



Changing airwaves and claiming rights in Pakistan

Summary keywords

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Speakers

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Episode 10: Changing airwaves and claiming rights in Pakistan

Jake Lloyd 0:15

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Hello, I'm Jake Lloyd and welcome to *How to build community*, a podcast and a radio show brought to you by Tearfund's *Footsteps* magazine and Arukah Network. In this episode, we're in northern Pakistan to hear a story of how an isolated migrant community brought electricity and water, confidence and skills to their neighbourhood through something called community-centred media.

[Audio of community radio project in KPK region, Pakistan].

This is the sounds of a community radio projects in the KPK region of Pakistan. It was a project set up by Hazeen Latif, who is my guest in this episode. Hazeen heads an organization called Amplifying Voices Pakistan, and they are dedicated to community centred media. Today, you're going to hear him tell a remarkable story of what this project has achieved in this region. But first of all, let's briefly hear Hazeen explain what community centred media is.

Hazeen Latif 1:35

Basically, community centred media is giving a voice to the community so that that community of being linked in and being trained with the skills to use media so that they can highlight their issues and their problems to the decision makers, to the people living around them so that they can live and they can have a healthy and flourishing life.

Jake Lloyd 2:01

Hazeen thinks this idea of training and supporting people to develop their own messages is far better than the way advocacy is often done?

Hazeen Latif 2:12

Normally, what is what the organisations, the NGOs, the groups who want to support or want to help the communities which are marginalised, did develop their own messages after taking information from the community. And that's not the way which we see if we allow communities to develop their own messages in their own language and send it on air, then the community would take the ownership of what they are talking about and the decision makers or the service providers or the donors or whoever is capable of helping them will come directly to them. So the trust is built in, you know, in a stronger way.

Jake Lloyd 2:52

So that's the theory. How does it work in practice? He's friends with a church pastor in a town in this KPK region, and it was through him speaking with his friend that he heard about a small migrant community of about 50 or 60 families that lived close to the pastor's church. Now, Hazeen has asked me not to name the migrant community or where they're from, but he did tell me that they arrived in the area several years ago following a time of flooding where they lived, and that when they moved to this area of Pakistan for a long time, they were not welcome.

Hazeen Latif 3:32

This community was not taught to be well-behaved or good community because this they thought that they are maybe the people of having evil mind in their thoughts. And so most of the communities which were living around them, they feared them. And they thought that maybe the thieves, the smugglers or the murderers or people from the evil side.

Jake Lloyd 3:59

And he also learned that they were a community that had a hard time accessing basic infrastructure.

Hazeen Latif 4:06

We found out that this community has such issues. For example, they did not have any proper infrastructure from proper infrastructure means. They did not have any roads that did not have clean drinking water. They did not have proper toilets. They were not got any kind of a basic health unit there. So all these were issues and they were all labourers. They didn't know how to even handwash They were unaware of that because they were kind of so much in that situation.

Jake Lloyd 4:37

Has been felt convicted that community centred media could help this community. But as he was an outsider from the big city, he also knew that to go and just run a program or impose his own ideas in the community just wasn't going to work.

Hazeen Latif 4:53

They feel that we are kind of intruders, that we are some aliens because, you know, provinces. They feel that Islamabad it's a developing it's developed city. It's they are of God. They are educated and they can't understand our language. And especially these KPK people, Pashtun people, they have a very strong culture, you know. You can't even enter their house. Their women are kept away. You cannot enter into their family court.

Jake Lloyd 5:23

So how did he get started? Well, he said it was about spending a lot of time just visiting and getting to know people. And he also said that this is an approach that sometimes raises eyebrows amongst people he knows.

Hazeen Latif 5:36

Even my family also, and some of my good friends said that 'for one year you are going there, meeting only friends, making friends, sitting with them, having tea and discussion and talking, talking about their issues. But you are doing nothing'. So I knew that it is the beginning, you know. We formed good friends and from that good friends we started developing that, that unprofitable kind of a trust, you know, nothing give and take. It's just a trust. It's just a friendship. And to have friendship, when somebody is ready, they would say 'Can you help us? Because for last 40 years, nobody has come to us and ask that what you are doing. And we have been suffering for clean drinking water. We have no electricity, we have no roads. We have no schools in our region. And we are applying, we are cultivating the land for a fee for some landlord. So we are tenants'. And then I say, 'Okay, I can support you, I can guide you, I can be with you for this time. And you are the champions. You will be the heroes, you will be the captains. It's just about you. You do it, I'll support you'. And they start doing it. So this is a fascinating and a good way to start with that rather than another than taking a tag on my head that 'Oh, I am from this NGO. I'm a director, I'm this man. I am

well-educated'. No, even I dressed in their local dressing, which they used to. And I would like to sit with them on the ground with all those houseflies, all those dirt and everything, sitting, mingling in between the community, being the part of that community, because without that community, you will never be able to get that trust.

