



# AMARC Asia-Pacific Newsletter

*"We are about people having a voice through radio."*



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## Advocating for Community Radio Policy in Nepal

The history of community radios in Nepal started with the establishment of Radio Sagarmatha in 1997. Nepal boasts of being the oldest community sector in the region but, to this day the sector struggles for formal recognition due to the absence of a policy. Although a policy does not guarantee that it will improve the sector, it is high time we advocate for one. It is imperative that the policy promotes the involvement of marginalized communities in the sector.

To develop a good policy, all communities should participate in its advocacy. If community broadcasting is important to us, our activism is equally necessary. Without this, the law may not be favorable to the potential stakeholders. Everyone should take ownership of this initiative. This is the perfect time to lobby for a policy with the newly elected members of the House of Representatives taking office. However, one thing that the stakeholders need to keep in mind is that policymaking is not just the job of AMARC Asia-Pacific (AMARC-AP) or the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) Nepal.

We have been saying that community radio is the medium that offers a voice for the voiceless, especially the marginalized communities. In fact, if we look at the history of radios, we can see that it was for the communities that did not have access. Across the world, it started with rebel groups using walkie-talkie sets that they robbed from the army at that time.

The use of radio officially started in the 1920s but became widespread in Europe after the Second World War. Since then, some countries like Australia, Bhutan, India, and Bangladesh, have good practices and have also adopted a community broadcasting policy. Nepal can take reference from such countries while drafting a policy. Furthermore, the stress should be on the content of the radio rather than just focusing on the introduction of the policy.

In Nepal, licenses for community radios are provided to three types of organizations – non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, and not-for-profit companies. Community radios should not only be owned by needy communities but should also ensure their participation and ownership. This should be clearly elucidated in the policy. The government should allocate funds for the establishment and operation of radio stations. The policy has to address what kind of subsidies and funds will be available for which communities and who will be in charge of mobilizing the funds.

We should take this absence of a policy as an opportunity to bring a good community radio policy that ensures the inclusion and participation of all marginalized communities' voices.

- Subas Khatiwada, Vice-President for South Asia, AMARC Asia-Pacific

#### Specific recommendations:

a) AMARC-AP should to produce a white paper outlining the status of community radios in Nepal – in terms of practices and policy situations.

b) We will be inviting representatives of the CR sector into some of our internal meetings to explain community broadcasting to the leaders of our organizations and movements so that they can be motivated.

c) There is a need for a few basic, simple and brief publications (laden with illustrations, images, and infographics) to explain community broadcasting and its wider implications on social and cultural movements.

d) The meeting this should be considered an 'ice-breaker' and a preliminary meeting. We would want leading sector organizations such as AMARC should invite us to such meetings often so that we can understand the 'nuts and bolts' better and suggest ways for further collaborations.

e) Today's meeting has impressed upon us quite positively the significance of community radios and we would like to remain involved.



## Focus Group Discussions

AMARC-AP organized consultations with multiple stakeholders representing various social and cultural movements with the aim of sensitizing and partnering for community radio development in Nepal. The consultations, held between 2-15 December, were conducted as focus group discussions (FDGs) and were moderated by a community radio expert. Each consultation focused on generating interest, discussing possible areas of collaboration, and joint actions for policy advocacy.

The focus group discussions not only saw the participation of individuals representing various organizations from different communities (Dalit community representatives, women's rights activists, representatives of small-holding farmers, politicians, intellectuals, queer community, youth, podcasters, and internet governance experts) but also included representatives of the government. The recommendations offered by the participants will help in drafting an inclusive community broadcasting policy that carries the voices of marginalized communities.

Main points of deliberations and recommendations from the FDGs were as follows:

- Community radios are overwhelmingly operated by professional journalists only and are mostly out of bounds of common citizens.
- There is negligible understanding within marginalized communities regarding the nature of operation and management of community radios.
- Community radios are considered to be radios of the NGOs only.
- Community radios charge a fee for broadcasting programs. The high charges keep the stations out of access of small citizen's groups.
- For the outsiders and the un-initiated, there is no difference between community and other types of broadcasters. At least, it is hard to tell the difference from the contents.
- FM broadcasters seem to be operating under no specific control or guidance. Is that not dangerous for the society?
- Government seems fixated on the idea that broadcasting takes place in the FM band only. It does not recognize podcasters and other online streamers as broadcasters even though the nature of broadcasting is changing rapidly due to equally rapid technological advances.



## ICRN Caucus Meet

Indigenous Community Radio Network (ICRN), an organization of Indigenous-led community FM radio, organized a national-level Indigenous Community Caucus workshop on 27 November 2022. The workshop was attended by over 60 participants representing Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists (FONIJ), National Indigenous Women Federation (NIWF), National Indigenous Disabled Association (NIDA), Press council, among others, and various other Indigenous Peoples Organizations advocating the Indigenous Peoples rights and Media.

