

Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy - 2008

People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Information
March 12, 2008

Community Radio Installation, Broadcast and Operation Policy - 2008

In terms of availability, immediacy and reaching ability, the role of radio as a means of communication is undeniable. Therefore, even after the immense expansion of Science and Information Technology (IT), the importance of this media remains unchanged in developed, developing and underdeveloped nations. Hence, radio in Bangladesh have augmented many times in significance and quality and have reached it's present state since it's small scale inception at Dhaka on December 16, 1939. Besides providing information, entertainment and education as the oldest and single largest public service broadcaster, Bangladesh Betar has also been serving the important responsibility of public awareness raising and above all involving the general public of all levels in national development for around last seven decades. In the age of free flow of information, commercial FM radio stations are now operating in our country at private ownership to fulfill the demand of multidimensional utility. These mainly city centered channels usually broadcast entertainment programs. But no radio has yet been formed in our country that is fully dedicated for the various grassroots communities and ethnic groups. Community Radio stations may be established and operated in the oral languages of these marginalized communities as well as their full participation and management which will reflect their hopes and aspirations, the indigenous knowledge, resource and culture of local communities and will combine modern knowledge and technologies. Community Radio has been initiated in other South Asian countries like India, Srilanka and Malaysia. Under these circumstances it is imperative for the marginalized communities and various ethnic groups of our country to have their (own) Community Radio.

1. Definition – Community Radio:

- (a) A 'community' is considered to be a group of people who share common characteristics and / or interests such as sharing a single geographical location i.e. a specific town, village, or neighborhood; sharing of economic and social life through trade, marketing, exchange of goods and services.
- (b) A non-profit service will be in charge of 'Community Radio' broadcasting activities. It should be owned by a particular community, usually through a trust, foundation, or association. Its aim is to serve and benefit that community. It is, in effect, a form of public-service broadcasting, but it serves a community rather than the whole nation, as is the usual form of public broadcasting described above. Moreover, it relies and must rely mainly on the resources of the community.
- (c) Community radio is a medium that gives a voice to the voiceless, serves as mouthpiece of the marginalized and is central to communication and democratic processes within societies.
- (d) Community Radio is a broadcasting system established by the efforts of a specific community, operated by the community for the purpose of the community's welfare.

2. Fundamental Principles of Community Radio:

Internationally recognized and accepted fundamental principles of community radio will also be followed in Bangladesh. Any Organization or Institution intending to operate community radio must fulfill the following principle: -

- (a) It should be explicitly constituted as a 'non-profit' organization
- (b) The institution / organization should have a proven record of providing service to local community for at least five years.
- (c) The community to be served by the Community Radio Station should be well specified and defined.
- (d) It should have an ownership and management structure that is reflective of the community that the CRS seeks to serve.

- (e) The program contents should cover educational, social, gender, economic, environmental and cultural fields be relevant to the needs of that particular community. It should not go beyond the community's cultural and historical heritage. Any kind of political, sectarian or doctrinal program shall be prohibited.
- (f) The institution/ organization must be a Legal Entity.
- (g) Preference should be given to rural communities during the pilot phase. The focus must be for communities deprived of the reach of mainstream media outlets.

3. Necessary eligibility Criteria to obtain license/permission for the establishment and operation of Community Radio in Bangladesh

3.1. The following types of organizations shall be considered eligible to apply for Community Radio establishment and operation:

- a. Government research institutions and development organizations, which satisfy the conditions listed at "Para 2" above.
- b. Non-government development organizations, with at least five years of operation and involved in poverty alleviation or media & ICT sector, which satisfy the basic principles listed at "Para 2" above. The organization should be a legal entity or registered from NGO bureau.

3.2. The following shall not be eligible to run a Community Radio:

- a. Individuals and partnership firms;
- b. Political Parties and their affiliate organizations including students' wings, trade unions, etc;
- c. Organizations and companies both local and foreign where profits are distributed to the owners/shareholders;
- d. International NGOs and foreign broadcasters/channels and
- e. Organizations banned by the Government.

4. Licensing Process

4.1. Eligible Organizations or Institutions desirous to establish Community Radio Station in Bangladesh will have to follow the following procedure to obtain license:

- 4.1.1. For public welfare, Government shall call for application from eligible Organizations and Institutions in prescribed format to provide approval;
- 4.1.2. The ministry of Information shall form a regulatory committee and a technical sub-committee for the assessment of applications and selection of eligible applicants;
- 4.1.3. Opinion shall be received from the Home Ministry on applicant Organization or Institutions selected by technical sub committee and regulatory committee;
- 4.1.4. Before granting approval the Ministry of Information shall accept a "Probability of Attaining Frequency" report from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC);
- 4.1.5. Only one license shall be granted to any institution/organization during the pilot broadcasting phase;
- 4.1.6. The applicant shall set up Community Radio station within 1 (one) year of receiving approval. Existing laws and regulations must be maintained for the importation and

replacement of any radio equipment for the establishment of community radio. Associated organizations and institutions shall fulfill the conditions of BTRC in this regard. Broadcasting activities shall begin only after obtaining the final approval/license. Initially license will be provided for a two year period starting from date of approval as an experimental project.