Jake Lloyd 7:29

So to Hazeen, it was all about trust. And I really like that phrase. He used unprofitable trust, just friendship. And so from this friendship and then this invitation to start a project that began to think about radio skills and equipment.

Hazeen Latif 7:45

From that point, we started our first training sessions How to use media and how to use radio.

Jake Lloyd 7:52

They also needed a place to make their radio shows, and there's no expensive facilities needed. Instead, they rely on resources and generosity within the community.

Hazeen Latif 8:03

In that village, a person gave his mother mud room and he said that you can do the recordings here. So they started a small kind of a studio, which was not kind of such a fancy studio, but at least a small mixer and two microphones with a laptop. And they started producing their own programs.

Jake Lloyd 8:21

So from here they start collecting stories, which Hazeen and his organisation then helps to arrange to be broadcast on a local FM station.

Hazeen Latif 8:31

So what they do is they collect stories from the people, for example, the electricity, people who are suffering, the women who are suffering. We get stories from that and they recorded and they added it. And with that they connect that story with some link and with the issue related policies, what are going on and connect to the other communities that look, we don't we don't have any electricity and we have only one single power line. And our community, which is on the back end, which is on the front, they are having all kind of facilities because their people have good connections with the ministers, with the provisional ministers, with the strong rich people. And we are poor and nobody cares for us. So these kind of stories are

developed and those are true stories so that if anybody wants to come in, they will find that house, they will find that village and they will find that person and they can check from that. So we started developing at least 5 to 7 stories regarding the electricity. One of the story was that an elderly lady, she was paralysed, bedridden, and she was unable to move. And due to the less voltage, the fan will only be of very low speed and low voltage. So doctors said that because of this heat, all her skin back skin has been damaged. So she needs some cooling to it. And because that was a wonderful story and the build up. Similarly, there were stories that people were having the school kids were having blisters on their skin because that is nothing to mean, there is no fans. So these are all stories came up to eventually build up a bigger story that this is the issue of the electricity and they needed that.

Jake Lloyd 10:32

So they built up this collection of stories about how a lack of electricity impacted them. And they did the same thing on the subjects of access to water as well. He told me that members of the community had to cross a railway track and walk to another community to fetch water and they were not always welcome when they got there. Sometimes they were chased away.

Hazeen Latif 10:53

The only clinic, which was developed by a volunteer when they checked there, registered most of the men and children and women. They were suffering from waterborne diseases, gastritis and other diarrhoea issues, and that was only because of the drinking water. There were only all two water boards which were dug far, far back 15 years back, and they were all rusted. And that rusted and stagnant, smelly water people were using. Nobody knew how to boil water. And even if they knew how to boil water because of their poverty, they don't have a gas that doesn't have stores. They burn water. So they will save the wood for cooking the food rather than boiling the water. So all those stories of suffering were built up and that developed a bigger story.

Jake Lloyd 11:49

And then as these stories began to be shared on the radio, change started to happen.

Hazeen Latif 11:55

While they were sending those programmes, all of a sudden, the infrastructure also started to develop. The contractors came and they started concreting the path which they were going on. There was a volunteer person came up and he said that I will give my one room to start up with a basic clinic health center so that people can come and at least they can have a water drip in for any dehydration, or anything. So we started developing that health unit that was developed later on after these programs at the Power Electric City Electricity Power, which was just very far away. And there were very thin lines crossing that village. They were also developed and more empowered. A Transformers world were built building more high voltage. Just cable came in and from that village there was one sewerage line was passing on and which every time

bridge swelled and the water came into the houses that was also cleaned up. And through that FM channels, even the government also was involved. And later on when the community spokesman taking my microphone going to the decision makers government to the going to the government offices, they were more than welcomed and they knew that this is a community and we need to help them so that that's what fascinated me, that a simple voice sent through an FM channel really made a difference between the community.

Jake Lloyd 13:31

But how did this change happen? I asked, as if government representatives were actually listening to the shows.

