



## Newsletter

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The community radio movement in Thailand was conceived under the 1997 Constitution, which guaranteed community ownership of a fifth of the nation's airwaves. It was an attempt both to break the deadlock of military ownership of the media and to ensure that the people had a steady, reliable source of information, something that had been sorely lacking during the Black May Uprising of 1992.

Despite the Constitutional guarantees, and supporting legislation, the community radio movement was blocked by the unwillingness of the Government to institute a broadcasting commission. But in late 2001, communities, backed by civil society, started transmitting in unlicensed stations. The Thaksin government started proceedings against the stations, while simultaneously encouraging unlicensed stations to 'register' and be allowed to continue free of harassment, and to take advantage of advertising revenue. It was a two-pronged attack to undermine stations committed to the goals of community radio, including participatory ownership, community involvement and non-profit status, through the stick of (costly) legal action and the carrot of monetary reward.

Thus, when the military coup of 2006 occurred, paradoxically, it seemed possible that there would be more room for community radio. Unfortunately, this hasn't transpired. Being rooted in the community, the politics of stations are as diverse as the politics of Thailand. And a number of the stations were owned by supporters of the 'red shirts', those who opposed the military coup and the subsequent toppling of elected leaders through judicial means. Among the first acts of the military government was to secure these stations and to attempt to control the flow of news.

There is an urgent need for Thai legislators, the military and the police to provide meaningful guarantees to communities that freedom of expression and access to the airwaves are not just for people in big cities and towns, but they extend both to all areas of the country and to all parts of the political spectrum.

Since the return of democracy, things have not appeared to improve. In April 2009, at least four pro-Thaksin stations were raided, with broadcasters being threatened and equipment confiscated. The stations and what has been dubbed 'red-shirt media' are still in the process of recovery and are looking at satellite broadcasting and using the internet to get around the controls.

While their proponents have been quoted as saying that these stations, with 'extreme' viewpoints, are a result of the failure of the mainstream media to maintain balance in the highly divided world of Thai politics, the problem is at least partly the failure of the State and State institutions to respect the diversity of Thai media, evident since the implementation of the People's Constitution and the complementary Frequencies Allocation Act. The guarantees of access to the airwaves in these documents never became a living reality, despite the mushrooming of over 3,000 community radio stations. Of these 3,000, only 300 abided by principles that would fit with most definitions of community radio, according to the Thai Community Radio Federation.

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for people in big cities and towns, but they extend both to all areas of the country and to all parts of the political spectrum.

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## AMARC ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE UPDATE



THE SECOND AMARC ASIA PACIFIC SECOND CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY WILL BE HELD FROM 10-13 OCTOBER, 2009 IN BANGALORE, INDIA. THIS NEWSLETTER WILL PROVIDE CONFERENCE UPDATES AS WE MOVE TOWARDS IT. THIS TIME, WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS ABOUT THEIR EXPECTATIONS FROM THE EVENT AND WHAT WOULD THEY LIKE TO DO IF THEY CAME TO

BANGALORE. FOLLOWING ARE THE RESPONSES WE RECEIVED:



**Ade Tanesia:** I want AMARC to design a conference that will allow a high level of interaction between community radios of north and south countries, between those of rich and poor countries. I think that this will help in finding ways of collaborating for strengthening the economy of the communities. We can make this world a better place through community media. The role of women in the CR must be strengthened and ensured that the voice of grassroots women is heard clearly and fully.

I am interested in presenting a paper on how community radios can set up a network to exchange information through internet, a kind of technology convergence. If I come to Bangalore, I would like to interview the representatives of community radios from the Asia Pacific region and make a short film from the interviews. I wish to learn about making programs for young women in the radio and also hope to learn about conducting training on gender and CR.

**Anton Birowo:** I would like to suggest that we pay attention to the organisational aspect of community radio network by dividing the topic into women participation and management skills. A strong organisation at the regional and national levels will help and promote the existence of community radio. I would like to present a paper titled 'tracking the spirit of community radio in Indonesia.' I would like to learn about initiatives in promoting people's voices. I would be very interested to visit some of the community media and people's initiatives in Bangalore.



**Junichi Hibino:** I expect the 2nd AMARC Asia Pacific Conference will make a very important contribution to the development of community radio in this region, because the participants from around Asia Pacific region will bring lots of knowledge and experiences accumulated in the communities to Bangalore. I would like to have a lot of intensive dialogues about how to make community radios more effective for community development with colleagues from other countries, especially to strengthen cultural diversity, enable disadvantaged members of the community and mitigate disaster risk. It has been only two years since

AMARC-Japan working group was formed. We have made some efforts to enhance the social impact of community radio such as hosting of the G8 Radio Forum in Japan, producing the disaster management audio materials, and holding the workshop for community based disaster management utilizing community radio during these two years, In Bangalore, I would like to share with everyone about the activities of the AMARC-Japan working group and our experiences from Japan.