The caucus meeting was aimed at discussing and recommending possible strategies to promote Indigenous languages and increasing the access of indigenous communities to community radio or media. The meeting was held to ensure the inclusive participation of Indigenous journalists' networks in the plans, policies, and laws of the government of Nepal. It also emphasized the need for the government to take necessary and effective measures to classify and recognize 'Indigenous media' as a distinct media and to make separate classifications for indigenous-led media based on certain standards and management under the existing media laws.

In the existing media laws and proposed bills, the print media has been classified into three-levels—national, provincial and local, whereas radio and television broadcasting into public, community and private media.

The interaction program was jointly organized by ICRN in collaboration with UNESCO Office in Kathmandu, AMARC-AP and ACORAB Nepal. In the program, representatives from various government and non-government organization related to Indigenous Peoples, Constitutional bodies—namely Indigenous Nationalities Commission, Language Commission, Tharu Commission, Inclusion Commission, National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities including from Federation of Nepalese Journalists, were also present.

Besides this, ICRN organized a three-day program production training for Indigenous youth broadcasters and communicators from Indigenous communities in Kathmandu from November 25-27, 2022. In the training, 10 journalists, mostly women journalists from 10 Different-Indigenous-led community radio and 10 youths from various Indigenous journalists' associations under the Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists (FoNIJ). This training program focused mainly on building capacity for developing programs, identifying priority issues of Indigenous Peoples, and promoting Indigenous Languages through community radios.

The training program was organized to promote Indigenous Peoples issues mainly Indigenous Language based programmes to help promote and preserve Indigenous languages in Nepal through community radio. The program was designed under the aegis of the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032). The training covered topics such as identifying who are Indigenous Peoples of Nepal, their rights, mainly linguistic rights, customary institutions of Indigenous Peoples, issues concerning Indigenous Peoples' rights related to land, territories, natural resources, right to free prior and informed consent related to development projects and formats of radio programs.

ICRN has also developed a practical guideline aimed at improving journalistic practice in reporting and coverage of Indigenous issues in Nepal. The guide offers tips on what to do and what not to do while reporting the issues about Indigenous Peoples. The guide also includes what possible angles for reporting various issues about Indigenous Peoples.

## National-level Policy Consultation

The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) Nepal organized a national-level consultation on the 12th of December 2022 in Kathmandu. The consultation discussed the findings of the survey, outcomes of the provincial consultations as well as the focus group meetings and the Indigenous community radio caucus consultation with the aim of developing an outline for a national policy advocacy framework and strategy.



The consultation included selected representatives from the provincial level meetings and focus group discussions, in addition to national level representatives of institutions and movements representing the indigenous people, youths, Dalits, women, small farmers, and LGBTQIA+ community specifically those working in the sector of freedom of expression, actors representing special service sectors including health, education, community mediation, legal experts, etc.

The national-level consultation was attended by representatives from various government bodies such as the National Inclusion Commission, National Women Commission, National Human Rights Commission, National Youth Council, and National Muslim Commission who expressed their support for community broadcasting policy. They further stressed the importance of community radios in advocating various issues existing in the community. During the meeting, the stakeholders emphasized the need to adopt a policy to increase community participation in community radio and for its sustainability.

The meeting included a presentation on the provincial meetings organized by ACORAB in seven provinces. Besides this, AMARC-AP also presented the findings of the survey on the Access of Indigenous People to Community Broadcasting that was conducted by the organization and the Focus Group Discussions that were organized for various communities to ensure their involvement and participation in the formulation of community broadcasting policy. Indigenous Community Radio Network (ICRN) also presented on the program production training that was organized for youths from indigenous communities for improving journalistic practices in reporting and coverage of indigenous affairs in Nepal and the Indigenous Community Caucus Meet.

The participants shared that due to the absence of a community radio policy their identity could not be established. Furthermore, it was stressed that such a community radio policy should be adopted that helps promote the access of marginalized communities to community radio. The role of community radio in the promotion of an egalitarian society is incomparable. Therefore, a community radio policy is imperative to improve the quality of community radios.

ACORAB Nepal had organized consultations in all of the seven provinces of Nepal, from 29 November to 2 December 2022 to discuss the following issues:

- Promoting indigenous languages through community radios -- taking stock of current status, challenges and opportunities;
- Identifying areas of improvement in the policies of provincial and local governments on media, especially in regard to the promotion of indigenous languages. The consultations applied UNESCO's Community Media Policy Series as a central reference point for the deliberations;
- Recommending specific actions for preserving and promoting indigenous languages through community radio.

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AMARC Asia-Pacific is the regional autonomous chapter of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC International). AMARC Asia-Pacific is constituted by the members of AMARC from countries in the Asia-Pacific region. AMARC Asia-Pacific has sub-regional governance structure that consists of South Asia, South East Asia, the Pacific and East Asia.