

# Voices of Learning: Assessing the Impact of Jnan Taranga Community Radio of KKHSOU on Open and Distance Learning and Community Services

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## **Abstract**

*This study evaluates the impact of Jnan Taranga, the community radio station (CRS) of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), established on November 20, 2010, in Guwahati, Assam. As a pioneering CRS in Northeast India, Jnan Taranga supports KKHSOU's Open and Distance Learning (ODL) model by delivering educational content in regional languages, fostering learner engagement, and addressing community needs. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach—telephonic interviews, structured questionnaires, a focus group discussion (FGD), and document analysis—this research examines the station's regulatory framework, programming structure, technological operations, and community outreach. Findings highlights Jnan Taranga's role in enhancing learner's motivation, academic communication, and socio-cultural development, while identifying challenges such as financial constraints and digital competition. Recommendations propose diversifying content, strengthening community ownership, and leveraging technology to ensure sustainability and scalability, positioning Jnan Taranga as a model for integrating community radio within higher education institutions (HEIs).*

## **Keywords:**

*Community Radio, Open and Distance Learning, Community Engagement, Socio-Economic Development*

## **Article History:**

Received on 22, October, 2025

Accepted on 28 January, 2026

## **Introduction**

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) offers flexible and inclusive education to diverse population, particularly in regions with limited access to traditional higher education (Pradeep, 2019). In India, where geographic and socioeconomic disparities persist, institutions like Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), established in 2006, play a transformative role. KKHSOU serves learners in Assam through Self-Learning Materials (SLMs), contact programs, and digital platforms, yet faces challenges in maintaining engagement, especially in remote areas. Community radio has emerged as an effective tool to bridge these gaps (Sarmah, 2023), offering accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant content. Jnan Taranga, KKHSOU's CRS launched on November 20, 2010, operates within a 30 km FM radius and globally via online streaming (i-RADIO). Broadcasting in Assamese, it delivers academic content, administrative updates, and community-focused programs like Gyan Xophura (Mondays, 10:00 AM) and Siksha Barta (Thursdays, 10:00–10:30 AM). This study assesses Jnan Taranga's contributions to ODL and community development, analyzing its operations, stakeholder's perceptions, and its potential as a model for HEIs.

## **Objectives**

- i) Explore the history and regulatory compliance of Jnan Taranga as a CRS under KKHSOU.
- ii) Investigate its efforts in fostering community participation, awareness, and socio-cultural development in Assam.
- iii) Assess its initiatives in promoting KKHSOU's ODL framework.
- iv) Provide recommendations to enhance operational sustainability and community impact.

## **Literature Review**

This review synthesizes existing literature on community radio, ODL, and their intersection, focusing on their roles in education, social empowerment, and community development, to assess the impact of Jnan Taranga.

Community radio has been recognized globally as a participatory medium that empowers marginalized communities by providing access to information, education, and a platform for local voices. Pradeep (2019) highlights that community radio fosters social inclusion by addressing local issues and promoting dialogue in underserved regions. In the Indian context, studies by Kumar and Sharma (2020) emphasize the role of community radio in disseminating educational content, particularly in rural areas with limited access to formal education systems. They argue that community radio bridges the digital divide by delivering

localized content in regional languages, making it an effective tool for education and awareness. UNESCO (2018) underscores the potential of community radio in supporting ODL by providing flexible, cost-effective, and accessible learning opportunities. The report cites examples from Africa and South Asia where community radio has been integrated with ODL to deliver educational programs, improve literacy, and support lifelong learning. However, the report also notes challenges such as limited funding, technical expertise, and listener engagement, which can hinder the scalability of such initiatives.

ODL has emerged as a critical mechanism for expanding access to higher education in India, particularly for non-traditional learners. According to Bordoloi (2021), ODL institutions like KKHSOU play a vital role in reaching remote and marginalized populations in Northeast India, where geographical and socio-economic barriers limit access to conventional education. The integration of technology, including radio, has enhanced the reach and effectiveness of ODL programs. Mishra (2022) notes that radio-based education, while less interactive than digital platforms, remains relevant due to its affordability and accessibility in areas with poor internet connectivity.

Jnan Taranga, launched by KKHSOU in 2010, is a unique initiative that combines community radio with ODL to serve both educational and community development goals. Das and Gogoi (2020) describes Jnan Taranga as a platform that delivers academic content, such as lectures and tutorials, alongside programs on health, agriculture, and women's empowerment, tailored to the needs of Assam's diverse communities. Their study highlights the station's success in engaging local listeners through participatory programming, such as talk shows and interviews, which foster community dialogue.