Community radio can play an important role for community development such as promoting cultural diversity. But I think the legal status of community radio must be assured to do that. As community radio in Japan has not been given legal recognition as a distinct group alongside commercial and public radio, I am strongly interested in the great efforts taking place in India and Bangladesh in this regard.

**Dina Listiorini:** I want peace journalism through community radio and the other topic about health communication such as how to inform members of the communities about health through community radio to be discussed in the regional conference. I want to share about peace journalism through community radio especially about UNSCR 1325 and sharing peace experiences and practices through community radio.



If I get the opportunity to come to Bangalore, I would like to visit some Hindu temples, some traditional markets, and some community radios if available.



**Hidayat:** I propose that the conference raise the issue of poverty from the perspective of culture. Changes are taking place in local communities and the way people view development, which has taken place by exploiting resources without consideration of the damage to nature. Poverty is primarily due to the injustice between the countries of North and South. My proposal is based on the issues raised by listeners of our community radio.

I would like to make a presentation based on the experience of our community radio organization. I am of the opinion that the role of "community radio" is a medium for social transformation in the community, because the "community radio" is responsible to the community and not exclusive. There must be strategic steps to push the community. Community radio must be open to the broadest participation of the community as owners of the radio (stock owners) and not only as a listener or audience. Before engaging in "off air" activities, "community radio" must create understanding and awareness in the community. We often forget this principle because of time and situation constraint. I am for the community radio station taking a socio-cultural approach, but not just through a project or program. The "off air" programs can be done only when people are ready to do so, thus the community radio can only push and stimulate awareness in the community. I would like to look at the community radio organization and their activities in Bangalore. I will share my experiences of my community radio and the Community Radio Network of North Sumatra (JARKOMSU).

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## **2nd REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF AMARC ASIA PACIFIC 10-13 October 2009 - Bangalore, India**

**Registration is Open at:**

**<http://asiapacific.amarc.org/index.php?p=2> Conference Asia Pacific 2009**

**AMARC Asia Pacific invites you to register to participate in the Regional conference.**

**Please note that the only way to participate in the AMARC's 2nd Asia Pacific Conference is by filling the application form online.**

**Please note the registration fee for AMARC members is US \$ 100 and US \$ 150 for non-members.**

**Please feel free to email Ms. Prativa Chhetri, Conference coordinator at [chhetri\\_prativa@yahoo.com](mailto:chhetri_prativa@yahoo.com) for any assistance regarding accommodation booking or for general enquiry.**

## INTERVIEW:

### SETBACKS TO DEMOCRACY IN FIJI: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

*Kathambi Kinoti of Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) interviewed Sharon Bhagwan Rolls of femLINKPACIFIC, a feminist communications organisation in Fiji in the backdrop of the recent military coup in that country. Sharon speaks about the struggle for freedom of expression, especially from the point of view of women of Fiji. This interview was first published in the AWID website.*

**AWID: Last month, there was a military coup in Fiji, the fourth in 22 years. What is the situation at the moment?**

**Sharon:** First of all I would just like to extend my sincere appreciation to the networks, women's groups and individuals who have been extending support and solidarity to us since the events of Easter Weekend this year, when the President of Fiji purportedly abrogated the constitution, and the citizens of Fiji have been living under a Public Emergency Decree which now extends into its second month.

There has been a decision to devalue the Fijian dollar by 20 per cent which is having an impact on prices of basic goods. This is further exacerbating what was already a very unfortunate economic reality for us. The economic impact of the series of coups is bringing home the reality that conflict is not good business.

There is an uncanny calmness because people have to continue to work and children have to continue to go to school, so I guess there is also a sense of "life must go on." However there is also uncertainty especially with the control of information through the mainstream media and this is most apparent in rural communities who were already living within the reality of an information and communication gap.

Talking to rural women also, especially those who have suffered due to the devastating floods in January this year, there is still a sense of reliance on the government to provide, but at another level we are not sure just how much available financial resources the administration has to support the social welfare and rural development needs of these communities. It will be very interesting to see what the outcomes of the national budget for 2010 will look like.

