

# Rural Voices: Unheard to Empowered

May 3-4, 2012

A conference organized by

**Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD)**  
**(An initiative of S.M. Sehgal Foundation)**  
**Plot No. 34, Sector 44, Institutional Area**  
**Gurgaon 122003, Haryana, India**

*"In the twenty-first century, the capacity to communicate will almost certainly be a key human right. Eliminating the distinction between the information-rich and information-poor is also critical to eliminating economic and other inequalities between North and South, and to improve the life of all humanity."*

*Nelson Mandela, 1995*

## **OVERVIEW**

Despite India's tremendous advances in the field of communication, most rural Indians remain information-poor and unheard. Penetration of mainstream communication media has failed to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Of the varied media forms, television dominates the outreach with 38% rural population using the medium. Radio is found to reach out to only 18% of the rural populace followed by print where the penetration is only 15% (Lintas Media...2008)<sup>1</sup>. Grassroots experiences reveal that this limited media outreach in the rural settings is largely linear, thus, preventing access to the 'voices'.

For inclusive growth and development, the needs and aspirations of all sections of the society must be represented. Excluded sections of the society must have access to information and platforms for expression. Communication which is participatory and development oriented in nature can go a long way in empowering rural communities to manage and control the development process. Rural Voices, a conference organized by the Institute of Rural Research and Development (IRRAD), an initiative of S.M. Sehgal Foundation, will feature creative ways in which rural communities receive information and express their needs and concerns effectively. Community radio, vernacular newspapers, and wall paintings are often effective media in villages. Other media used in participatory communications include theatre, comics, songs and other art forms.

IRRAD invites diverse stakeholders to discuss alternative media and share successes. Panelists will feature policy issues and media resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Lintas Media Guide 2008: Urban and rural reach of advertising media  
<http://www.afaqs.com/news/story.html?sid=20191>, Accessed on April 02, 2012

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE**

- Highlight the positive impact of participatory communication within rural communities
- Showcase successful models and practices in alternative media
- Reiterate the need for community inputs in the development process
- Identify resources for rural development communications

## **CONFERENCE DESIGN**

**DAY ONE: MAY 3, 2012**

**Venue: IRRAD Auditorium, Gurgaon**

The conference is divided into following sessions:

- Celebration of Rural Voices
- Alternative media in rural development communications
- Policy framework, guidelines and resources for development communications
- Action planning for collective initiative and cooperation

**Celebration of Rural Voices:** This session will acknowledge and recognize individuals and groups who have effectively used participatory communication media as tools for bringing about a positive change in rural lives and communities at large. Their experiences can be a source of inspiration for others to learn from and emulate.

**Community media in rural development communications:** A variety of media are employed in development communications such as community radio, vernacular newspapers, wall paintings, and theatre. The medium should effectively reach and engage the intended village audience. This session will showcase the uniqueness and inherent strength of each medium and will invite the participants to identify media best suited for a particular context.

**Policy framework, guidelines and resources for development communications:** Policy makers and donor agencies will share views about and resources for development communications. These insights will help development communication practitioners to formulate their strategies in accordance with stated policies and advocate for policy changes if required.

## **ACTIVITIES**

1. **Action planning for collective action and cooperation:** In small groups, participants will prepare action plans to take forward the learning from the conference. This will be an opportunity to discuss individual plans and consider collective action.

### **Key topics for action planning:**

- Recommendations for integrating development communication in rural development strategies and programs.
- Strategies to create citizen journalists in rural areas
- Available and required resources for promoting rural voices
- Building guidelines for participatory communications

## 2. Performance by Street Theatre Groups and Puppetry artists

**DAY TWO: May 4, 2012**

**FIELD VISIT**

**Venue: Ghaghas Community Center, Mewat (Haryana)**

The conference also brings an opportunity to the participants for a field visit to Mewat to witness a community radio initiative, Alfaz-e-Mewat FM 107.8, a NGO-government partnership model. Sign up in advance so that IRRAD can arrange enough transportation.

### INVITED SPEAKERS

Ms. Anshu Meshak	CEO, Charkha Development Communications Network
Mr. Anupam Srivastava	Pratibadh, wall newspaper
Mr. Arvind Gaur	Asmita Theatre Group
Mr. Ashok Yadav	Director General, Department of Agriculture, Haryana
Mr. Debarun Dutta	Program Officer, Drishti
Ms. Iskra Panevska	Communication and Information Advisor, UNESCO
Ms. Jessica Mayberry	Founding Director, Video Volunteers
Ms. Kirti Sharma	Human Rights Watch
Mr. Michael	AirJaldi
Mr. Osama Manzar	Founder, Digital Empowerment Foundation
Mr. Paulo Mefalopolus	Chief, Communications for Development , UNICEF
Mr. Prateek Shah	Social Media Activist
Mr. Ram Bhatt	Maraa
Ms. Ranjana Pandey	Jan Madhyam
Ms. Ravina Agrawal	Program Officer, Media ,Ford Foundation
Ms. Razia	Alfaz-e-Mewat Community radio initiative by IRRAD
Mr. Roopak Chauhan	Program Manager, American India Foundation
Mr. Sachin Jain	Vikas Samvad
Mr. Sajan Venniyoor	India Representative, Deutsche Welle Radio Agency
Mr. Sameer Kochar	Skoch Foundation
Mr. Sharad Sharma	World Comics India
Ms. Shashwati Bannerjee	Sesame Workshop India Trust
Ms. Sonali Khan	Country Director, Breakthrough
Ms. Supriya Sahu	Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, GoI
Mr. Subranshu Choudhary	CG Net swara
Ms. Usha Bhasin	Head, Development Communications, Doordarshan

### **CONFERENCE DELIVERABLES**

- A policy recommendation to be churned out from the Conference report
- Handbook on community media initiatives practiced by grassroots organizations
- Conference evaluation from participants

### **CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES**

The Conference will have participation from diverse stakeholders from Government, International Organisations, NGOs, students, and policymakers and donor agencies. The participants will be benefitted through increased awareness on the community media avenues available for participatory communications, learn from them and plan collective action wherever possible.

**For further information, please contact:**

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