



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

GENERAL EDITION | MAY 2026

NEWSLETTER

Voices of the Asia-Pacific:
Community Radio News & Stories

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Editorial

Community Radio at a Crossroads

This edition of the newsletter reflects a defining moment for community broadcasting across the Asia-Pacific region. Rapid digital transformation, migration, climate crises, shrinking civic spaces, and economic pressures are reshaping how communities communicate and participate in public life. Yet the stories in these pages also demonstrate that community radio continues to adapt with remarkable resilience and creativity.

From Nepal's discussions on hybrid FM and digital futures to Indonesia's debates on multiplatform broadcasting and disaster communication, community broadcasters are rethinking how to remain relevant in changing technological and political environments. The message emerging across the region is clear: the future is not about abandoning FM, but about building balanced models that combine accessibility, participation, and digital innovation.

At the same time, the experience of the *Asur*

Akhra Mobile Radio in India reminds us that community media is not defined by expensive infrastructure or sophisticated studios. Sometimes, a bench in the forest, a portable loudspeaker, and the determination to protect a language and culture are enough to create meaningful communication spaces. Likewise, *Radio Sipurennu* in Indonesia shows how women-led community radio can become a lifeline for isolated coastal communities by connecting public health, education, gender equality, and local livelihoods.

The regional workshops and consultations highlighted in this issue further underline the growing importance of cross-border solidarity, media literacy, gender justice, and conflict-sensitive communication. They also reaffirm the need for stronger support systems for grassroots broadcasters facing increasingly complex realities.

Community radio in Asia-Pacific may be changing in form, but its core mission remains unchanged: amplifying local voices, strengthening participation, and ensuring that even the most marginalized communities are not left unheard.



Photo: FMYY, Kobe, Japan [Online Community Radio]

Opinion

FM Roots, Digital Wings: Community Radio's Hybrid Future

Suman Basnet

Community radio in Asia-Pacific is entering a period of transition. Across the region, the familiar FM dial is no longer the only pathway to community voice. Youth mobility, digital access, and shifting listener habits are pushing stations to think beyond terrestrial broadcasting. Yet the case for FM remains strong, because community broadcasting has always been about participation, not scale.



Nepal illustrates the pressure clearly. In the 2022–23 fiscal year alone, a record 750,000 young people left for foreign employment, averaging more than 2,000 departures a day through legal channels, while more than 2.2 million Nepalis were already living abroad according to the 2021 census. As Dr. Ramnath Bhat, President, AMARC Asia-Pacific observed: “Many of our people are no longer physically present in their communities. They are abroad, or moving between places for work. So how do they remain part of the community?”

This question resonates across South Asia and the Pacific, from Nepal and Bangladesh to the Philippines, to various island states.

At the same time, the digital environment is expanding rapidly. While internet use grows in Nepal, access remains unequal: urban households are far more connected than rural ones, and women, older people, and poorer households often remain underserved. That divide is also visible regionally. Countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India have seen rapid smartphone-led growth, while others in the region have advanced farther in digital regulation and infrastructure. But even where internet penetration is rising, connectivity is still mediated by cost, geography, data affordability, and platform dependence.

This is why the future of community radio should not be framed as FM versus online. FM remains free-to-air, dependable, and inclusive. It works without data, subscriptions, or smartphones, and remains vital during emergencies, power cuts, and in areas where internet access is patchy or expensive. Many listeners rely on FM for trusted local information, especially where the digital divide remains wide.



Online, however, offers real advantages: it reaches migrants and diasporas, supports podcasts and archives, and helps stations engage younger audiences whose media habits are increasingly digital. The challenge is not to abandon FM, but to build a balanced model that matches each station's social mission and financial reality.

That balance matters more now because the operating environment is hardening. As Dr. Bhat cautioned: "The legal and regulatory landscape is changing, and often not in ways that support community media. Questions around copyright, licensing costs, spectrum fees, and unclear advertising regulations are becoming more prominent." High fees, multiple taxes, bureaucracy, and shrinking political spaces make sustainability harder at exactly the moment when community broadcasters need flexibility.

The answer, then, is not a leap to internet-only broadcasting. It is a hybrid future: FM for openness and inclusion, digital for reach and renewal. Community radio's strength has never been 'size' alone. It has been the depth of its relationship with people. In a digital age, that means FM roots with digital wings.