4.2. Applicants for license must fulfill the following criteria:

- i. Proven record of community development work for at least five years in the area wished to be served in association of local people with a community radio station;
- ii. A broad outline of the type of program to be broadcast should be prepared and submitted to the licensing authority.
- iii. Indication of the level of community's participation in management structure of the proposed station and its program preparation and broadcasting shall be spelt out in writing.
- iv. The criteria will also include the sources of funding for the Radio Station. If donor fund is obtained then necessary approval of the NGO Affairs Bureau as per existing law shall have to be obtained.
- v. Priority will be given to the applicants managed by and/or looking to serve the disadvantaged and backward sections of the population (with special consideration to women).

4.3. Licence Fee:

Reasonable license and spectrum fees have been fixed by the government considering the fact that Community Radio is a development initiative and non profit entity. Initially license fee for each station has been decided to be 20,000.00 (Twenty Thousand Taka) [286 US \$] and seize-able deposit is 1, 00,000 (One Lac Taka) [1429 US \$]. The Government reserves all rights to redefine this fee and deposit at any time. Frequency fees shall be decided by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

5. Technical Structure

- 5.1. Each Community Radio Station will cover a range of 17 km. from it's centre. Maximum limit for transmitter power could be 100 watts. The permitted power could be decided on the basis of the licensee's area of work and/or geographical dispersion of the target audience. In this case an ERP of maximum 250 watts can be considered. Requests for higher transmitter power above 100 watts and up to 250 watts will require approval by the Committee constituted under the Ministry of Information;
- 5.2. The antenna tower's height from ground level will not exceed 32 meters. But in sparsely populated areas such as islands, the mentioned height can be restructured with prior approval of the licensing authority to achieve the desired coverage. In all cases antenna gain must be kept limited under 6 DB;
- 5.3. Frequency shall be allocated in F.M band as per National Frequency Allocation Plan after selecting the place of Community Radio station;

6. Other Conditions of the Policy

6.1. The Permission Holder shall ensure that nothing is included in the programme broadcasts which:

- 6.1.1. Offends decency, criticizes other countries or endangers the friendly relations of Bangladesh with other countries.
- 6.1.2. Openly or in veiled manner attacks any religion, community or ethnic group or in any way created animosity between communities or groups of people or tries to promote sectarian views which may lead to communal discontent or disharmony.
- 6.1.3. Contains anything obscene, defamatory or false information against person (s), groups or institutions or is partisan in nature.
- 6.1.4. Is likely to encourage or incite violence or contains anything against maintenance of law and order or which promotes anti-national feelings/attitudes.
- 6.1.5. Contains anything amounting to contempt of court or anything affecting the integrity of the Nation;
- 6.1.6. Contains aspersions against the dignity of the State and, Government.
- 6.1.7. Criticizes, maligns or slanders any individual in person or any group or segment of society in the country;
- 6.1.8. Encourages superstition or blind belief;
- 6.1.9. Degrades women;
- 6.1.10. Degrades children.
- 6.1.11. Degrades human in disabilities.
- 6.1.12. Encourages or supports the use of drugs including alcohol, narcotics and tobacco;
- 6.1.13. Stereotypes, incites, vilifies or perpetuates hatred against anyone or any group or attempts to demean any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, religion, age or physical or mental disability.
- 6.1.14. Tries to exploit religious sentiments or susceptibilities;
- 6.1.15. Undermines religious views and beliefs of those belonging to any particular religion or religious denomination.

7. Other Terms & Conditions

- 7.1 The basic objective of operating the community radio is to serve the target community and the people to meet their causes by involving them in the programs broadcast from the station.
- 7.2 The CRS shall be owned and managed only by nonprofit institutions/organizations.
 - 7.2.1. Each licensed station will have a Management Committee. Active and inclusive participation of the target community members is to be ensured in the operation and management of the station. It would be taken as a key indicator of success particularly in case of their involvement in content creation.
 - 7.2.2. An advisory committee will be formed for each station with the participation of local level government representatives such as Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Additional Deputy Commissioner (where the station is located at a district headquarter), Police

officers of the level of Assistant Superintendent and appropriate level representatives of nation building departments such as Agriculture, Fisheries, Livestock, Forests and Environment, Health, concerned Regional Director of local public radio station and NGOs working in the relevant field etc.

