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Community Radio in Bhutan

By Ashish Sen

Nestling amidst the undulating hills of Trashigang district in Eastern Bhutan lies the picturesque Sherubtse College. Sherubtse has many firsts to its credit. Apart from the country's first credited college, Sherubtse also boasts the country's first and only campus college radio. The distinction is significant – especially in a country where community radio remains to be endorsed by the law of the land.

The visit to Sherubtse came towards the end of a field visit to Bhutan, but in many ways it proved to be one of the key highlights. As a part of the UNESCO- AMARC IPDC initiative, in April 2013, Sajan Venniyoor and I traveled to the land of the Thunder Dragon to explore the feasibility of community radio.

While the third tier of broadcasting has yet to strike legitimate roots in the country, the signals that emanated from Sherubtse were encouraging, to say the least. Even as the campus radio station's broadcasting is constrained by technical restrictions (the transmitter is just 1 watt), the enthusiasm and participation of the student community is palpable. Interestingly, the campus radio station is licensed to the student body and not the college per se. During the interactions at Sherubtse, the staff emphasized repeatedly that their role was only advisory in nature. The programme and policy directions are currently managed by the students. Currently, the station broadcasts for two hours on weekdays and five hours on weekends and special occasions alternatively in English and Dzongkha.



At Sherubtse - discussion with students

Sherubtse's campus radio station is currently, as the Media Development Assessment (MDA) of 2010 affirms, the sole exception to the absence of community broadcasting in Bhutan. According to the MDA, "Community media is a new idea in Bhutan and, to this end, the only community media is a radio that has been licensed to Sherubtse College".

However, our field visits indicated that while supply mechanisms needed to be put in place, the demand for community participation in media was growing. In fact, the enthusiasm of the college's student

community and the objectives of the station would appear to resonate across several other quarters of civil society in the country. This is not surprising, given Bhutan's demographic and geographical features.

A landlocked country with scattered and sparse population, Bhutan's landscape cuts across terrain that is alternatively hilly or mountainous and often remote. The combination makes for stunning visuals and breathtaking scenery, but has posed formidable challenges to development.

While the past decade (especially since the country's unique concept of Gross National Happiness gained popularity) has witnessed media growth, "reach and scale remain critical

bottlenecks for the media (often) resulting in media clutter in urban areas within the country.” The disproportionate reach has meant information inaccessibility for marginalized and deprived communities, especially in rural Bhutan. According to IFAD figures, poverty affects more than 20 per cent of the people and “90 per cent of Bhutan’s poor people live in rural areas.”

This is where radio, especially community radio, provides both promise and potential. Apart from addressing the issues of access and reach, radio scores because it does not require literacy skills. The technology is simple, while portability is not an issue. Its relevance assumes added significance in a country like Bhutan which is vulnerable to frequent natural calamities like floods and landslides which disrupt communication and information support systems.

The good news for community radio could also stem from the progressive attitude towards media liberalization that the Royal Government of Bhutan has embarked upon since the past decade. In fact the idea and practice of media liberalization received endorsement from the country’s highest quarters – as evident from His Majesty’s address at the 2009 Parliament session: “Media – newspapers, television, radio and the internet –must play a very important role...Hereafter media will be vital in keeping people well informed and in encouraging debate and participation – key to a vibrant democracy. Therefore I have decided...to strengthen media agencies so that they may carry out their duties, without fear or favour, in the interest of democracy.”

While the proof of the pudding may lie in the eating, the mushrooming of Community Information Centres in several *Gewogs* (an administrative unit comprising a number of villages) with multi-media facilities provides a demonstrable indicator of the government’s commitment towards strengthening information access. Community Radios could be a valuable component to this model – addressing the last mile, last post as well contributing to media pluralism and diversity.

Finally, Bhutan’s vision of attaining Gross National Happiness through “a participatory society where people make informed decisions for the country’s development” would appear to intrinsically be in harmony with the culture and philosophy of community radio.

