

AMARC Asia-Pacific NEWSLETTER

Year 12, December 2016



Editorial

Memories of the April 25, 2015 earthquake of Nepal and the aftershocks still send a shiver down the spines of everyone who experienced the devastating tremor. Approximately 10,000 lives perished and 25,000 seriously injured by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake. It brought down homes and heritages, compelling millions to live in constant fear and despair.

Nineteen months have passed since that ill-fated day and it's only now that we have found time and courage to look back and evaluate.

For a country not at all prepared for a disaster of that scale despite always being aware of its vulnerability to earthquakes, it took some time for everyone to comprehend what was happening and what should be done next. The earthquake caused a widespread communication blackout in the 14 districts that were the worst affected. Telephone network went berserk immediately after the earthquake and electricity connections were broken. Rumours of all kinds surfaced the country, and radio was arguably the only means of communication people could resort to for reliable information.

However, radio stations in the affected districts weren't altogether intact. All local radio stations were thrown off air. Many station buildings fell down or got damaged beyond repair, and equipment loss was at a large scale.

Most community radios were located in rented buildings, which had to be evicted – either due to the damages or at the insistence of landlords who feared that the tall towers of the radio standing on the building roof would put the building and surroundings at risk.

A group of supporters of local radios gathered at the AMARC Asia-Pacific office in Kathmandu to take stock of the situation. An informal 'radio support group' was formed consisting of several national and international media and humanitarian organizations. AMARC, with its notable experience in disaster risk reduction programmes, took the lead. The focus was on urgent and effective ways of resurrecting community radio services in the districts that had suffered most.

Fortunately, mobile towers had suffered limited damage and connection was restored

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Radio Sindhu old



CR Hamro operating from the fields



Inauguration of new building of CR Sindhu

Photos: AMARC-AP, CR Hamro

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Lessons From India's First Emergency Radio

As a first of its kind in South Asia, an emergency FM broadcaster was permitted to go on air in Cuddalore district, Tamilnadu State, India in the aftermath of a devastating flood that killed 500 and displaced approximately 1.8 million people.

Operating out of the District Collector's office and broadcasting on 107.8 MHz, the emergency station focussed on providing important, relevant and useful information to local communities in the aftermath of the disaster. It also engaged its listeners on other themes like education, agriculture and health that are of daily utility and relevance.

Convergence: The setting up of the emergency radio in Cuddalore once again brought to fore the call for convergence between community broadcasters, telecommunication and online platforms. While FM radio is useful in disaster situations in terms of affordable receiver sets and free to air access, listeners will need telecom networks to 'call back' and participate in the programming. Often, emergency radio may not have staff to go out and conduct field recordings from communities. Telecommunications and online platforms are wonderful opportunities that allow two-way traffic and enhance community communications.

Frequencies: The Cuddalore experience underscores the need to reserve frequencies for emergencies. Rural and semi urban locations may have spare frequencies to allocate for emergency broadcasting but most urban cities have no space left in the spectrum.

Cross-Media Alliances: The Cuddalore Emergency radio continues to be highly localized while the Pondicherry All India Radio (AIR is a public broadcaster in India) addresses a couple of districts, and there are one or two commercial radio stations broadcasting entertainment content. While public service radio has excellent coverage, infrastructure and resources, it is often low on listenership. But commercial radio is often low on infrastructure and lacks competence in doing public interest programming but often has excellent listenership. Similarly, community radio has good audience engagement and good programming but lacks

wide coverage and infrastructure. If all three tiers of radio can work together—before, during and after disasters—they can create an impact with communities that other electronic/digital media will find hard to match. Cooperation rather than competition is the need of the hour.

Focussed Programming

To enhance the effectiveness of emergency and more long-term disaster preparedness efforts on community radio, a focussed programming plan needs to be worked out

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within hours. In some places it took a few days. This helped us ascertain the status of local radios within a few days.

Support teams were dispatched to the stations for quick recovery. Tents were provided to shelter stations. Mobile radios and basic equipment and spare parts were deployed. On-site coaching and mentoring, and motivation to people working at the local stations were organized. Within a few weeks, there was indeed one local radio up and running in each earthquake-affected district.