- 7.2.3. Regarding station management and programming, the licensee will promote equity and social justice with special priority to the marginalized communities in terms of their race, caste, religion, physical disability and gender.
- 7.2.4. The licensee will ensure capacity building for and within the community through formal and / or informal training as required.
- 7.3 The license will be granted for an initial period of 2 years. Based on performance of the licensee and provided that no violation of the terms and conditions has occurred during the period, the license can be renewed for such periods as the government may decide. The pilot projects have to be evaluated on mid term basis as well as at the final stage of its operation.
- 7.4 The license shall not be transferable. There should have provision to conduct midterm and final evaluation of performance.
- 7.5 Permission may be provided on pilot basis to share programs among different Community Radio Station if the programs consist of locally relevant content. Programs of Bangladesh Betar (Radio) would be relayed or re-broadcast in the Community Radio Station as and when these are of national importance or of relevance to the people of the area. Special program such as address of the president, prime minister, special program of national days celebrations and weather bulletin. Community based broadcasting program has to be broadcasted through community radio stations.
- 7.6 The program contents of the community radio broadcast service will focus on agriculture, both adult and children education, gender, primary health, environment, social welfare, current market prices, demand for agro products, rural and community development, baby care, maternity health care, family planning (radio bulletin), income generation etc. The programming should reflect the special interests of the community to be served.
- 7.7 The programs should ensure community peoples' inclusion from the point of participation, choice and sharing. The community people will participate in program planning, implementing, operating and evaluating.
 - 7.7.1. The licensee will develop plans to facilitate and promote community participation besides setting out the station's programmatic values in context to the community to be served.
 - 7.7.2. Speeches of government officials at upazilla level on development issues and policies would be broadcast by the CRS.
 - 7.7.3. Through participatory process a specific program should set its spotlight on local information, events and notifications, local culture, identity, and local language.
 - 7.7.4. The format, subject, presentation and language of programs must reflect the local culture.
- 7.8. As the community radio serves the purpose as local medium, thus, local development news will be permitted. Nonetheless, any kind of political broadcasts will be strictly prohibited.

7.9. Advertisements related to development services will be permitted while community radio program broadcasting based on the following conditions:

- 7.9.1. The commercials should be related to development services relevant and limited to the specified area.
- 7.9.2. Community stations will ensure that the sponsors of programs do not influence the content or the style of individual programs or the overall programming of the Community Radio Station and its code of conduct.
- 7.9.2. Existing government regulations shall be followed for commercials.
- 7.10. Any Government authority may regulate or monitor the activities of any community radio station if necessary.
- 7.11. The licensee should provide quarterly report to the ministry of information. The licensee will preserve records of broadcasted programs during the piloting phase. In case of failure, the Government will have the liberty to revoke the license.
- 7.12. The Government or its authorized representative shall have the right to inspect the broadcast including other Community Radio Station set up facilities of the licensees and collect information in connection to public and community interests.
- 7.13. The Government will have the right to take over the entire Community Radio Station service and network possessed by the licensee or revoke/ terminate/ suspend/ punish the license in the interest of national security or in the event of national emergency/ war or low intensity conflict or in any similar type of situations.
- 7.14. Notwithstanding anything contained anywhere else in the license, the Government's decision shall be final and conclusive. The Government shall have the power to direct the licensee to broadcast any special message as may be considered desirable to meet any contingency arising out of natural emergency, or public interest or natural disaster and the like, and the licensee shall be obliged to comply with such directions.
- 7.15. The permission holder shall be required to submit their audited annual accounts and annual report to the Government.
- 7.16. The Government may revoke permission of license if the licensee fails to commission services within the instructed period.
- 7.17. The Govt. may take initiatives to create a Community Radio Development Fund as supplement for the community broadcaster's own resources, capacity building, improvement in quality of technology, research & evaluation purpose, etc.
- 7.18. Concerned organizations and institutions shall comply with all conditions decided by BTRC for the use of frequency and radio equipment.
- 7.19. Tower established for community radio operation shall not be given for the use to private telephone operators.
- 7.20. Organizations/Institutions establishing community radio stations shall arrange for overall security of the station with armed Ansers by it's own funding and the in-charge of concerned police station shall submit a monthly report to the government stating if any anti-state broadcasting have been carried out.
- 7.21. The government preserves all rights to modify any rules or regulations stated in the policy in support of public welfare or for appropriate broadcasting or for public security.
- 7.22. The Government reserves the right to revoke the license at any time in public interest or in case of violation of the terms and conditions provided.

8. Monitoring of Community Radio Broadcasting

- 8.1. Every month a copy of CD containing the recordings of broadcasted programs of community radio station will be provided to the local authority prescribed by the Government.
- 8.2. A local advisory committee will be formed under the UNO, Officer-In-Charge of local police stations, and Regional director of local Radio station Principal of locally situated education institution. The committee will monitor the community radio station activities in regular basis and submit a confidential report to the Ministry of Information per month.
- 8.3. The advisory committee will provide suggestions based on the strengths and weaknesses of the community radio station broadcasting.
- 8.4. The advisory committee will encourage the participation of upazila level government officials in the community radio programs.
- 8.5. The advisory committee will encourage producing development advertisements / government advertisements through community radio.
- 8.6. The advisory committee will provide necessary counseling service to improve the quality of programs.
- 8.7. Central Monitoring Committee formed by Ministry of Information shall supervise the overall operation related to Community Radio and shall inform the Ministry on a regular basis.

Translated by: Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)
House: 13/1 Road: 2 Shamoli, Dhaka 1207
ceo@bnnrc.net, www.bnnrc.net