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Community broadcasting key to realising sustainability of agriculture in the region

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By Harsha Udayakantha Peiris

Design and production of television programs for farmers have been an effective methodology in Japan to boost productivity of the farmer communities who contribute largely for the wellbeing of the socio-economic process in Japan.



Kapila M. Gamage



Kenichi Kodama

TV Hamura an exemplary agro-broadcaster

Being exemplary in this context, TV Hamura started operations in October 1993 as a regional television broadcaster in for 26 cities of Tokyo prefecture in Japan. At TV Hamura, video promotions are made by the employees of the Hamura city. They plan, shoot, edit and produce the video documentaries and feature programs as promotion programs that are the mostly accessible for their community. The programs provide local information pertaining to prefectural agriculture, local topics, events and so on, in an understandable manner.

At the start of modern times, Hamura was a farming village and its main industry was silk cultivation. The city is located about 45 kilometres from central Tokyo. There is plenty greenery with the natural surroundings around the Tamagawa River and the woods which give the citizens an understanding of what the area looked like in the past.



A part of the international media delegation at the OSM in Promoting innovation and Productivity in Agriculture for Mass Media Practitioners organised by the APO in Tokyo, Japan engaged in the group discussions, insights, lessons learned from the mission for follow up action plan. From left: Rann Reuy – Senior News Writer of Cambodian Broadcasting Services; Faruk Ahmad – Producer (News) Grade 1 of Bangladesh Television; Baatar Oyun – of TV5 television Mongolia; Ariffin Bin Abu – Head of MADA TV Corporate Communication Division of Muda Agricultural Development Authority; Joo Youb Lee – Deputy Head of Department of PyungHwa Broadcasting Corporation of the Republic of Korea; and Haris Harisman – News Producer, Reporter and News Anchor of the LPP TVRI Television of the Republic of Indonesia

The Tamagawa River flows from the western part of the city to the south, and Hamura City is also known as the location of the water inlet for the Tamagawa waterworks that were constructed in the Edo era. The recent period of high economic growth in the region saw an increase in population when automobile companies were attracted to the area to be constructed and it gradually developed into a commuter suburb. Today, the city has a good balance between residential and industrial areas.

There are 123 farming households in Hamura City as of the census in 2010 which accounts for about 0.5 percent of the 24,918 households in the city in 2012. According to the farm household category in the Agriculture and forestry census, 67 of the Hamura farming households are commercial farms and 56 are subsistence farms. The percentage of commercial farms is high compared with other parts of Nishi-tama and Tokyo prefectures.

TV Hamura presents new contents every Thursday and the daily program times are 9.00am, 5.00pm and 9.00pm being observed as the most convenient watch times for the community. “ We visit the farmland to talk and produce our agriculture programs at the farming facility itself. And we offer much time for the farmer to address his issue himself than presenting it ourselves so that the responsible role-players and authorities in return, get a much influential picture

of the exact problem encountered by the farmer at his work. It boosts credibility, so depending on the urgency, the relevant authorities can timely make presence or take steps to bring sustainable resolutions to such issues,” says Kenichi Kodama, a Freelance Director at TV Hamura.

Kodama was invited recently, at the Head Quarters of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) in Tokyo to address an international media delegation engaged in a Multicountry Observational Study Mission (OSM) on Best Practices in Promoting Innovation and Productivity in Agriculture for Mass Media Practitioners organised by the APO. Two journalists from Sri Lanka had also been selected to attend the session.



Sirimalee Alahakoon, Senior Producer at Educational Program Division of Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation, make a field shoot of video footage for her monthly agriculture program on national television, where tea grower Moriuchi explains of innovative approach of tea farming in Shizuoka, during the recent APO OSM in Japan

“We do have problems too. Sometimes our agriculture programs run un-heard by the authorities. And such issues are mainly due to the time allocations or the busy daily chores in metro areas. As an effective measure, we keep the top audience acknowledged early about the programs to be telecast on TV Hamura, through e-mails and new media such as social media, so that they can vacate that time to watch it or record for later viewing. Accordingly, over the years, we have been influential in presenting farmers’ problems and issues pertaining to the prefectural agriculture industry through ‘TV Hamura’ for a fruitful feedback,” he says.

Hamura city is operating a farmers’ market under the Dedicated Manager System (DMS). By doing this, the city is promoting local production for local consumption by providing a stable supply of fresh, safe and secure local produce to its citizens. This farmers’ market has become a fixture where customers can meet the farmers and where fresh produce picked that day is provided to the citizens. A number of individual farmers’ markets also exist in the city to promote local consumption of local produce. These individual farmers’ markets provide fresh, inexpensive and delicious produce and more importantly, they provide a sense of security because the customers know who has made the produce.

TV Hamura, by reaching these farm households and fields to talk with the farmers, shoot television programs there, edit and present them via TV Hamura, is further supporting and encouraging the community to consume more local produce from the prefecture. ‘The Circle of Hamura Farming,’ one such exemplary television program of TV Hamura, started in 2009 as a way to introduce vegetables that were in season and the farmers making them, is very popular to date with the farms that are visited and the viewers of TV Hamura.

Mahaweli Project paves way to community broadcasting for agriculture

Although the medium was different from picture plus voice to voice only, the first of its kind in South Asia, Community Radio, namely Mahaweli Community Radio (MCR), under the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project was set up in 1981

in Sri Lanka by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) as a means to effectively address the communities re-settled under the Mahaweli Development Program. The project was assisted by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

M.J.R. David in 'A Passion for Radio – Radio waves and Community Chapter 13, clearly mentions that the programs on MCR were conceptualised not on the basis of what the producers think but on field research findings.