The legitimization of community radio in Bhutan would add yet another milestone to the rapidly changing history of community radio in South Asia. And underline the growing relevance of community radio in the region. While it is premature to determine how long the process of actualization will take in Bhutan, our exploratory visit confirmed that the indicators of relevance, need and civic interest in community radio were palpable. It now remains to happen...

Ashish Sen, sen_ashish@yahoo.com, is the President of AMARC Asia Pacific.

**Where are the Women in Community Radio in Asia Pacific?
A New Survey is Launched by AMARC-WIN**

By Bianca Miglioretto

The first survey ever on the situation, experiences, needs and aspirations of women in community radio in Asia Pacific was conducted in 2006 by Isis International and AMARC-WIN. Seven years later it is time again to take a close look at the status of women in community radio in this region. AMARC-WIN therefore launches another survey on “Status of Women Community Radio Broadcasters in Asia Pacific 2013”.



Only 28 radio stations from 14 countries in the region responded to the survey in 2006. This small number had two reasons – one AMARC-WIN was not yet established in the region and only had a small network and two there were not many radio stations existing in most countries. In the last seven years a lot has changed in the community sector in the Asia Pacific region. India and Bangladesh have opened their airwaves to community radio which have seen a gradual growth of the sector in these countries. First initiatives of community radio are found in Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos and the Pacific Islands. In other countries the number of community radio has increased, such as Nepal, Indonesia and Thailand. Internet radio has become another option in countries where FM community radio is not yet allowed.

During this period AMARC Asia Pacific was able to establish a network of community radio that reaches most of the countries in the region. AMARC-WIN has developed the Gender Policy for Community Radio (GP4CR) that sets guidelines to enable the full and equal participation of women in community radio and on gender fair and sensitive broadcasting. The GP4CR has been translated in over 20 local languages and can be downloaded from the AMARC Website. It has also been adopted by the AMARC General Assembly in 2010.

In 2006 only 28% of the leadership positions were occupied by women while men occupied 72%. The percentage for technical positions was about the same. Many radio stations had only one hour women's programme weekly or none at all. Some radio stations did not have any woman among their staff. The main changes that the respondents wished to see were access for women to decision making and all aspects of programme production including technical as well as more gender sensitive programme content. The most important training needs were technical production skills, journalistic skills, gender and feminist perspectives and management and administration skills.



Khoun Radio, LAO PDR

A new survey will reveal the status of women in community radio today - what are their experiences, needs and aspirations - and provide updates on the changes and strides that women have made in the last seven years. The results of the new survey will allow AMARC-WIN to serve its WIN members, women in community radio as well as their listeners in general better. We will be able to plan and respond to the specific needs of the different radio stations and women broadcasters.

Therefore we would like to invite you to participate in the AMARC WIN survey 2013. With your help we can engender community radio, make our work and the movement more effective. You can download the questionnaire from our website at

ap.amarc.org. It consists of 20 questions and will take about 30 minutes to fill in. You can also request the questionnaire from the AMARC Asia Pacific Office by writing to prativa_chhetri@asiapacific.amarc.org

Take this opportunity to tell us about your situation, needs, experiences and wishes to serve you better.

The deadline for sending in the questionnaires is **June 30, 2013** please send the completed form to prativa_chhetri@asiapacific.amarc.org or fill it in directly on the AMARC website: ap.amarc.org before June 30, 2013.

I thank you for your collaboration and look forward to your responses!

Bianca, bianca@tinig.ch, is the Women International Network Representative for AMARC Asia Pacific.

**“Sound mixing is as easy as cooking a curry”:
Q & A with Bianca Miglioretto**

As the UN marks World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, UN Women speaks to the Vice-President of the Women’s International Network of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, Asia Pacific Chapter, on her work and on introducing radio technologies to community radio producers. The interview can be accessed at: <http://www.unwomen.org/2013/05/sound-mixing-is-as-easy-as-cooking-a-curry-q-a-with-bianca-miglioretto/>

Recommendations from Pacific Islands Community Radio Roundtable

The Pacific Island Countries Community Radio Roundtable was held between 11 and 12 February 2013 in Suva, Fiji Islands. It was convened jointly by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC Asia Pacific) and femLINKPACIFIC in collaboration with the WACC Pacific regional committee. The two day roundtable was attended by more than 50 participants mostly from the Pacific Island countries.



