Barriers to Diversity in Community Radio

- Maraa

Community Radio in India

- First community radio guidelines came in 2003

- First license for campus radio given to Anna FM in 2004

- Presently, about 200 operational Community Radio

- About 200 application waiting for clearance

- More than 600 applications rejected

- Rejected applications outnumber the accepted applications by a ratio of 1:3

2006 Policy Guidelines

- **Eligibility**- licenses given to educational institutes, NGOs and agricultural universities and institutes.

- **Technical**- cap on transmitter having maximum Effective Radiated Power of 100 Watt; antenna height to 30 meters above ground level.

- **Content**- emphasis should be on developmental, agricultural, health, educational, environmental, social welfare, community development and cultural programmes; advertising restricted to 5 minutes per hour of broadcast.

Licensing

- Submit financial records, details of past work which is scrutinized by several ministries.

- LOI - issued subject to receiving clearance from Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence & HRD (in case of private educational institutions)

- Frequency allocation by WPC wing of Ministry of Communication & IT.

- MoIB - handles the administrative part of the licensing (content regulation), provides a license vis-a-vis a Grant of Permission Agreement valid for five years

- MoCIT - handles the technical part (spectrum allocation), provides a license vis-a-vis a Wireless Operating License valid for one year

- 3 kinds of radio- Public, Commercial and Community Radio

- Frequency reserved for Radio- 88Mhz-108Mhz

- Frequency reserved for community radio- 90.8 MHz, 91.2MHz, 90.4MHz. 107.8Mhz and 96.9 Mhz are standby frequency

- **System of getting license-**
- **Prasar Bharti** (public) - gives its expansion plan to government and a budget is allocated for the new channels
- **Commercial radio**- frequency is given in phases- a set of frequency is identified by MoIB and MoCIT, those frequencies are auctioned and people bid for the frequency
- **CR**- First Come First Served (FCFS) basis- depends on the applicant and allocation satisfaction as per policy requirements

Gaps in CR policy

- FCFS- whoever applies first gets the license

- MoCIT allocates spectrum to only to those who have successfully obtained a Grant of Permission Agreement (GoPA)

- MoCIT also reserves three frequencies for community radio in a given license area

- Therefore, MoIB cannot provide a GOPA to an applicant (even if they clear all the eligibility criteria) if all three reserved frequencies are already allocated.

➢ **Frequencies are allotted as long as MoIB cleared them; licenses are rejected if MoCIT has filled up spectrum quota**

- Two different kinds of barriers to community radio:

1. Entrants into the sector are arbitrary (solely decided on how quickly they applied, i.e. before others)

2. Prospective entrants are denied simply because their application came too late.

➢ This has an adverse impact on media diversity at two levels:
a. at an inter-sector level, for radio
b. at an inter-category level, for community radio.

FCFS- How does it create imbalance in ownership

Imbalance at inter-sector level (public, commercial and CR)

Delhi

- Commercial radio- 8
- Public radio - 2
- CR- 6

Mumbai

- Commercial radio- 7
- Public radio- 3
- CR- 1

Both are imbalanced markets.

FCFS- How does it create imbalance in ownership

Imbalance at inter-category level
(Educational, NGO & agricultural university or institute)

Example- Delhi

1.   Delhi has 6 CRs and all are campus radio

2. All the CRs are located in South Delhi.

a.   Space is saturated, no scope for others to apply

Restrictions: (i) limits the kinds of people who can participate
   (ii) limits the kind of content available for audience

➢ **No scope for community ownership in such a market**

b. No application from other parts of Delhi

- 2013 amendment- protection given to three reserved frequencies was made according to the type of market in which the frequency was sought.
- Urban area- CR frequency protected for a radius of 10km
- Semi-urban area- protected for a radius of 25km
- Rural area- protected for a radius of 50km

- No significant change seen in the pattern of license as many are not aware of this policy change.

- Lack of initiative to fill the space created by this policy change.