Photo: Radio Mosintuwu, Indonesia



Photo: Radio Maria, Papua New Guinea

Feature Article

Studio in the Forest: First Radio Broadcast in Asur Language Begins

Syed Shahroz Qamar

In Kotyahat, Netarhat (India), the sound of traditional mandar drums suddenly echoes through the air: “Daha-daha tur, dhantina dhan tur... Noa heke Asur Akhra Radio... Aenegabu, Degabu, Siring Abu...”. (“Come sing, dance, speak, this is Asur Akhra Radio.”)

As the music blares from a black soundbox, a crowd gathers and begins clapping enthusiastically. And why not? It’s a moment of pride.

The youth of the endangered Asur tribe have launched the first-ever mobile radio broadcast in the Asur language, in villages surrounded by hills and forests, about 200 km from Ranchi. In terms of equipment, they only have a computer, mixer, mic, and loud speaker system. There’s no modern studio.

Under the leadership of Chait Asur (Toppo), a retired principal from Jobhipat, Vandana Tete, and Prof. Mahesh Augustin Kujur of Ghaghra, a team including poet Sushma Asur, Roshni Asur, Ajay Asur, Vivekananda Asur, Milen Asur, Manita Asur, and Sukhmania Asur, set up a bench in the middle of the jungle. Sitting around it, they began to sing and speak. That became their studio.

Vandana Tete, who was involved from the conceptualization of the Asur Radio, explains: “The aim is to connect the new generation with their native language.”

While state-run, commercial, and community

radio stations require long licensing processes and expensive equipment, these are luxuries tribal communities can only dream of. But what they do have is hard work and determination, and with that, they’ve launched this weekly radio broadcast. Their only infrastructure is a portable public sound system.

How the Team Works

The team first records content, including songs, history, and current affairs. Then, they travel to eight different weekly village markets (haats) around Netarhat. This happens once a week. *(continued on page 5)*

Community Support Keeps Us Going

Vandna Tete, interviewed in May 2026

AMARC-AP: Why has the Akhra Mobile Radio (*Asur FM*) not transitioned to licensed FM broad-casting?

Vandna Tete: Our radio is run by the *Asur Adivasi* community in Jharkhand, which belongs to the *PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups)*. Like other *PVTGs*, their population is very small, and their economic and educational conditions are not strong. There are the high technical requirements, skills, and costs needed to operate a licensed radio station. It is not feasible for the community to meet these requirements. There are other reasons too: The area where *Akhra Mobile Radio* operates is a mining zone. Second, there has been a proposal since 2019 to establish an army firing field range in the region, which has been consistently opposed by the local *Adivasi* communities. *(continued on page 5)*

Continued from page 4

The initiative began in January at Kotyahat. Each week, they go to a different haat. There, they play the recorded content over a sound system for the Asur villagers to hear.

The Asur Language - On the Brink of Extinction

The Asur tribe, credited with introducing iron to the world, has a population of around 10,000 in Jharkhand. Their Asur language, part of the Austroasiatic Munda language family, is among the 196 endangered languages in India.



According to UNESCO's *World Atlas of Endangered Languages*, Asur is classified as "definitely endangered," meaning the younger generation neither speaks nor understands it. This puts the language at high risk of extinction.

To address this, the *Jharkhandi Bhasha Sahitya Sanskriti Akhra* has launched the *Asur*

Akhra Mobile Radio in collaboration with the Asur communities of Jobhipat and Sakhua Pani in Netarhat, India.



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AMARC-AP: Are you still using the local market based mobile broadcast model, or have you expanded to other formats (digital, recordings, social media)?

Vandna Tete: Yes, we are still using the local market (haat) based mobile broadcasting model. We have also expanded to platforms like *SoundCloud* and *YouTube*, but this has been disrupted as some members have had to leave in search of employment. (continued on page 6)

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AMARC-AP: What are the biggest challenges in sustaining the initiative?

Vandna Tete: One of the major challenges in sustaining and expanding this initiative has been the lack of a proper studio or central space where we can work in all seasons and safely store our limited equipment.