The “Pacific Islands Community Radio Roundtable” discussed challenges facing the community radio sector in the Pacific countries. It focussed on planning a few achievable action plans that community radios/media of Pacific countries can work on jointly or in coordination with other partners. The following are recommendations made at the Inaugural Pacific Islands Community Radio Roundtable:

- It was recommended that radio and broadcasting legislature and policy formulation should involve CSOs, recognize and differentiate community radio particularly with regards to licensing, fees and spectrum allocation.
- These recommendations could make specific reference to either a country’s Bill of Rights or Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights to ensure the protection of the rights to information and expression.
- Such recommendations could use the Pacific Islands Forum’s Digital Strategy to be suited to different Pacific Island countries’ needs and realities.
- It is recommended that any community radios would be as part of a process of overall empowerment and development of that community as it is a platform of dialogue and it should be for the community to decide whether or not they want a community radio station.
- While the community radio station is a process, it is also recommended that particular attention should be paid to the stations’ role as a system of documentation.
- Government and its ministries could be utilized as resource partners but neither as broadcasters nor owners to maintain legitimacy of the community radio station.
- Community radio stations should respond to their community but also remain an alternative media source that acts as a sharing space for underrepresented and marginalised groups and individuals. This may include women, rural women, young women and men, people of diverse SOGI and indigenous people.
- Community radio should also provide diversity of opinion and while allowing for the sharing of those who may initially be opposed to equality and diversity, the sharing space should allow for the education of such individuals to allow for harmonious exchanges and compromise, democratizing the processes and community.

- It is recommended that there is a need to establish programme standards and guidelines that are responsive to the community's political needs.
- There is a need for training of women in managerial and technical areas as well as implementation of gender policies to increase their capacity to engage at all levels of community radio station management.
- It was recommended that community radio should be involved more to eradicate poverty and prevent conflict by giving marginalised and underrepresented people and groups their space.
- Young people, proven to be more technologically able, should be increasingly more involved.
- Community radio should also be used to share information about preventative, preparatory and other measures to deal with natural disasters and climate change.
- It was recommended that community radio stations remain mindful that sustainability is not simply about financial resources, but also social, physical and human resources.
- Community radio stations should also adjust its programming to suit the community; this may involve the development of media education and literacy programmes as well as programming reflecting local politics or events.
- A strong connection between the community and station should also be established to provide the station with a pool of resources, whether personnel, financial or in kind contributions.
- Appropriate technology should be used so that the community radio is accessible to the community whether it be in terms of information sharing for news or programme production.
- It is also recommended that in all recommendations to legislature and policy makers, local and national constraints need to be articulated to maintain the need for accessible technology, particularly in a region of developing nations. While states like Fiji may not be able to access spaces such as the Pacific Islands Forum, CROP agencies could be an alternative for technical assistance.
- Networks within the communities as well as between community radios stations should be established or strengthened for information and procedure sharing and to engage as a collective movement.
- It is also recommended that international networks should be connected to whether taking the form of participation in global events and radio campaigns or joining established networks such as AMARC.

For details of the Pacific Roundtable, please visit <http://ap.amarc.org/node/57>

Participants' Speak: Community Radio Training in Suva and New Delhi

To enhance the capacity of community radio broadcasters of the region AMARC Asia Pacific conducted trainings in January, 2013 in New Delhi, India and in February 2013 in Suva, Fiji Islands.



Participants of Community Radio Workshop, New Delhi, India

Training workshop for Women Community Radio Broadcasters of South Asia for “Enhancing Access to Community Media, Promoting Positive Social Change and Peace Building through Community Broadcasting” was held in New Delhi from 19 -22 January, 2013. Altogether 32 women community broadcasters from South Asian countries - Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated in the training workshop.