While external support was invaluable, it was the courage and commitment of local community broadcasters to come back on air to help the rescue and relief work that was truly commendable. They braved aftershocks and operated in spite of tragic personal losses at home and within families and friends.

After ensuring operation of at least one radio station in each affected district, rapid assessment teams were deployed within a month of the earthquake to gauge the extent of damages suffered by the radios and to correctly estimate infrastructural and technical requirement for reconstruction.

AMARC's early intervention and action towards bringing together the radio community helped to attract attention of partner organizations and donors towards the plight of the local broadcasters, which

on. Preparedness is not just about warning systems but also holding local environmental, urban planning and infrastructural practices accountable. It is poor planning that exacerbates the impact of disasters. During disasters, radios need to be trained to disseminate credible, accurate and objective information. In the aftermath, radios need to be trained on how to counsel communities, handle trauma and pay attention to abuse of human rights. Both government and civil society need to invest in capacity building programmes that make available resources along above-mentioned lines.

This is an abridged version of an article by Ramnath Bhat, Acting President, AMARC Asia-Pacific, that first appeared in CR News, Volume 7, Issue 1 (Apr-Jun 2016), produced by the UNESCO Chair on Community Media.

eventually helped to win strategic support for the radios. While several media support organizations too carried forward invaluable support for the radios, AMARC partnered with UNICEF Nepal, BHN-JPF Japan, and Shapla Neer to provide equipment and infrastructural supports to the affected stations.

Resources were used to replace broken equipment's like UPS and inverters, hand-held recorders, laptop computers, studio mixers, and telephone hybrids among others. Support was also provided for the reconstruction of radio buildings, studio, and repairing of transmission towers.

AMARC continues its campaign for Disaster Risk Reduction. It advocates for radios in disaster prone areas to have an Emergency Evacuation Plan and Disaster Response Plan. Such plans must be sensitive to the needs of women, children, senior citizens and the physically challenged. Broadcasting regular programmes on disaster preparedness, helping carry out disaster drills in the community, and conducting baseline surveys of the community including household information of people with disability, illness and special needs should be part of any community broadcaster's agenda to effectively contribute towards disaster risk reduction.

Suman Basnet

Community radio and emergency response in Indonesia

By Idha Saraswati

The role of community radio in disaster risk reduction was discussed in a community media gathering event titled 'Jagongan Media Rakyat' held by Combine Resource Institution in Yogyakarta in April 2016. The discussion hosted by the Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI) saw several community radio activists and researchers share their experiences and insights.

Iman Abda from JRKI reflected on the early stage of emergency response for Sinabung eruption in North Sumatra in 2014. An emergency radio was built near the refugee shelter, which not only disseminated information crucial to the survivors, but the same content also inspired the local government to take action and start distributing supplies.

Sinam MS, coordinator of JRKI, shared another experience of emergency response during landslide in Banjarnegara, Central Java. Besides providing information to the survivors and local government, the emergency radio also connected stakeholders involved in the emergency response.

These are the reasons why Sinam believes that community radio can be developed into emergency radio. Emergency radio is an important part of emergency response management, because most communication infrastructures in disaster affected areas are usually down. Radio, with its simple technology, is more flexible and even people with no experience can be trained to operate and broadcast information collected from the field during emergency situations.

However, regulation is still needed to support its development. "Emergency radio should also be included in the contingency plan, so it can be developed as fast as possible," Sinam said. There needs to be specific directive about allocating radio frequency in disaster prone area, quick permission procedure, and access to the technology to develop the system.

Agreeing with Sinam, Imam Prakoso, AMARC Asia-Pacific's Vice President for South East Asia, reflected on how the emergency radio set up a few months after the disaster in the affected area was able to fill the information gap, as the national media only focussed on broadcasting news targeted at audiences outside the affected areas.

Junichi Hibino from FM YY community radio in Japan shared how several emergency radios were set up in a week (or up to a month in some areas) after the 2011 tsunami. "We developed a portable backpack radio station to set up emergency radio easily. Now we can broadcast from anywhere," he informed.

