

Unesco optimistic about community radio in India

Unesco has voiced optimism about the role for community radio opening up in India following its participation in a major broadcast exhibition here.

'The time for Community Radio has truly come. The tremendously enthusiastic response that the exhibition on 'Community Radio: Innovation, low cost solutions and access' got at the BES Expo-2007 (from Feb 1-3 in Pragati Maidaan) demonstrated this loud and clear,' said a statement released at the conclusion of the Broadcast Engineering Society's expo held here.

The exhibition, organised by Unesco (the UN-related specialist organisation related to education, cultural and social activities) - in collaboration with Plan India, OneWorld South Asia and Care India - was 'an attempt to create awareness about Community Radio and show case low cost technology that can be used to set up radio stations,' said Unesco.

India has been cautiously unveiling policies to allow low-cost FM-based community radio stations to be built across the country, and in mid-November 2006 the policy took a quantum leap with [New Delhi](#) announcing a more broad-based policy to allow such not-for-profit broadcasters to set up operations.

The exhibition was held against the backdrop of the new Community Radio policy allowing NGOs and not-for-profit organisations to set up community radio stations for development purposes.

The uniquely designed stall at Hall 10 in Pragati Maidan sought to create an ambience of a rural community radio station and highlighted the fact that setting up radio stations need neither be complex nor costly. In fact, the stall ran a special live broadcast 'Hamari Awaaz FM 89.9 Mhz' from the radio-station-in-box.

The 'box', measuring around 55x50 cm contains a mixer, CD/Cassette player, a 30W FM transmitter, antenna and a laptop with the added possibility of multimedia programming and access services.

The 30W transmitter can be tuned to any frequency within the FM band by a very simple setting process. Developed by the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), with UNESCO assistance the 'box' is a self-sufficient broadcasting and production tool and will cost Rs 300,000 minus import duty.

Also on display was a suitcase radio - a handy portable suitcase that could function as a full-fledged radio station. A member of 'Mandakini ki Awaaz', a community radio group from Uttarakhand that conducted the live broadcast, also showed how a radio station can be made soundproof with papier mache egg-trays and thermacol.

In competition with some of the most exclusive, high tech and highly priced exhibits, the popularity of the community radio stall increased with every passing day.

Over 500 people visited the stall - that included representatives from NGOs, educational institutions, student groups, radio equipment manufacturers and researchers.

Jocelyne Josiah, Communication and Information Advisor, Asia, UNESCO, said the world was

divided into those who loved radio and those who had yet to discover it. She said if the currently fashionable personal audio tool I-Pod and other cutting edge technology were one side of the media spectrum, radio was on the other extreme. However, its importance lay in its incredible reach and the fact that it was capable of touching the soul.

Presentations on existing community radio applications and practices like the E-Tuk Tuk that was used in remote communities in Sri Lanka and Radio-station-in-a-Box were made at the Forum. The E Tuk Tuk, Kosala Keerthirathne from Sri Lanka explained, was an auto-rickshaw which contained a mobile telecentre and radio broadcasting unit.

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