Sarmah (2023) evaluates Jnan Taranga's impact on ODL learners, finding that it has improved access to educational resources for students in remote areas of Assam. The study reports that programs broadcast in local languages, such as Assamese and Bodo, and this have increased learner engagement and retention. However, Sarmah also points out limitations, including irregular broadcasting schedules and a lack of feedback mechanisms to assess listener satisfaction. Beyond education, Jnan Taranga has contributed to community services by addressing local issues such as health awareness, environmental conservation, and gender equality. Baruah and Deka (2021) argues that the station's programs on health and sanitation have raised awareness among rural listeners, leading to measurable improvements in community health practices. Similarly, Goswami (2019) highlights Jnan Taranga's role in empowering women by providing a platform for discussions on gender issues, which has encouraged greater participation of women in community decision-making.

However, the literature also identifies challenges. A study by Rahman (2022) notes that while Jnan Taranga has been effective in broadcasting educational and social content, its reach is limited by technical constraints, such as signal range, and also lack of consistent listener data to evaluate its impact comprehensively. Furthermore, there is limited research on the long-term sustainability of community radio initiatives like Jnan Taranga in the context of ODL.

### **Research Gap**

While existing literature highlights the contributions of Jnan Taranga to ODL and community services, there is a notable gap in comprehensive, longitudinal studies that assess its long-term impact on learner outcomes and community development in Assam. Most studies, such as those by Sarmah (2023) and Das and Gogoi (2020), focus on short-term outcomes, such as listener engagement or program reach, but do not explore the sustained effects on academic performance, skill development, or socio-economic empowerment. Additionally, there is a lack of quantitative data on listener demographics and feedback, which limits the understanding of how effectively Jnan Taranga meets the diverse needs of its audience. Furthermore, no studies have systematically compared Jnan Taranga's model with other community radio initiatives in India to identify best practices or scalable strategies for integrating community radio with ODL. Addressing these gaps would provide a more robust understanding of Jnan Taranga's role and potential in enhancing education and community services.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively evaluate the operations, impact, and stakeholder perceptions of Jnan Taranga Community Radio at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). The mixed-methods approach ensures a robust assessment by combining the depth of qualitative insights with the breadth of quantitative data, enabling a holistic understanding of Jnan Taranga's contributions to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and community services.

#### **Data Collection Methods**

The study utilizes multiple data collection methods to capture diverse perspectives and ensure a comprehensive evaluation:

#### **Interviews**

**Structured Interviews:** Conducted with key stakeholders, such as the deputy director and radio anchors, to gather in-depth insights into Jnan Taranga’s establishment, operational processes, and challenges.

**Semi-Structured Interviews:** Employed open-ended questions to allow flexibility and elicit detailed responses, fostering a deeper understanding of stakeholder experiences and perceptions.

### **Questionnaires**

1. Structured questionnaires were distributed to listeners, community visitors, and other stakeholders to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.
2. The questionnaires were designed to assess the relevance, accessibility, and impact of Jnan Taranga’s programming and community initiatives, focusing on listener satisfaction and engagement levels.

### **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

Organized with a diverse group of 5–8 participants, including community members, listeners, and station staff, to explore collective perspectives on Jnan Taranga’s role and effectiveness. Moderated discussions encouraged interactive dialogue to capture varied viewpoints and foster collaborative insights.

### **Document Analysis**

Archival records, station reports, and regulatory documents were reviewed to analyze Jnan Taranga’s establishment, milestones, and compliance with community radio guidelines. Program schedules, collaborative project reports, and technological advancements were examined to understand operational strategies and content development.

### **Sampling**

The study employed a combination of sampling techniques to ensure diverse representation:

**Purposive Sampling:** Key informants, including the deputy director and radio anchors, were selected based on their direct involvement with Jnan Taranga, ensuring expert insights into its operations.

**Convenience Sampling:** Listeners and community visitors were included based on their accessibility and willingness to participate, facilitating broader data collection.

### **Sample Size:**

- Questionnaires: 50 respondents.
- Interviews: 6 key informants.
- Focus Group Discussion: 5–8 participants per session to ensure manageable and diverse discussions.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from various sources were analyzed using the following approaches:

#### **Qualitative Analysis:**

- Thematic analysis was applied to interview and FGD transcripts to identify recurring themes, challenges, and stakeholder perspectives.
- Coding and categorization of qualitative data facilitated the identification of key patterns related to Jnan Taranga's impact on ODL and community services.