“Listeners were pleased to have their own kith and kin visiting their homes through radio rather than strangers. Innovations were most likely to be adapted when someone with similar socio-economic standing conveys them. This was best provided for in an exchange of experiences rather than a lecture or monologue. The ability to participate in this exchange of views helped listeners see their own potential and responsibility in the realisation of developmental goals in personal, domestic and national goals and especially in the area of agriculture. Between 1981 and 1989 the mobile teams of the MCR had visited nearly 1500 villages. The Community Radio in Girandurukotte and the MCR broadcasts on the Anuradhapura regional service – ‘Rajarata Sewaya’ had been listened to by about 90% of the local population and was the second most important source of agricultural and health related information.”

The project was a close version to the present day TV Hamura in Tokyo.

“After the World War II, developed countries collaborated to initiate a number of development programs to elevate their countries step by step. They also expanded the same programs to a number of under developed and developing countries that came under direct or indirect control of the British and the US. These programs always brought fruitful results in the countries of the implementers, but failed to reach out successfully in developing or under developed countries, half-way due to several matters. Although the community radio was introduced in Sri Lanka as one such resultant projects, especially in the resettlement areas under Accelerated Mahaweli Development Program, to strategically address the socio-cultural and agro-industrial activities of the

communities, the program collapsed once the funds were over,” says Kapila M.Gamage – a veteran radio and television journalist who immensely contributed and performed towards the wellbeing of the agro communities through MCR since its inception.

Later, following years of service as a radio and mass media practitioner, trainer and lecturer at few higher educational institutes and universities he now serves as a creative tele and script writer.

“Apparently, radio is a low cost medium of communication that needs minimum amount of literacy to address target listener groups. The cost of investment is also considerably low. And due several of these reasons it was well established and became more popular in Asian countries. It could easily address the Asian communities with low literacy rates.”

“When it came to the community radio, it was from the people, for the people and by the people. In community radio, the concepts were built by the people, they were the main role players, sometimes even in the production of programs. The radio was run by them and through their operation. This was the concept. But in Sri Lanka, from the beginning, the community radio was formed as a branched arm of the national radio service. Although it was funded, equipped and staffs were trained by the UNESCO-DANIDA assistance it did not have any exact ownership owing to the original conceptual objective of the community radio. Therefore, later it did not function exactly as it was wanted by the people,” Gamage says.

MCR a golden era of community broadcasting

According to Gamage, community radio in Sri Lanka presented a huge potential in addressing various socio-lingual, cultural and agro-industrial issues raised within the resettled communities of Mahaweli Project , the mega hydro power development scheme in Sri Lanka that was re-named as an accelerated project during the latter part of the 70s. “The Mahaweli Community Radio (MCR) started

to relive the interaction between the resettled communities in a sustainable manner,” he says.

The system ‘H’ was the first to be developed under the accelerated Mahaweli development scheme and the first community radio operations in Sri Lanka were established making the city of Kandy as its base. Community radio also did its transmissions from ‘Rajarata Sevaya’ in Anuradhapura and then a base operations station was also established at the Mahailuppallama Government Agriculture Department’s building.

The first community radio station constructed and operated in an original agro community area was the ‘Girandurukotte’ Community Radio Station at the system ‘C’ of the Mahaweli development scheme. Then there was one erected at Kotmale too. At the beginning, the transmissions used the AM band of the air waves and later shifted to FM,” Gamage reawakens his experience as a community broadcaster.

The community radio was mainly used to discuss issues pertaining to agriculture in the regions, land issues as well as community, health and educational issues. Through these programs the radio brought and introduced effective solutions to these matters via experts’ views. The listener communities identified community radio as a family member. Sometimes it was their best friend. “ When it went off air due to a technical error, the next day they came to the radio station to ask why we were not heard the previous day. Whenever there was a dispute between husband and wife or when they lost cattle they came to the community radio. They had faith that the community radio would personally seek into their matters and bring fruitful solutions. It was the type of community radio.

I remember, once, at Girandurukotte, when the then government raised the paddy prices and millers refused purchasing paddy from the farmers, they protested at the community radio station urging an immediate solution. They did not march up to the police or any authoritative body to protest against the price hike, but to the community radio. That was the type of credibility the community radio had achieved at that time,” Gamage says.

Present practice of community radio in Asia and SL's potential

In many Asian regions, even at present, the community radio is apparently powerful in bringing sustainable solutions to its communities' burning issues "Community radio in several Asian countries play a major role in developing agriculture as an industry. 'Radio Lumbini' and 'Radio Sagar Matha' in Nepal, 'Nama Dhwani' or Our Voices in Kolar District in India are two shining examples for such community radio broadcasts. Radio 'Nama Dhwani' in India serves more than 500 farmer families in their listener area. Most of them are vegetable farmers. The radio helps to solve their numerous issues pertaining to water, fertiliser and market prices of produce," he says.

According to Gamage, community radio has always been a low cost investment that largely benefits to the listener community it serves. It creates a better volunteer base presenting with a potential resource panel from the community itself that could better empower the community it serves. "And this is the main issue we encounter in effectively implementing the community radio concept here. The political mediation fears the empowerment of the community. Many politicians do not wish to empower the electoral communities. The fact they are not aware in this regard is that whenever the empowerment process stops it interferes and largely affects the socio-economic development process."

Despite topographic and geographic disparity, Sri Lanka has practically proved the effectiveness of community radio in addressing issues pertaining to agriculture industry, emerging from grass-root level. "And yet, if accurately introduced and effectively implemented, even at present, community radio is one of the best mechanisms to make an informed farmer majority and expand agro-education towards enhanced productivity in the industry of agriculture in Sri Lanka," Gamage says.