Similarly, Mario Antonius Birowo, community radio researcher from Yogyakarta Atmajaya University, explained that the supply of information is very important in every disaster risk reduction stage as lack of information can cause mass panic among survivors. A simple tool to communicate and share information like radio is needed to reduce the risk, he concluded.



JRKI
Jaringan Radio Komunitas Indonesia

“

Disasters must not be allowed to impede on freedom of expression.

- Al-Amin Yusuf, UNESCO
New Delhi, speaking on
the occasion of World
Radio Day 2016

Community Centres hosted by community radios in Nepal



With the aim to help earthquake-affected communities and provide a physical space for community members to come together and discuss their ideas and problems, five community radios in the earthquake-affected districts of Nepal have been running community centres at their stations since August 2015.

While the loss of their dear ones and properties distressed the community members after the disaster, lack of clear information, and bureaucratic hurdles for receiving relief materials and other assistance have continued to confuse them. At community centres, they can spend some peaceful time over tea or coffee,

and also talk to the radio staff about the problems they've been facing.

The radio staff not only refer the visitors to individuals and offices that may be able to help them solve their problems, but also use the information received from the visitors to design radio programmes so that others with similar problems can benefit, too.

Inspired by the Japanese experience of running community centres that were organized after the Fukushima disaster, these community centres are financially supported by Shapla Neer and coordinated by AMARC Asia-Pacific.

FEMTALK: Human Security after Winston

femLINKpacific coordinates a community media network across Fiji and the Pacific which includes the operation of two community radio stations – in Suva, Fiji’s capital, and in Labasa, the main hub of Fiji’s second largest island. Monthly district-level meetings are convened throughout Fiji to provide a space for women to discuss and document their experiences of and solutions for development issues in their communities.

By Sian Rolls



Following femLINKpacific’s 2nd National Women’s Human Security First Consultation held in June 2016, district level rural women leaders meetings continued. Across Fiji, women have continuously raised food, economic and personal insecurity since Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston.

Reflecting on the changes since TC Winston, Timaima Ralolokula, member of the Veilomani Women’s Club in Malamala, during the rural women leader’s consultation held in Nadi, said: “Earlier, most of the families in my community had three meals a day. But after the cyclone hit, some of them eat only two meals a day, while others eat three meals with reduced portions.”

“Replanting vegetables is difficult because of the dry season right now,” said Sera Naitila, member of the Vaidoko Women’s Club, in Rakiraki, adding that replanting root crops failed because the “suckers dried up.” She further explained how they’re deprived of balanced diet as they’re forced to make do with whatever is available.

Akeneta Sulita, a member of the Naqai women’s club, speaking in Labasa, shared that the cyclone damaged their farm and with it their share of “healthy eating.”

Food security concerns have created an additional burden on the women’s minds and the family budget.

“After TC Winston, I’ve noticed that women wake up early in the morning, send their husbands to work and children to school and then they’re busy tending to the damaged farms in an effort to start growing vegetables and other edibles again,” shared Nila Rao, an advisory councillor in Rakiraki.

“They’re also raising ducks and chicken and most of them are looking at other ways of supporting the family as many men lost their jobs after the Penang Mill closed down,” she added.

“I’ve seen farmers crying during the time of renewing crop lease, because the cyclone has left them with nothing—even the seeds and saplings were washed away. I think the farmers need ration during such times,” observed Satya Wati, member of the Sanatan Nari Sabha and Yasiyasi Multiracial Women’s Club, during the Tavua June rural women leader’s meeting.

As many communities continue to struggle to rebuild their lives and reinvent their sources of food and income, infrastructural damages in a place which already lacked development before the

cyclone hit, has started to create safety concerns.

In Nadi, Anita Devi, Treasurer of the Wailoaloa Lively Women’s Club, pointed out how thick bushes surrounding the houses put women at risk of different crimes as most of them are almost always at home, alone. She pointed out the need for police posts nearby.

Likewise, Timaima expressed her concerns over the security of women post TC Winston during the June rural women leader’s consultation in Nadi. “We normally go to the creeks early in the morning to fetch drinking water, alone. Many young girls even take bath there, and it isn’t safe,” she shared.