However, there has been some progress in this regard. Villagers, along with local youth who are part of the *SIRB (Special India Reserve Battalion, formed for PVTGs)*, have been repairing an old community building that had fallen into disrepair. We will be able to use this as a studio.

Another key challenge is the lack of technical training.

AMARC-AP: What kind of support would make it easier for initiatives like yours to become sustainable?

Vandna Tete: The core issue is financial constraints, along with a lack of resources and permanent infrastructure. So far, we have been running the radio through community support and volunteers. At times, with the support of organizations like Cultural Survival, we are able to cover some essential expenses and provide small honorariums to volunteers.

However, the lack of consistent financial resources leads to volunteers leaving in search of livelihoods, which is one of our

main challenges. The absence of sustainable funding, limited access to better equipment and other resources, the lack of a permanent structure, and the inability to adequately compensate volunteers are all major barriers for us.

AMARC-AP: Please share examples of why Asur radio matters to the community.

Vandna Tete: Most of the people involved with the radio are not highly educated. Earlier, they did not know how to use smartphones, mainly because they did not have access to one, but now they do and are gradually learning how to use them.

After listening to the radio, people have started reaching out to share their songs, stories, news, fading traditions, and traditional knowledge. We are now working on documenting and publishing this material. This year, three books - on poetry, stories, and ancestral songs - are expected to be published.

Young singers and poets are emerging. There has been an encouraging increase in interest in learning and speaking the language. The earlier reluctance toward playing traditional musical instruments is also fading.

People who are employed and earlier remained distant from the community are now beginning to engage and support it. This shift in mindset itself is very important.

Spotlight on an AMARC-AP member

Radio Sipurennu: A Lifeline for Indonesia's Coastal Women

Launched on 15 September 2021, *Radio Sipurennu* is a women-led initiative based on Sabutung Island, South Sulawesi. It was established during the COVID-19 pandemic to bridge critical gaps in education, health, and communication for remote maritime communities. Its identity is shaped by its strong focus on empowering women and addressing social issues often overlooked in isolated regions.



Photo: Radio Sipurennu, Indonesia

Work & Impact

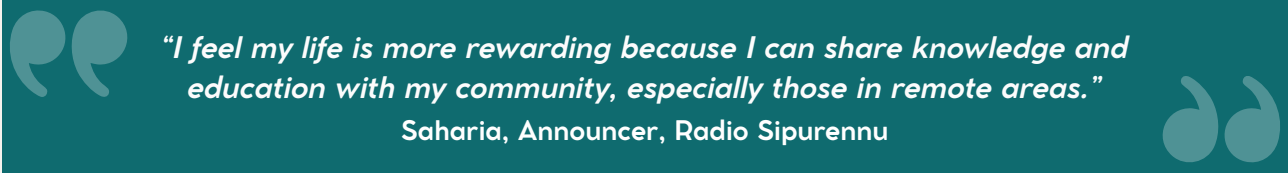
The station prioritizes gender equality and public health. Key initiatives include program campaigns against child marriage and domestic violence, and specialized broadcasts on reproductive health – vital in areas with limited medical facilities. Beyond social advocacy, the radio supports local livelihoods by broadcasting weather reports and market prices for the fishing and farming sectors. During the pandemic, it served as an educational lifeline by facilitating distance learning.

Local Context & Audience

Serving the Pangkep Regency in both Bugis and Indonesian languages, the station reaches a diverse audience of fishers and small-business owners. It actively amplifies marginalized voices by involving them directly as contributors and resource persons, ensuring content remains contextually relevant.

Challenges & Resilience

Geographic isolation presents steep hurdles: limited electricity restricts broadcasting to daytime, and unpredictable weather often disrupts operations. Additionally, the station faces a decline in interest among local youth. Despite these technical and social barriers, *Radio Sipurennu* maintains a consistent, adaptive presence.



Innovation & Participation

Community ownership is central to the station's model; listeners participate in management meetings and program planning. While digital reach is constrained by infrastructure, the station engages the younger generation through on-the-ground activities and partnerships. The radio's cooperation with *AMARC Asia-Pacific* and the NGO *Yayasan Kajian Pberdayaan Masyarakat (YKPM)* further enhances its reach and impact.

