Michel Delorme is the founding President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). In this interview with AMARC’s Regional Director, Suman Basnet, he recounts how the organization came into being and its journey, thus far and the challenges that lie ahead:

Suman: What do you recall about the first meeting that led to the setting up of AMARC? Could you recall for us where the meetings were held, who all participated and what were the main issues discussed?

Michel: Thank you, Suman, for your interest in learning the story of the early days of AMARC. It’s a pleasure to remember the first impulses of this great international community radio movement.

It all started in 1980, when World Communications Year was declared. The year was 1983 when it occurred to me to bring the world of community radios together in Montreal. The first challenge was to get the idea accepted by radio stations in Quebec.

There was strong objection saying the costs of such an event would reduce funding for local radio stations. Eventually, the project was accepted with some reservation.

This was the first step to founding of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). Our initial motivation was to get to know community radios from around the world. What we first needed to get started was, details of community radios all over the world. A team from the University of Quebec in Montreal produced a portrait of the great diversity of democratic and non-commercial radio around the world. This study served to establish the type of broadcasters that the association would group into its solidarity and exchange network.

Two committees were created from the start for management and consultation. The concertation was formed from associations in America, Europe and Africa. We had some contacts in Asia, in particular with Japanese artisans.

Suman: Were there any specific arguments or doubts against the setting up of AMARC that can be recalled?

Michel: Doubts or arguments against the establishment of AMARC? Yes! The biggest doubts lay in our ability to raise funding: could we be up to our ambitions? The first was financial—
how would we cover the operating costs of AMARC? How would we finance projects, including support for radio development and the creation of an exchange network?

The other concern was about the representative and dynamic organizational structure in its actions that we had to create. Who would be the members? Would they be national and regional associations, or the local radio stations?

At the end of the first assembly, it was decided to meet in Vancouver in 1986 to prepare for the creation of an NGO. We had to propose an NGO with democratic and effective management. These elements had to be defined to create AMARC in Managua, Nicaragua in 1988.

Suman: How old were you then? Do you know what must have been the age of others that were with you at that time?

Michel: I was born right after the second World War. In August 1983, I was 37 years old. But by all accounts, I looked like I was 30-years-old. The majority of the participants were around the same age as me.

The leaders came from different [radio] wave liberation movements in Europe, in the USA, with the Community Radio network (NCRA), in Latin America with popular and educational radio stations, and from Africa with the experience of rural radio.

Suman: What was your motivation to establish AMARC? What did you and your friends of that time expect to achieve from AMARC? Have the context changed now?

Michel: Our initial motivation was to get to know community radios from around the world. I have always been passionate about radio and communication— from the opening of the media to popular participation. I had the chance to meet the people of La Francophonie by participating in seminars in Africa. I made several forays into the world of radio in the USA by participating in several conferences of independent radio producers. It was the same for LA and Canada.

I wanted these people to meet and discuss their reality and the impact of radio. I thought Everyone would benefit from the wide variety of radio experiences with a common goal of democratizing communication.

The context of 2020 has changed enormously. New technologies have propelled trade and communications from local producer, to global. Local radio, however, retains its role of communication and openness in this new environment.
The creation of a virtual network offers an opportunity to create a global NGO, serving local media without having to hold very expensive conferences!

_Suman:_ Did you manage affairs of AMARC yourself as a staff or a board member? Which years were those? Where was the first office of AMARC International Secretariat established?

_Michel:_ Yes, I have been closely associated with AMARC affairs since its inception. The search for funding for the first assembly required that we be convincing but also realistic and relevant to the context of the _World Communications Year_. We produced a balance sheet study carried out by a university team and made contacts to obtain the collaboration of several partners. I carried out the financing procedures, administered them, and reported on their use. Funding required vigilance from the outset to establish our credibility for the future of AMARC.

I was associated with the financing and management of AMARC until the 1992 assembly in Mexico City, where I handed over the management to a new team. Subsequently, I participated in the discussions for the next few years. The AMARC Secretariat in Montreal played a leading role in the start-up and evolution of the organization, for communications, fundraising, management and administration.

_Suman:_ How did the regional chapters come about? What led to their establishing of the first regional chapter of AMARC? Which regional chapter was it and when did it take place? When did the other chapters come up?

_Michel:_ From the first assembly, regional meetings of national organizations called for each region to be represented on the NGO board and for regional networks to play an active role in planning and carrying out AMARC projects.

Europe, Latin America, USA and Canada, Africa, Oceania were identified at the first assembly. These regional networks were formally integrated into the structure of the NGO in 1988 in the third assembly in Managua. Women formed their network during the Mexico City assembly in 1992. Asia was added to regional networks in the early 2000s.

_Suman:_ You have referred to national associations being part of the early discussions of AMARC. In the last 18 years that I have been associated with AMARC, I have heard many individuals arguing in favor of limiting AMARC membership only to associations and not to extend it to individual radio stations. I once heard Steve Buckley making the case for membership for individual radios by saying that every individual radio had the right to engage with the global association directly. I would like to know if this was ever discussed in the early days? Was this an issue then? How did the transition of moving from engaging with associations to including individual radios come about?
Michel: This question of participation of local radio stations directly in AMARC activities cannot be resolved by a rigid conception of the regulations. There are two aspects to remember: representation and participation. For representation issues, national associations are appointed to direct the activities and fulfillment of AMARC's mandates.

It is impossible to have a local membership that participates in the functioning of the management structure of AMARC. This idea is impracticable since it will eliminate all the radios which cannot bear the costs of such participation.

The idea of allowing local radio stations to participate in AMARC activities (solidarity, radio production, direct exchanges, etc.) is relevant. National associations cannot assume this cooperation from local radio stations to another local radio station.

Suman: Lastly, has the relevance of AMARC changed?

An organization like AMARC is still useful and relevant. It makes sense especially in our time of great technological changes and the globalization of trade. AMARC will have to adjust its mission according to the reality of the media. We will always have to anchor ourselves in its mission of democratizing the media, popular participation in production, and exchange and support between the local media.

**AMARC Assemblies over the years:**

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<th>Assembly</th>
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<td>AMARC 1</td>
<td>Montreal 1983</td>
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<td>AMARC 2</td>
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<td>AMARC 3</td>
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<td>Buenos Aires 2010</td>
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Michel Delorme
8 April 2020