Broadcasting the excluded

A forum on mobile broadcasting threw up interesting ideas on how it can become a great medium of communication in remote areas

BANGALORE MIRROR BUREAU

Mobile broadcasting is not only possible but is also fast gaining popularity as a medium that breaks the digital divide, yet it has not caught on in India. Strange but true. This was evident at the consultation, 'Whose Technology is it Anyway', organised by VOICES and supported by UNESCO, UNDP and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasting.

Addressing a gathering of than 100 representatives from the government, NGOs, CBOs and Civil Society Organisations, key note speaker Rohini Nilekani said, "Discrimination and exclusion are the prime culprits that have handicapped community voice," she said. Making a strong case for public and community access to media, she urged the spread of community voices, which are collaborative, affordable, accessible, tolerant and mutually respectful.

Steve Buckley, president of the World Association of Community RadioBroadcasting, talked of the global nature of a radio station and emphasised a cross-media and a multiplatform approach to ensure that community voices are heard.

"The rapid strides in technology have redefined community from a geographical entity to special-interest groups across the world. This would encourage community as a collective voice," he said.

Madhu Acharya, from Antena Foundation, Nepal said it is sometimes important to go back to the future. His presentation on Doko, or Radio in a Basket, demonstrated to the audience how women in Nepal travel across the countryside with a radio in a basket. Doko radio enables mobile broadcasting. In other words, the Doko travels for 15 days at a location and generates about 45 broadcasts from remote parts of Nepal in a day. The villagers are ready to pay Rs.15,000 to Rs.20,000 (Nepali rupees) to hold and broadcast debates and discussions in their village.

Sharada Prasad of the Arghyam Foundation showcased a powerful mixed-media initiative in the form of the Indian Water Portal, which combined the internet and radio to ensure the dissemination of community voices and concerns the critical issue of water. The presentation underscored the importance of combining the old and the new if we are to address the issues of access and inclusion.

Ramnath Bhat, VOICES, made a presentation on the suitcase radio and radio in a box, which underlined the need and relevance of mobile broadcasting, especially in remote areas that are vulnerable to natural disasters.

Key note speaker Rohini Nilekani and Steve Buckley, president of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasting at the forum