Mainstream information and communication is seriously controlled. Our organisation runs a community radio and is also subjected to censorship by the military. We have to send our broadcast log and community news collation to the Ministry of Information prior to each broadcast. We are also intently monitored when we are on air, and on our monthly "Enews bulletin" and "Community Radio Times." This very much reminds me of the media control following the first military coup on May 14, 1987.

However, we are hoping that we can continue with our work, despite there being restrictions on public meetings. We have been able to produce a new "Women, Peace and Human Security" radio series from our visits, as I have been able to conduct rural consultations during the last three weeks and hope that we will also be able to stage the rural broadcasts with our community radio station.



Community or alternative media is a critical space right now. Even if we are only communicating within an 8 – 10 kilometre radius it is an important space that we will work hard to retain. Ultimately though, with information and communication channels being tightly controlled rural women will continue to be further marginalised and isolated.

femLINKPACIFIC has been advocating the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 which mandates the meaningful participation of women in peace-building processes and this has now been stalled because processes of engagement such as the Political Dialogue Forum do not seem to be an immediate priority of the new order. However, I feel that as the women's movement we need to find ways in which we can continue our work safely.

**AWID: What in particular are women's experiences not only after this most recent coup, but also of living under military rule?**

**Sharon:** I will address this from the micro or grassroots level first. Going back to military coup of December 2006, when I travelled out to meet women in rural communities, there was a sense of isolation from what was happening in the capital city as well as a reality that they just needed to get their children back to school and provide for their families. You need to appreciate that these are women from informal settlements, women who sell at the local markets, who live in squatter settlements or traditional settings, so for them the information and news was very confusing. If we are to make a difference as a women's movement, this is where we need to strengthen our work and efforts. Right now the feeling is the same, especially since many of the women whom we work with experienced the brunt of the devastating floods in January 2009 and are still trying to put their lives back together, so their immediate priority is their families. On our recent visits the key insecurities identified were economic, health, environmental, as well as human security issues relating to infrastructure like improved roads and water supply.

There is also a sense of fear and uncertainty as with any political crisis. I feel that the military has demonstrated its might very early on and the ongoing detention of anyone who is considered to be a risk in light of the Public Emergency Decree is a way to silence any possible opportunity to publicly denounce the actions - and if you did, with the media control in place, it would be very unlikely that your message would be heard. So we do need to consider alternatives. What is critical right now is to ensure women's realities are not lost in the political maze and that the status, particularly of rural women, can provide critical development benchmarks to demonstrate that we need democratic governance so that women can have a place in decision making for their peace and human security.

There is also a need to link the growing violence, especially sexual and domestic violence to the political realities and how these impact very clearly on the status of women.

**AWID: How have women's organisations responded to these challenges?**

**Sharon:** Dating back to 1987, following each military or civilian coup, women have responded actively calling for respect for the rule of law and human rights, and these have been acts of peace and non violence. Women have been detained in 1987 and again in 2006 for their work. Women human rights activists in particular were detained and suffered at the hands of the military following the takeover in 2006.

Women have rallied together, through silent peace vigils which demonstrate our commitment to peace and make the point that we will not be silenced by the acts of the overthrow of any democratic government. We have negotiated at the policy level, as well as by using our women's networks to communicate with other key political players.

Women have documented events, they have spoken out on human rights abuses and they have also been involved in ongoing lobbying and advocacy especially for a formal and mediated dialogue process which would have the support of the UN and the Commonwealth Secretariat. But this is not easy especially as these are new concepts which need to be discussed and understood by the broader movement, by more women. A challenge has been the diverse viewpoints and perspectives within civil society on the styles of engagement with those who now have political power, and also on the process of the development of a People's Charter which now is the mandate of the current political administration, and so we have to better understand each other in order to be able to move forward collectively.

**AWID: What do you see as a viable way to get Fiji back to democratic governance and what will women's roles be in achieving this?**

**Sharon:** There is a critical need to continue to strengthen women's capacity as leaders and negotiators during this current period. It is critical for women to understand how to negotiate and proceed through some very new waters, as well as how not to lose sight of the need to attain parliamentary democracy while we address some critical development issues, such as the feminization of poverty, which is a stark reality right now. Also, how do we analytically respond to developments at the macro-economic level? Especially when women continue to face the brunt of their poverty situation - poverty of opportunity, information as well as the reality of struggling to pay school fees, rent and other expenses. This is the situation faced by rural women, older women and women with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

So any process must ensure that women are empowered to speak and be heard, especially since we can, as women, also perpetuate the traditional barriers of decision making.

We need to be assisted in this dialogue process. We cannot simply focus on the process of elections. We also need to be able to analytically address poverty which is extremely disempowering to women and affects their engagement in any political process. We need to be able to address issues of security sector governance and we also need to prepare women who are willing to participate in future elections.