#### **Quantitative Analysis:**

- Responses from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to quantify listener satisfaction, program reach, and community engagement levels.

#### **Triangulation:**

- Data from interviews, questionnaires, FGDs, and document analysis were cross-verified to enhance the reliability and validity of findings, ensuring a robust and trustworthy evaluation.

#### **Discussion and Analysis**

##### **Regulatory Framework and Establishment**

Jnan Taranga, established by Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), operates under the Grant of Permission Agreement (GOPA) issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, on August 18, 2010, with a renewal on April 8, 2025, extending operations until August 18, 2030. The station adheres to the Revised Policy Guidelines for Setting up Community Radio Stations in India (2024), emphasizing community participation and alignment with national development goals. Key regulatory stipulations include:

- **Non-transferability:** Permission is non-transferable, with violations resulting in termination and forfeiture of a Rs. 25,000 bank guarantee (Clause 4.1).
- **Content Regulation:** At least 50% of content must involve local community participation, with half of this focusing on women's empowerment, covering themes such as leadership and entrepreneurship beyond traditional topics like nutrition (Clause 5.7). News is restricted to Akashvani-sourced content to ensure accuracy and prevent distortion.
- **Technical Specifications:** The station operates with an Effective Radiated Power (ERP) of up to 100 watts and an antenna height of 15–30 meters within university premises (Clause 6).
- **Funding and Advertising:** Sponsored programs are limited to Central/State Governments or public interest organizations, with advertising capped at 12 minutes per hour (Clause 7.2). Revenue must be reinvested into operations, with surplus funds requiring Grantor approval (Clause 7.3).

- **Compliance Requirements:** Recordings must be preserved for three months (Clause 8.1), audited accounts submitted by September 30 of the following financial year (Clause 7.4), and inspections permitted without notice (Clause 9.1). The station requires security clearance and a Wireless Operating License from the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing.

- **Penalties for Non-compliance:** Violations, such as unauthorized content or failure to preserve recordings, may lead to suspension (up to three months) or revocation, with a five-year reapplication ban (Clauses 14.1–14.7.3).

These regulations ensure Jnan Taranga functions as a non-commercial, community-focused platform aligned with national broadcasting standards.

### **Programming Structure and Content**

Jnan Taranga’s programming aligns with the Community Radio Forum’s mandate to address the educational, developmental, social, and cultural needs of the community. From an initial schedule of two hours of live programming and two hours of repeats in 2010, the station expanded to 11 hours daily (9 AM–8 PM) by 2015. The 2017 program schedule reflects diversity and inclusivity.

### **Key Programs**

- **Monor Khobor (2:00–6:00 PM):** A live phone-in show, fostering participatory dialogue on community issues.
- **Eklavya and Zuba Tirtha:** Target students and youth, including disadvantaged groups, with educational and career-oriented content.
- **Mohila Sora and Angana:** Focus on women’s empowerment through interviews with women in literature, music, and business.
- **Dibyabanga Sakalor Anusthan:** Addresses the needs of differently-abled individuals, promoting inclusivity.
- **Amar Kobologiya Ekasar:** Weekly interactions enabling community members to share experiences and concerns.

These programs demonstrate Jnan Taranga’s commitment to representing women, youth, children, and marginalized groups.

### **Educational Programs and Their Value**

- **Gyan Xophura (Mondays, 10:00 AM) and Siksha Barta (Thursdays, 10:00–10:30 AM):**
  - **Purpose:** Deliver domain-specific learning.

- **Features:** Subject experts present concise lectures in simple Assamese, covering subjects like Environmental Science, History, Political Science, and regional topics. The segment “Gonit Sora” translates mathematical concepts into real-life applications.
- **Impact:** Reinforces self-study through audio revision, benefiting visually challenged students and those with limited literacy. Supports asynchronous learning for students during work or travel. Environmental topics promote awareness of climate change, sustainability, and local ecosystems.
- **News Bulletin:** Disseminates academic calendar updates, including exam schedules, assignment dates, and admission information, as well as emergency updates during disruptions (e.g., natural disasters). Acts as a weekly touchpoint, reducing confusion and improving compliance with deadlines, particularly during exam and admission cycles.