Hazeen Latif 13:39

I don't think so that none of the government officials or any decision makers would listen to these programmes. You know what happened that then we strategised when we developed those stories and through stories, people started to listening and this kind of a hype was created. Later on with these interviews, with all these stories, our representative from the community went directly to the electricity office to talking to the engineer who had this control of all this electricity. And when they were talked and said that this is the issue, we have been airing these programmes, listen to these programmes. What would you say about this issue then that, you know, he or she would be trapped and then they would then they would promise on air or through our microphone that, yes, we have heard this issue. And by next week, we are having three more lines so that people can get good voltage of power. So it's, you know, it's kind of a balanced story is stories coming from the community. And that issue taken to the decision makers or to the departments or directly or indirectly deal with that issue. So, one or two, they get together, they take action on that. And third part, when the electricity lines were placed and power came back, people were happy. We again took that story to encourage the departments who did this good job. So that was kind of a balancing the story rather than only banging the negative drum of 'No, no, no, no, issue, issue, issue, issue'. So the things which were positive, which they were dealt, they were all encouraged. And then the department became very happy and they said that they are cooperative to us. So if we had some other issues, then again, if you want to go to the department, that trust again would open the doors for our community leaders to get interviews from them.

Jake Lloyd 15:38

And as you mentioned, that it's not just the government that have acted some generous local people. And remember, these are people who previously looked down on this migrant community. Some of these local people donated for boreholes to be dug to give access to water.

Hazeen Latif 15:55

Well, one of the donor, which is a very recent donor, she's not from any organisation. She's an independent lady. And after hearing our programmes and our stories, what we are doing for the community, she said

that I want to help and I want to support you to dig a water board, water hall here so that people can get water out of that.

Jake Lloyd 16:20

On a practical note, as the support of housing continue after the project has been set up.

Hazeen Latif 16:26

Our drain doesn't stop as per their need. I give them the refreshers, I do the troubleshooting. We often travel to the community and sometimes for nothing, even no issues, no problem, just sit with them. And secondly, you know, it's a volunteer job. So volunteers, youth doesn't stay. Sometimes a person can do a program for at least two, three months, four months. Then he or she can leave, especially the women, the girls, to get married in early ages and they leave the place. So as the newcomers come in, they get training from the previous people. So we keep on the connection with them. It's not that we are disconnected and by biodata and that's fun and I'm going home. So no, but mostly it is that we try to be in touch with them.

Jake Lloyd 17:26

And the goals of this community don't stop. There has been told me how they have now set their sights on a new goal.

Hazeen Latif 17:33

And now our future plan is to at least build two rooms for them, um, in which girls and boys can have their basic primary teaching because they don't know anything. The kids are just running here on their, uh, with nowhere to go.

Jake Lloyd 17:50

So there's no, there's no education at the moment.

Hazeen Latif 17:53

No education. Education. Schools are far away and they are poor. They are labourers working in the field. So they find it so much difficult to send and especially, you know, for the girls.

Jake Lloyd 18:05

Finally, if you're listening to this and you're interested in doing something similar, where you live, where should you start? I put this question to Hazeen and he told me about the four rules of his work.

Hazeen Latif 18:16

First of all, it is to make your shoes dirty. It means to become the part of the community. And our second principle is hand over the microphone to them rather than holding the microphone to yourself. And our third principle is use the local voices. Give them an opportunity to do the local voices and afford principle is use whatever they have. You know, if they have a mosque, use that. So when you make your shoes dirty, when you get to sit with the community, the trust develops.

Jake Lloyd 18:48

That was Hazeen Latif From Amplifying Voices, Pakistan talking about how community centred media can transform people and place. If you want to see some pictures, videos, updates from this community and if you're on Facebook, then I highly recommend seeking out their page. Just go to Facebook and search 'Amplifying Voices Pakistan'.

But that's almost it for this episode. Before we go. Don't forget you can catch up on previous episodes of *How to build community* on our SoundCloud page or in your podcast player. Just search How to build community. You can help support the show by making a small monthly donation on our Patreon page. Just go to patreon.com/arukahnetwork . You can learn more about Arukah Network at the www.arukahnetwork.org .

You can download every edition of Tearfund's *Footsteps* magazine at learn.tearfund.org . And finally, if you have some feedback on this show or suggestions for future interviewees, then you can reach me via email jake@arukahnetwork.org. But that's it for this episode. Until next time. Bye for now.

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