Looking Ahead

Radio Sipurennu aims to evolve into a primary platform for climate change awareness and combatting misinformation. Its goal is to empower coastal communities through accurate, context-specific information that supports informed decision-making.

Know Your Community Radio

Name	Radio Sipurennu
Location	Sabutung Island, Mattiro Kanja Village, North Liukang Tupabbiring District, Pangkajene and Islands Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia
Year established & Broadcasting languages	2021 & Bahasa Indonesia and Bugis
Contact info	(+62) 81341555513, sipurennu.fm@gmail.com
Transmission & Coverage population	FM (50 Watts) & 5,000 (approximate)
Total broadcast hours per day	6 hours
Coverage population	5,000 (approximate)
Target audience	Women; Children; Farmers and fishermen
Thematic focus	Gender Equality; Health; Education; Countering fake news; Poverty alleviation

News from the AMARC Network

AMARC-AP Launches Youth-Focused Peacebuilding and Digital Inclusion Initiatives

AMARC Asia-Pacific has launched two complementary initiatives supported by the *Civil Peace Service (CPS)* of *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)* and the *World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)* to strengthen youth participation, peacebuilding, and conflict-sensitive digital communication in Nepal.

The initiatives aim to empower youth, particularly women and marginalized groups, as peace communicators and digital stakeholders through training, mentoring, and community engagement activities. Key components include fellowships and workshops on audio storytelling, podcasting, fact-checking, conflict-sensitive communication, digital rights, online safety, and inclusive digital participation.

AMARC Asia-Pacific Launches YouTube Channel for Community Media

AMARC Asia-Pacific has launched a new YouTube channel to share resources, insights, and updates on community broadcasting across the region.

The channel features videos that bring together regional experts to explore key topics such as the history of community radio, participation models, licensing frameworks, and current challenges like disaster response, misinformation, digital transformation, and inclusive media.



Under the WACC-supported initiative, AMARC-AP will implement the project 'Amplifying Youth Voices: Peacebuilding through Digital Inclusion and Community Communication', focusing on youth-led audio storytelling, digital participation, and community dialogue.

The GIZ/CPS-supported 'Youth Peace Ambassadors' initiative will train young people in conflict-sensitive digital content production while promoting inclusive and non-violent public discourse through community radios and digital platforms.

Both initiatives will be implemented in collaboration with community radios, youth groups, and civil society partners across Nepal throughout 2026.

It also highlights digital storytelling practices and AMARC's work with local broadcasters to counter misinformation through training, dialogue, and participatory approaches. With more content planned, the channel serves as a learning hub for broadcasters, media practitioners, and advocates.

Find out more:

https://www.youtube.com/@AMARC_Asia-Pacific

AMARC-AP and ACORAB Hold Dialogue on the Future Sustainability of Community Radio

AMARC Asia-Pacific and the Community Radio Association of Nepal (ACORAB) jointly organized a workshop on 'Sustainability of Community Radio: Technology Shifts, Community Connections, and Future Pathways' on 19 December 2025 in Sauraha, Chitwan.

The event brought together ACORAB board members and community radio leaders to discuss the future sustainability of community broadcasting in Nepal amid rapid technological and social change.

The discussions focused on the transition from FM broadcasting to internet-based platforms, changing audience behavior, migration of youth, financial pressures, and the growing importance of maintaining strong community connections.



Participants emphasized that while digital platforms offer new opportunities for reaching younger and migrant audiences, FM broadcasting remains essential due to its accessibility, reliability during disasters, and inclusiveness for communities with limited internet access.

The workshop concluded with calls for hybrid broadcasting approaches that combine FM and digital platforms while strengthening local participation, trust, and community ownership.



South Asian Community Broadcasters Strengthen Responses to Misinformation and Conflict

Community broadcasters and media practitioners from South Asia participated in a two-day regional workshop on 'Strengthening Community Radio

Responses to Dis/Mis-information, Conflict, and Gendered Harms', held on 15-16 December 2025. The workshop focused on strengthening the role of community radio in addressing misinformation, promoting conflict-sensitive communication, and advancing gender-responsive broadcasting.