Community Radios in India
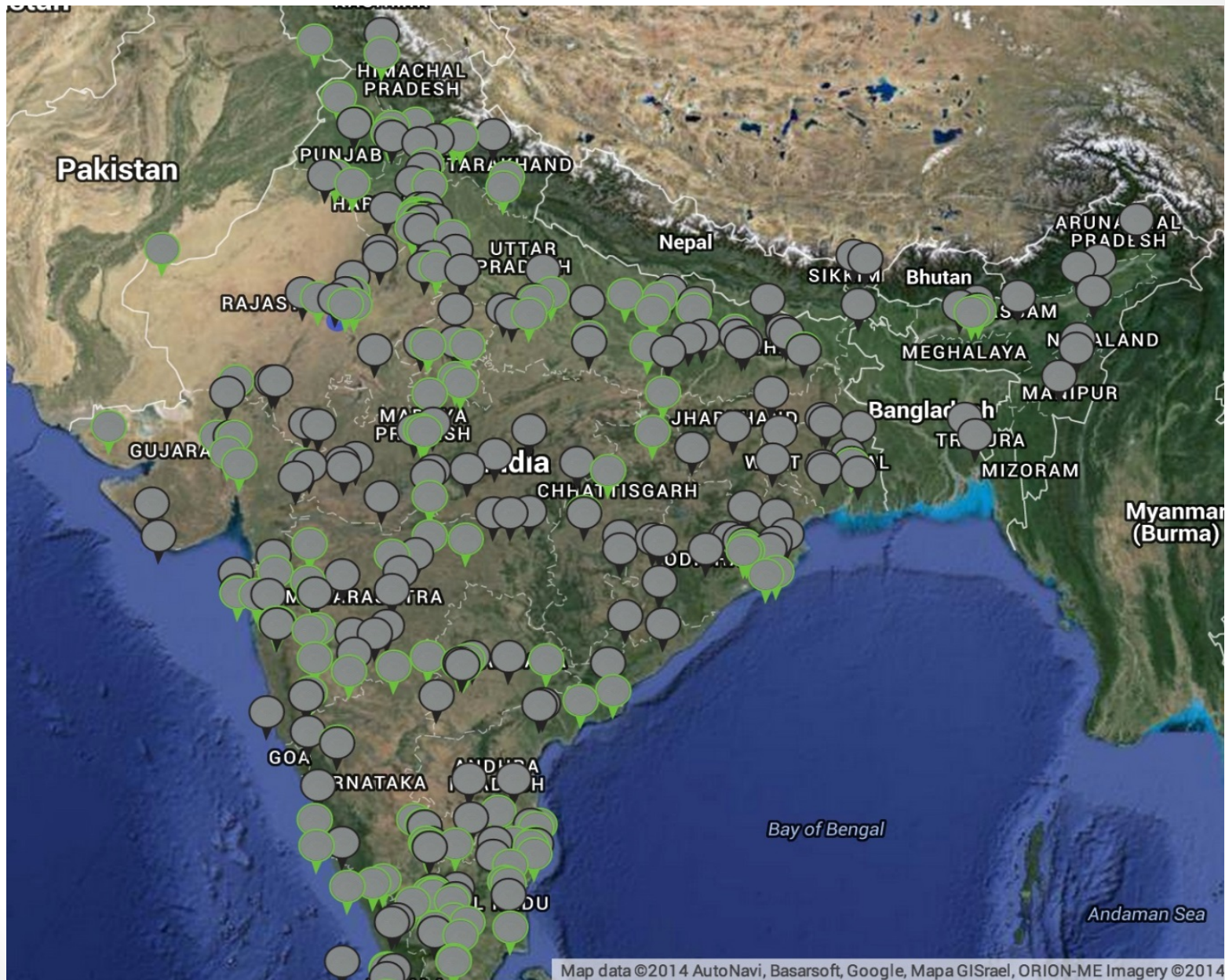
Gap Areas

Conclusion

- Operational radio stations are concentrated in particular parts of the area creating large pockets of the license area without access to community radio content.

- FCFS- leads to only one sub-category of community radios to dominate a market, depriving audiences of diversity in content even though they have access to community radio content.

- There is no planned growth and allocation of public resources, namely spectrum is provided without rationale on how well a given applicant can serve the public interest.

- The developmental discourse around community radio prevents other possibilities and discourses being associated

- Another discourse could be of alternative media, comparing Community radio to public and commercial radio

- Lack of policy initiative to create a balance in the market.

Scope for further study

- Methodological focus needed to identify measurement techniques. What is the right balance and how do we know it is right?

- Expand scope of empirical work across other markets and under different conditions

website- http://communityradio.technology

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http://maraa.in/