“Since the electricity hasn’t been restored after the cyclone, we don’t feel safe to walk back home from work after sunset.” added Eta Tuvuki, member of the Burenitu Soqosoqo Vakamarama I Taukei, at the Rakiraki.

Children’s studies have been hampered, and their phone’s batteries are mostly dead—which largely impairs their response to emergencies in the night.

“Because of the darkness, women are scared of doing their chores and going around the compound of their own houses,” said Selai Adimaitoga, member of the Seni Makosoi Women’s Club, during the Tavua June rural women leader’s meeting.

Women want to see these issues addressed but until and unless they are part of decision making, their issues will remain and the burden of cost, time and energy will be unfairly placed upon them – simply because they are women.

To engage with local women leaders and remind the government of its commitments to women’s human rights, peace and security, femLINKpacific’s Women’s Human Security First, and Women’s Weather Watch campaigns were organized since 2015. District and national-level meetings and consultations were held to come up with recommendations to ensure women’s rights and security. Reports encapsulating what the women raised through the consultations, including October’s 3rd National Consultation, are available at: <http://bit.ly/2h7NZpj>

News

Radio drama series on Golden 1000 days

AMARC Asia-Pacific in collaboration with UNICEF Nepal, Association of Community Radio Broadcasters of Nepal (ACORAB), and Ujyaalo Multimedia Nepal (UMM), is launching a radio drama series on 'Golden 1000 Days'—a national campaign by the Government of Nepal and UNICEF. The drama series will include Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as a key component as well and will start broadcasting from March 2017.

The 'Golden 1000 Days' campaign was launched in order to address the problem of malnutrition, which has about 37 per cent of children under five years of age suffering from stunted growth in Nepal. The 1000 days comprises of the period from the start of a mother's pregnancy through her child's second birthday.



Enhancing Community Radio to improve food security and resilient family farming in Asia Pacific region



A regional workshop on "Interactive community radio to enhance food security and resilient family farming" for improving community media and ICTs capacities for agriculture and rural development in Asia-Pacific was organised by AMARC and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations in Bangkok, Thailand from 19 to 21 September, 2016.

The workshop saw participation of community broadcasters from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Resource persons from FAO, University of Philippines-Los Banos (UPLB), and AMARC conducted the workshop. The workshop concluded with an action plan to guide community radios to more effectively deal with issues concerning family farming and food security, with cross-sectoral collaborative approaches with disaster risk reduction and gender issues.

Bhutan community radio assessment

AMARC Asia-Pacific collaborated with Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Bhutan for carrying out an assessment of community radios. SDC has supported the piloting of community radios in Bhutan for the first time. Different civil society organizations (CSO) like the Tarayana Foundation, READ Bhutan and Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy initiated these pilots in 2015. Several college radios were also supported within the programme.

The assessment carried out between June-July 2016 has made recommendations for improving policy, ownership models, technology setups, people's access and participation, enhancing sustainability, and capacity building and networking.



Photo: AMARC-AP

Earlier, in 2014, AMARC Asia-Pacific carried out a feasibility study for the development of community broadcasting in Bhutan and concluded that the conditions were generally favourable.

The role of community broadcasting in Bhutan is immense given the mountainous and at times inaccessible terrain with scattered population speaking different dialects. It can play an important role in supporting the government's approach of establishment of a vibrant and free media to contribute to Bhutan's unique concept of Gross National Happiness.

Workshop: AMARC Community Radios and Disaster Risk Reduction

AMARC Asia-Pacific in collaboration with UNESCO offices in Kathmandu and New Delhi, jointly organized a regional workshop on disaster risk reduction and the role of community radios for improving people's participation in recovery and rehabilitation.

Experts from countries of South Asia and Europe made presentations on the scientific advancements for disaster

risk reduction, practices being followed at grassroots, and ways in which community media could strengthen linkages between policies and practices at the grassroots. Discussions were also held on issues concerning gender, networking, and building linkages between humanitarian efforts and community radios.

The consultation took place from 19 to 21 October 2016 in Kathmandu, Nepal.



Participants at the Biratnagar workshop performing a group task.

