - Is the CRS located in a disaster resistant building?

There is a persistent demand to relocate the transmitters during a calamity. Based on relevant information the CRS may be granted permission to use auxiliary antennas during emergencies. CRS need to be furnished with repeaters to address a larger population uninterrupted during emergencies. They should be guided to broadcast disaster related information from time to time.

Other commercial and community radio stations in the proximity have to be identified, to prevent overlapping of frequencies.

Use of auxiliary antenna by the CRS is advisable and permission should be granted in advance, i.e. at the time of licence renewal, so that it can commence its operation at the very first warning of an emergency. But, it should inform the authority about such an application, say 24 hours before commencing operations.

- The location of auxiliary antenna and mobile transmitter proposed to be erected must be decided while granting permission itself, so that they may be moved immediately when a disaster hits. It may be permitted to relocate anywhere in the field strength of the main antenna. Change in frequency of the radio station will lead to confusion and the locals would be uninformed about the updates on the new frequency. So, the broadcaster should be directed to operate in the same frequency band.
- “Radio-in-a-Box” is an integrated mobile radio broadcasting station that could be used during disaster and emergency response and community broadcasting⁵.

⁴ http://www.amarc.org/documents/rapports/Survey_Report_CR_Disaster_management.pdf; accessed on June 07, 2014

⁵ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/community-media/radio-in-humanitarian-assistance/>; accessed on June 09, 2014

- **Technology:** Collaboration with government ministries, NDMA, NGOs, commercial broadcast stations to get the latest news on weather and consequent update to the government for dispensation of manpower, relief materials, further directions to tackle the situations that arise. For this, government should ensure the use of latest technologies like geographic information system (GIS), by the needful CRS to acquire appropriate and reliable information on natural disasters.
- **Expansion:** Inviting applicants from the eastern and western coast and islands of Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep⁶. This can be achieved by coordination of MoIB with the Local Authority in the two islands for greater participation in CR. The local authorities can invite applications by means of advertisements in local newspapers. Make provisions for their assistance by the existing community radio or AIR in their operations in the first year. Also, they will require higher ERP, tower height, height above sea level, and mobility of antennas; technicalities have to be considered.
- **Training:** Community radios should be well equipped to assist in disaster management. They should have personnel trained to deal with emergency situation. For this UNESCO's workshop can be organized to learn the techniques⁷. Locals can also be given directions and training for dealing with such emergencies with the help of community radios.

7. What, in your opinion, are the measures required to ensure a faster growth in the number and spread of CRS in rural India?

- Government could review its guidelines for community radios, especially for those in hilly or remote regions. They could be provided with higher ERP than the standard one.
- Awareness and educational programs on establishing and operating a community radio should be provided.
- Government could support apprenticeship programs in community radio to existing students, members of the community or to NGOs operating in the area.
- Licensing, which is complicated in the present scenario needs to be replaced with single-window clearance, to enable faster growth of CRS in rural India. A lengthy licensing procedure is an impediment to set up community radio stations⁸.
- An initiative by the ministry to grant permission on the condition of one of the owners being a member of the target community rather than simply holding a membership status, can cultivate organic growth.
- Frequencies may be reserved for allocation to CRS lying in disaster-prone areas to create more opportunities⁹.

⁶ <http://edaa.in/column/community-radios-for-disaster-preparedness>; accessed on June 06, 2014

⁷ http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/ev.php-URL_ID=9827&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html; accessed on June 07, 2014

⁸ <http://edaa.in/updates/multiple-clearances-remain-a-deterrent-to-many-stations>; accessed on June 02, 2014

- Building an online platform to interlink community radio so that they can share their knowledge and expertise.
- AIR can be directed to present a list of programs to be broadcasted by CRS, to increase the listenership of CRS. Simultaneously, CRS can publish its broadcasting routine in regional newspapers, so that people can listen to programs of their choice.

⁹ https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-278449A1.pdf; accessed on June 03, 2014