

## **CHANGE THROUGH COMMUNICATION CASE STUDY: UKS RADIO PROJECT**

By Tasneem Ahmar/Pakistan

### **Background**

In 2003 *Uks* became the first Civil Society Organization in Pakistan with an independent radio production house. The most noteworthy feature of *Uks Radio Project* is that an all female team of journalists and broadcasters runs it, though male producers are hired on project basis. We at *Uks* realize that while it is important to critically analyze the projection of gender roles in mainstream media, it was at times frustrating to be faced with the same stereotypes that we had been condemning all along. *Uks* put together programmes that are gender sensitive in nature, highlighting the achievements of women as well as dealing with the realities of being a woman in Pakistan; battling numerous odds at day-to-day level. In October 2003, *Uks* launched “Meri Awaz Sunno” (Listen to my Voice) a 15-minute, bi-weekly women’s radio programme in Urdu, becoming the first radio programme in Pakistan for women by women.

The programme has taken up many issues that are of interest to women in Pakistan, important but rarely brought to light by the media. A whole variety of themes have been covered by bringing forward voices of women affected by hushed-up issues rampant in our society; HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, commercial sex workers, Drug abuse reproductive health, education, women rights with specific relation to Islamic laws, emotional health, political participation, women and disasters and conflicts are some of the issues that have been taken up by *Uks*.

The aim of *Uks Radio Project* is to raise awareness by producing issue based programmes targeted to bring attitudinal changes in masses and to create awareness on social issues with gender perspectives. *Uks Radio Project* works in collaboration with different organizations

*Uks* in collaboration with the British High Commission launched a radio series, 'Hamari Tarraqui, Hamaray Masael' (Our development, our problems). The radio producers traveled across the country to search for talents and record stories that raise voices and concerns on themes, including women’s political rights, economic rights, access to justice, to education, to health-related concerns, mobility and right to work. *Uks* produced a series supported by Global Fund for Women (GFW) “Aao Sunain unkahi, unsuni, kahanian” (lets hear unheard voices, untold stories). This was a series of radio programs to advocate women’s empowerment during reconstruction in the Earth quake affected areas of Pakistan.

*Uks* is involved in training of radio producers on technical areas as well as issues of gender sensitization and improvement of language for production. *Uks* has been actively initiating media trainings on gender-sensitization. It has a strong network with the media. Over the past few years it has regularly initiated and organized workshops and seminars

on themes that needed urgent attention like the gender sensitization of media, specially print media on different issues for example violence against women, reporting HIV & AIDS.

*Uks* has been publishing media guides and manuals after thorough research. These include the “Manual on Best Practices in Radio Journalism”, “Gender Sensitive Code of Ethics for Print Media”, “Media Toolkit and Media resource book on HIV & AIDS.”

*Uks Research Centre* initiated a one-of-its kind project, the Pakistani Women's Media Network (PWMN) that aims to bring together women working in different fields of the print and electronic media in Pakistan at one platform for a more positive portrayal and increased representation at all levels, as well as for improved conditions for women working in the media.

The PWMN project is an outcome of *Uks'* decade long struggle, since its inception in 1998, for fair and sensitive reporting on women's issues.

The PWMN project aims to address a number of issues with specific focus on the factors behind the under-representation of women in the media and their absence at the decision-making tiers. This will be a part of *Uks'* daily and regular media monitoring, aimed at ensuring a fair and equal representation of women working in the media.

PWMN is an informal, non-hierarchical group comprising women media persons and others working in or on the media. It works as an autonomous body, committed to raising voices and concerns against gender-based violence, injustices and biases in the media and society.

### **Strategies for Change**

In the Pakistani media, women are either portrayed as victims of violence or sex symbols. This series pays tributes to the talented, brave and intelligent Pakistani women who are working to defy this image, disregarding all traditions and breaking stereotypes. They are stepping into the so-called domains of men. In their pursuit they are not only empowering themselves economically and socially but opening up avenues and paving the ways for the less daring women to follow suit. *Uks radio programmes* try to bring out and highlight these women and their voices.

The radio producers traveled across the country to search for talents and record stories that raise voices and concerns on themes like women's political rights, women's economic rights, access to justice, access to education, health-related concerns, mobility and right to work. These programmes highlight many areas of important and critical issue and try to explore ways on how to mainstream gender in different social and political issues as well as promote gender equity. The purpose of this project is to facilitate Pakistani media in reflecting women's initiatives for development and empowerment.

Our latest production

- **Aurat, Maeshat Aur Karobar (Women, Economy and Business)** bringing forward various Government and non government initiatives which are enabling Pakistani women to fulfil their dreams and hopes and transforming the role of women in society for making a poverty free world a reality.
- **“Hum Kissi Say Kum Nahin (We are no less than others!)** a series of 12 radio programmes on the rights of the disabled and the responsibilities of society towards them.

### **Challenges and Successes**

*Uks Radio Project* is an achievement and has given us a significant boost. The programmes prepared by *Uks* team are aired by several FM radio stations as part of Public Service Broadcasting. The main themes of these programmes are women and human rights. We have given voice to hundreds of women (and some men) by airing these programmes. The feed back has been tremendous and we feel that this will definitely lead women to empowerment. Most recently, *Uks* has conducted a baseline survey on FM radio transmissions in Pakistan. This is an extensive content analysis of 8 FM stations across Pakistan on their programmes on women and human rights issues.

Uks radio programmes have so far been aired from:

1. Radio Pakistan
2. FM 103-Lahore
3. FM 101, Clarity Communications Islamabad (from 8 stations, with a coverage of 99 locations)
4. FM Power 99-Islamabad
5. Campus Radio-Peshawar University
6. Sunrise FM 97 Hasanabdal
7. FM 95, Jhelum
8. FM 96, Sargodha
9. FM 96.6 Sahiwal
10. FM 91 Hyderabad
11. FM 91 Ghotki
12. Mast FM 103, Lahore
13. The Islamia University Campus Radio FM
14. Campus Radio FJWU VOW FM 96.6
15. Voice of Kashmir FM 105-Muzzafarabad
16. Voice of Kashmir FM 105.4 Rawalakot
17. Voice of Kashmir FM 105.4 Dheer
18. FM 107-Apna Karachi
19. FM 92-Highway- Nooriabad
20. FM 98-Bahawalpur
21. FM Sunrise UK
22. Radio Mirch-India

Challenges are few but *Uks* team has been able to successfully deal with them.