Photo: AMARC-AP

Workshops on 'Professionalism in Community Broadcasting'

AMARC Asia-Pacific and the Community Radio Support Centre organized a series of five workshops in different locations in Nepal to discuss the principle and practise of professionalism in the context of community radios. International Media Support (IMS) supported the workshops, held between 30 July and 17 August 2016. Altogether more than one hundred participants, comprising of station managers, reporters and board members of community radios actively participated in the workshops.



AMARC-AP EC members with staff members

AMARC Asia-Pacific Executive Committee meets in Kathmandu

AMARC Asia-Pacific Executive Committee (EC) meeting was held on 22 April 2016 in the regional office in Kathmandu. It was attended by Ramnath Bhat, Acting President, Junichi Hibino, Treasurer, and Nimmi Chauhan, WIN representative for Asia-Pacific. In addition to the annual face to face meeting, the AMARC-AP EC and Regional Board hold regular online meetings to review operations of the regional office against AMARC Asia-Pacific regional action plan (RAP 2014-17) drawn on the basis of priorities set by the regional assembly of members.

News

Seminar: Reviewing role of community radios in the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal

On 21 April 2016, AMARC Asia-Pacific organized a seminar to mark the first year since the massive earthquake that struck Nepal on 25 April 2015 and to review the role of community radios in the aftermath.

The event was graced by the then Honorable Minister of Information and Communication of the Government of Nepal Mr. Sher Dhan Rai as the Chief Guest.

Along with community radio broadcasters from Nepal, speakers and community radio experts from India and Japan shared their opinions in the seminar. Mr. Ramnath Bhat, Acting President of AMARC Asia-Pacific along with Mr. Junichi Hibino, Treasurer, and Ms. Nimmi Chauhan, Asia-Pacific representative of Women International

Network (WIN- is a network of women broadcasters in community radios) made presentations based on experiences of community radios working for disaster risk reduction (DRR) in other parts of Asia Pacific. A range of issues including people's participation in community radios and community radio friendly media policy for DRR were discussed in the seminar.

On the occasion, the Honorable Minister presented plaques to representatives of Shapla Neer and BHN (NGOs from Japan) as appreciation for their contributions in reviving community radios affected by the earthquake.

The seminar was organized with the support of Shapla Neer, which supports grassroots development in Nepal.



Photos: AMARC-AP

Honorable Minister of Information and Communication of the Government of Nepal Mr. Sher Dhan Rai presenting plaque to Mr. Hiromichi Suzuki of BHN and Mr. Toyoaki Komatsu of Shapla Neer.

Upcoming Events

1 South-Asian consultation on Disaster Risk Reduction and Community Radio

AMARC Asia-Pacific will be organizing a regional consultation on enhancing disaster risk reduction through local radios in the first quarter of 2017. Registration information will be made available in the AMARC-AP mailing list and website. Participants from countries of South Asia will convene to discuss strategies to strengthen community radios as tools of disaster risk reduction. The event is being supported out of a grant from IPDC/UNESCO.

2 Training workshop for South-Asian community radio broadcasters on Community Radio and Disaster Risk Reduction

AMARC Asia-Pacific will be organising a training workshop for community broadcasters from South Asia to improve their plans and skills for enhancing emergency preparedness at the station as well as in local communities. The workshop will be held in Kathmandu in the first quarter of 2017. Registration information will be made available in the AMARC-AP mailing list and website. The event is being supported out of a grant from IPDC/UNESCO.

3 FK Norway Exchange Programme

In partnership with Maraa in India and Rupantar in Bangladesh, AMARC Asia-Pacific will be coordinating the 'Health Communication and Education through Participatory Learning Models using Community Radios,' an exchange learning project being funded by Fredskorpset (FK) Norway. The project aims at building the capacities of local stakeholder groups in Bangladesh, India and Nepal on health

education and health communication through participatory approaches using community radio stations. The Community Learning Programme (CLP) is built on the premises of co-learning with community participation constituting an integral part of the communication design and production process thereby empowering the community and their means of communication. The main highlight of the project is exchange learning, and will involve three rounds of exchange of participants from Bangladesh, India and Nepal over a period of 21 months. Applications will be called through AMARC-AP mailing list and its website.

For more information

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