I have been discussing a possible process, which is something I feel has been needed in Fiji since the May 2000 coup, which as you can appreciate, impacted the women's movement and exacerbated barriers between racial and socio-economic groups. Apart from my work with femLINKPACIFIC, I wear other hats. I am the second vice president of the National Council of Women of Fiji (NCWF) and a member of other affiliate organisations of the NCWF, such as the YWCA and the Poor Relief Society in Fiji. It is in all these capacities that I have been working towards putting in place a process that would address these issues.

There needs to be critical mobilization of technical and financial resources to support a Women's Dialogue Forum. femLINKPACIFIC has developed a "Peace Talks" project model to advance UNSCR 1325 and we will continue to work with our Fiji and regional partners to enhance the development of a core group of women who can enhance their knowledge and capacity to be at the formal peace process.



The NCWF with a core group of affiliates like the YWCA and femLINKPACIFIC would have a key role in coordinating the Women's Dialogue Forum. This will help us collectively negotiate and prepare the women's agenda for the formal process. Here we will need technical support. We would be interested in hearing from women who have worked through a process of mediated dialogue and engagement in a formal peace process. Financial resources are also critical. Too often it is expected that women will just continue to work without resources and many of our women's groups are still volunteer based.

I see the steps of a mediated or facilitated process being as follows:

1. NCWF undertakes a series of consultative meetings with women who belong to the networks of affiliates in rural communities. These are meetings that bring women from all ethnic and faith backgrounds together for 2 – 3 days of scene setting. The context of women's human rights, peace and security form the framework for discussion and the consultation will work towards clear outcomes and recommendations.
2. The outcomes are fed into a comprehensive 3 - 5 day women leaders' consultation, with two days for young women's representatives bringing together three representatives from each affiliate, including one young woman, to finalise and adopt the final collective women's agenda. The meeting also confirms who the core representatives of any formal process will be.
3. The outcomes are presented to all key stakeholders in and outside of Fiji and form the basis of the women's negotiations.
4. The outcomes are also presented to other women's networks who are not members of the NCWF in particular the indigenous women's network the Soqosoqo Vakamarama, Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. This process will be a very important starting point to train women for future leadership, not just in parliament but also in local government and other critical local levels of decision making.

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*The article can be read online at: <http://awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Issues-and-Analysis/Setbacks-to-democracy-in-Fiji-Women-s-experiences>*

## COMMUNITY RADIOS CONNECTED BY SATELLITE NETWORK IN NEPAL

Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB) has launched Community Information Network (CIN) connecting 105 community radios of Nepal into a single satellite network on 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, providing a platform for information sharing. The Network will allow the stations to receive news and information from the studios of ACORAB as well as to share information among the stations.



Most of Nepal's community radios are located in remote areas of the country and hence the options for receiving and sharing of information are few and limited. Internet connectivity is not widespread. Most stations are dependent on dial-up based low speed connectivity. Sharing of content among the stations has been mostly based on exchanging of audio CDs. However, given the regular road blockades pertaining to natural as well as human-made reasons, delivery of CDs has been inefficient. The satellite network is expected to help the stations overcome these challenges. Through CIN, community radios will be able to share their radio programs and voice clips with other stations in the network.

ACORAB has set up a recording studio along with a small but a professional news production team in Kathmandu. It will dispatch news twice, everyday. Participating stations will also receive the news in text to allow them to repackage and localize. In the next phase, member community radios and ACORAB will work together to produce programs in Kathmandu on the basis of information and content received from the stations. This way, CIN will help to centralize local issues and localize central issues.

The CIN will function in close collaboration with community radios. It will focus on encouraging critical dialogues from local perspective on various current issues such as national identity, democracy, human rights, good-governance, social-cohesion, social-inclusion and social-justice, peace-building, constitution making process, development and other socio-political issues.

In order to ensure a high level of participation of the community radio stations and as part of the CIN plans, ACORAB will work to enhance the capacity of radios by organizing internship opportunities for the staffs of the stations. During internship, local producers and reporters will get change to hone up their skills and knowledge for news and program production.

ACORAB will soon begin to broadcast live, the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly where assembly members are working to write the new constitution of Nepal. The broadcast is expected to increase the level of accountability of the legislators towards their constituencies and local communities. The broadcast will also feed into content creation to enhance dialogue between the policy makers and members of their constituency, with the aim of providing input to the constitution making process.

**For more information on ACORAB and the CIN, please visit <http://www.acorab.org.np/>**