The “Interactive Learning Workshop for Radio Broadcasters of the Pacific” was held in Suva, Fiji Islands from 13 to 14 February, 2013. The event was collaboration between AMARC Asia Pacific Regional Office, with femLINKPACIFIC and Fiji National University and supported by International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA), UNESCO, PACMAS and NZAID. About 30 participants from Pacific Island countries namely Fiji Islands, Marshal Islands, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu participated in this workshop.

Here are what the participants had to say about the trainings:

“Besides learning from peers, the methodologies adopted by the trainers are also worth mentioning too. Being so use to the top down teaching and learning method, the bottom up interactive method came as a refreshingly good experience. I believe other participants will also agree with me when I say that the session on ‘story telling’ was an eye opener for many of us. Be it in community radio or any other media, as journalists we tend to be fixated with certain stories as news worthy and many others as not news worthy. However, this session helped us look at stories from altogether a different perspective. We were encouraged to look beyond just the black and the white stories; but also the many shades of grey stories which are equally important and interesting.

Attending this training has benefited me in more than just one way. One very direct impact is to scan my own work through the gender lens. I consciously made an effort to see if in any way I’m being gender stereotypical, be it in portraying or in content. The other thing I definitely took back was the attitude of ‘positive discrimination’. If the same work can be done by both a man and a woman, and if it is in my capacity I would choose to be the woman.” **Ashuni Pou from India** summing up her experience from participating in the New Delhi training workshop for women broadcasters.

Sathiyavani Subramaniam, from Sri Lanka on attending the training in New Delhi, India says, “It was a great learning experience to participate in the AMARC training. As a young broadcaster it provided new insights to my work and taught me practical skills to be used in our community radio. One of the things which inspired me most was sharing our work experience. It

helped me understand how community radios work in different countries and know about the challenges faced by women broadcasters. Although we came from different countries the problems faced were similar. We were given practical training, which helped us become creative broadcasters.”

Jannatul Mawa, from Radio Nalta, Bangladesh sharing her experience at the New Delhi training says, “I come from a country where there are huge disparities between women and men so when I got this opportunity to attend the training I was on cloud nine. I had to travel to Delhi by myself because of the delay in visa process but this did not deter me. On reaching Delhi by myself I felt a sense of achievement. The training was very good and it gave us the opportunity not only to learn but to be heard also. It helped us to think out of the box and gave me a new approach to my work. I would like to thank my trainers and AMARC for this wonderful training.”

“I have learnt the importance of community radio and the role it can play for the development of the community. It is equally important for us the broadcasters to do a research within the community first to understand the baseline situations of the communities where we are working in. I take this training as a foundation for me to start navigating and accustoming myself with the media industry.” **Lavinia Selupe from Tonga** on sharing her experience in participating in the Interactive Training in Suva, Fiji



Community Radio Workshop in Suva, Fiji Islands

Louise Anne Laris, from Bougainville, Papua New Guinea who participated in the workshop in Fiji says, “The best part of the interactive training was on how to use community radio for disaster risk management and responses. Honestly speaking, I have never been in any disaster ‘Risk Zone’ before except a few alerts on tsunami warnings. I am very much thankful that I was able to attend this training as I have learnt a lot from the experiences shared by our Asia and Pacific islanders.

In Bougainville through our years of experience, media has played a major role in bringing warring factions together. It has helped to hold groups accountable for their actions. We have used print media and radio to disseminate correct information to communities on the relevance of women, peace and security. This experience has reminded me that radio reaches where one cannot go. It goes beyond borders. It penetrates the minds and wills of individuals and changes attitudes. Media or radio has the ability to expose and brings to attention the many important issues affecting our communities.”

Lucille Chute, from Fiji on attending the training there had this to say, “I have learnt so much from legislation, technology, networking, community radio, development, gender equality and not forgetting SOGI/LGBTIQ. I have been able to better understand the available tools for gender equality and the responsibilities as a community radio journalist, and the ethics to ensure we never use our power over the women we report about and talk respectfully about them on the radio. The workshop session on interview skills has certainly helped me also to improve my interview skills and I am going back to my community and practice all that I have learnt here.”