### **Community Radio in the ODL Context**

Jnan Taranga enhances Open and Distance Learning (ODL) by addressing key needs:

- **Accessibility:** Reaches learners in remote or internet-scarce areas within a 30 km FM coverage radius, supplemented by i-RADIO live streaming (<https://i-radiolive.com/live/channel/Jnantaranga>).
- **Affordability:** Free-to-air broadcasts eliminate costs for students.
- **Cultural Proximity:** Uses local languages and culturally relevant examples.
- **Timeliness:** Facilitates rapid dissemination of academic updates.
- **Engagement:** Fosters a sense of belongingness and continuous learning.

Globally, radio in education, dating back to the early 20th century, has proven effective in countries like Canada, South Africa, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. In India, institutions like IGNOU have utilized radio since the 1980s, and KKHSOU adapts this model to local needs, (Sarmah, 2023).

### **Community Engagement and Social Impact**

Jnan Taranga extends beyond academics to foster community-building and life skills (Das and Gogoi, 2020) through:

- **Health Awareness:** Programs on nutrition, reproductive health, addiction, and first aid.
- **Livelihood and Vocational Training:** Introduces skill-based short-term courses.
- **Gender Sensitization and Social Issues:** Special slots for Women’s Day, Environment Day, and other social causes.

### **Key Community Initiatives**

- **Pamohi Village Outreach (2014):** Engaged people from Karbi tribal community with cultural showcases and through health guidance on epidemics and hygiene.

- **Old-Age Home Visit (January 1, 2015):** Broadcast performances by residents of a Kahilipara old-age home, amplifying their voices.
  - **Cyan Setu School Event (January 9, 2015):** Organized competitions at an underprivileged school in Guwahati to encourage participation.
  - **Public Transport Awareness (2015):** Highlighted transportation challenges through interviews with passengers and drivers.
  - **Sakhi Sanjeevani (2015):** Focused on women’s maternal and reproductive health.
  - **Listener-Led Initiative (2015):** Trained a listener, awarded Best Listener on World Radio Day, to host a segment on environment and traffic awareness.
  - **Ganapati Health Camp (February 11, 2024):** Collaborated with multiple organizations to provide free health check-ups in KKHSOU’s adopted village.
- These initiatives bridge knowledge gaps, promote cultural preservation, and address health and educational needs.

### **Collaborative Projects and Funding**

From 2018 to 2024, Jnan Taranga secured Rs. 30,48,996 in funding for campaigns on public health, education, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development, with Rs. 5,43,632 pending (Table 2, not shown). Major collaborators include ASDMA, UNICEF, and AYUSH-CEMCA. Pending funds highlight challenges in timely disbursement, impacting outreach and infrastructure upgrades.

### **Training and Capacity Building**

- **Young Reporters Workshop (June 29–30, 2017):** Trained 40 youths in radio production and journalism with UNICEF Assam.
- **Internship Programme (March 22, 2022):** Provided 15-day audio-visual production training for eight students from D.K. Girls College, Mirza.
- **Community Radio Workshop (October 30–31, 2023):** Engaged 45 grassroots organizations in live radio transmission and multimedia operations.
- **Climate Countdown Workshop (November 3–4, 2022):** Focused on climate change awareness and radio content design.

These efforts enhance local skills and foster community ownership.

### **Technological Advancements**

In 2021, Jnan Taranga launched online streaming at <https://i-radiolive.com/live/channel/Jnantaranga>, enabling access across devices and addressing challenges in reaching remote audiences amidst competition from digital platforms.

### **Milestones and Celebrations**

- **Foundation Day (November 20, 2014):** Featured live programs with listeners and faculty members.
- **8th Anniversary (November 20, 2018):** Celebrated with performances and lectures at KKHSOU's Housefed Complex.
- **World Radio Day (February 13, 2022):** Focused on "Radio and Trust" with expert talks.
- **World Radio Day (February 11–13, 2024):** Included a health camp and a lecture on radio's societal role.

### **Pandemic Response (2020–2021)**

During COVID-19, Jnan Taranga contributed to public health communication:

- **COVID-19 RCCE:** Produced 10 radio episodes (20–25 minutes) on risk communication.
- **On the Brightside:** Collaborated with UNICEF Assam for six video episodes (15–20 minutes) on adolescent mental well-being.
- **Vaccination Campaigns:** Addressed vaccine hesitancy and myths with CRA-UNICEF.

### **Stakeholder Perspectives**

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed:

- **Role of HEIs:** Jnan Taranga enhances KKHSOU's societal impact by integrating academic expertise with community needs.
- **Content Needs:** Stakeholders recommend storytelling, interactive discussions, and youth-focused programs on climate-resilient agriculture and vocational training.
- **Community Ownership:** Listeners seek more opportunities to contribute ideas, with suggestions for listener committees and local producer training.
- **Success Stories:** A maternal health series increased clinic visits, and an organic farming program improved yields.
- **Challenges:** Limited funding, technical issues, regulatory restrictions on news, and competition from digital platforms hinder outreach, particularly among youth.

### **Challenges**

Based on stakeholder inputs and analysis our study reveals the following challenges for Jnan Taranga:

- **Financial Constraints:** Pending funds (Rs. 5,43,632) limit outreach and infrastructure upgrades.
- **Technical Limitations:** Equipment issues and limited signal range restrict access in remote areas, (Rahman,2022).

- **Regulatory Restrictions:** GOPA's content rules, particularly on news, limits flexibility.
- **Competition:** Digital platforms fragment audiences, especially youth.

### Recommendations

Based on stakeholder inputs and analysis, the following strategies are proposed:

- **Enhance Content Diversity:** Introduce storytelling formats, interactive call-in shows on youth employment and mental health, and programs on climate-resilient agriculture in local languages.
- **Strengthen Community Ownership:** Establish listener committees and train locals as producers to foster engagement.
- **Improve Sustainability:** Diversify funding through grants and local sponsorships aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Expand Partnerships:** Collaborate with NGOs, schools, and regional networks like the ASEAN University Network for content co-creation.
- **Engage Youth:** Launch mentorship and internship programs to involve youth in content creation.
- **Leverage Technology:** Develop a mobile app for on-demand content and expand social media outreach.
- **Address Technical Challenges:** Secure funding for modern equipment to enhance program quality and reach.

### Conclusion

Jnan Taranga Community Radio, operated by Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), has solidified its role as a vital instrument for advancing Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and fostering community engagement in Assam. By delivering culturally resonant and accessible content in local languages, the station bridges educational and social divides, strengthening the bond between the university and its diverse community. Its programming, which spans subject-specific academic tutorials, timely administrative updates, health awareness campaigns, agricultural guidance, and cultural preservation initiatives, underscores the transformative potential of community radio in higher education and social development.

The station's adherence to the Government of India's Grant of Permission Agreement (GOPA) regulations, renewed in April 2025 for operations until August 18, 2030, reflects its administrative robustness and commitment to national broadcasting standards. Between 2018 and 2024, Jnan Taranga secured ₹30,48,996 in funding through strategic collaborations with organizations such as ASDMA, UNICEF, and AYUSH-CEMCA. These partnerships have

enabled the station to address critical societal issues, including public health, disaster preparedness, adolescent mental well-being, and environmental sustainability. Tangible outcomes, such as increased clinic visits following maternal health programs and enhanced agricultural yields through organic farming initiatives, demonstrate Jnan Taranga's capacity to drive grassroots-level change and empower communities as agents of their own development.

Despite these achievements, Jnan Taranga faces significant challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability and impact. Financial constraints, including ₹5,43,632 in pending funds, limit outreach efforts and infrastructure upgrades, particularly in remote areas. Technical limitations, such as outdated equipment and restricted signal range, hinder access for underserved populations. Additionally, the rise of digital and mobile-based learning platforms, coupled with competition from commercial media, fragments audiences, especially among the youth, challenging the station's relevance in an evolving media landscape. Regulatory restrictions, particularly on news content, further constrain programmatic flexibility. To ensure continued relevance and impact, Jnan Taranga must adopt proactive strategies. Diversifying funding through grants, local sponsorships, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can enhance financial stability. Investing in modern equipment and expanding digital infrastructure, such as a mobile app for on-demand content, will improve accessibility and engagement. Strengthening community ownership through listener committees and training local producers will foster inclusivity and deepen stakeholder investment. Expanding partnerships with NGOs, schools, and regional networks like the ASEAN University Network can facilitate content co-creation and knowledge sharing. Finally, targeting youth through mentorship programs, internships, and interactive content on climate-resilient agriculture and vocational training will help to attract and retain younger audiences.

In conclusion, Jnan Taranga stands as a pioneering model for integrating community radio with ODL and community services, amplifying the voices of learners and marginalized groups in Northeast India. Its ability to navigate regulatory frameworks, secure funding, and deliver impactful programming, highlights its potential as a catalyst for education and social transformation. However, addressing financial, technical, and competitive challenges through strategic innovation and community-driven approaches is essential for sustaining its legacy. By embracing these opportunities, Jnan Taranga can continue to serve as a beacon of learning and empowerment, reinforcing KKHSOU's mission to create an inclusive and equitable knowledge society.

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