The sessions were facilitated by regional media practitioners and AMARC Asia-Pacific leaders from different countries. Dr. Ramnath Bhat, India led discussions on conflict-sensitive broadcasting and misinformation; Arti Jaiman, India facilitated sessions on gendered dimensions of misinformation and communication harms; Raymund Villanueva, the Philippines guided discussions on strengthening cross-

border community radio networks; and Deepak Adhikari, Nepal conducted practical sessions on fact-checking, AI-generated misinformation, explanatory journalism, rumor mapping, and ethical community reporting.

Supported by the *Civil Peace Service of Brot für die Welt*, the workshop combined

WIN-AP Promotes Safer Community Radio Spaces for Women Broadcasters

Women community broadcasters from Nepal participated in a one-day workshop on 'Community Radio for Conflict Resolution' organized by the *Women International Network Asia-Pacific (WIN-AP)* on 14 December 2025 in Kathmandu.

Facilitated by Arti Jaiman, *WIN Representative for Asia-Pacific*, the workshop focused on challenges affecting women broadcasters, including discrimination, abuse of authority, sexual harassment, consent, and workplace boundaries.

Using participatory methods such as group discussions, anonymous experience-sharing, surveys, and reflective exercises, participants explored practical ways to prevent and respond to workplace discrimination and harassment. Discussions also highlighted the importance of institutional support systems, reporting mechanisms, and safer

presentations, discussions, role-play exercises, and hands-on verification activities. It concluded with participants identifying practical strategies to strengthen community resilience, improve fact-checking skills, promote inclusive storytelling, and enhance regional collaboration among community radios.



workplace environments.

Participants further shared expectations from *WIN-AP* and discussed how the network could support member stations in building more inclusive and secure broadcasting spaces.

WIN-AP is a parallel movement within the AMARC network that works to strengthen the participation, leadership, safety, and rights of women engaged in community broadcasting across the Asia-Pacific region.

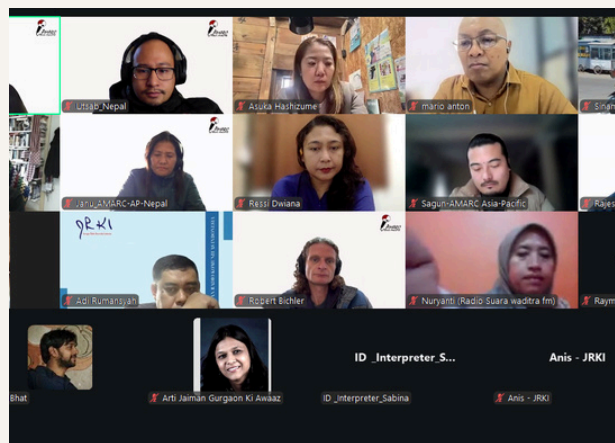
Indonesian Community Broadcasters Discuss Digital Transition, Policy Challenges, and Disaster Communication

AMARC Asia-Pacific convened an online consultation with Indonesian community broadcasters and sector leaders on 4 December 2025 to discuss the current state of community broadcasting in Indonesia and identify priorities for future regional interventions. The consultation brought together representatives of the *Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI)*, researchers, and community media practitioners to contribute inputs to AMARC-AP's forthcoming regional roadmap for community broadcasting.

The discussion focused on the challenges community radios face in transitioning toward multiplatform broadcasting, including streaming, podcasts, social media, and digital applications, while maintaining their grassroots identity and public service role. Participants highlighted concerns related to high licensing costs, limited internet access, lack of digital infrastructure, and the need for stronger youth participation in community media.

The consultation opened with a presentation on the growing pressures facing community radios across the region, including migration, climate disasters, shrinking resources, and rapid technological change.

Adi Rumansyah and Dr. Ressi Dwiana presented on Indonesia's evolving broadcasting environment, including proposed



changes to the Broadcasting Law and their implications for community radio.

Participants also stressed the continuing importance of community radio during disasters. Discussions referenced recent floods in Sumatra and Central Java, where communication systems collapsed and community radio was viewed as a critical emergency communication tool.

The consultation concluded with calls for stronger regional coordination, policy advocacy, digital capacity-building, and sustained support for community broadcasters adapting to changing technological and social realities.

Regional Peacebuilding Partners Meet in Kathmandu to Strengthen Community Media Collaboration

AMARC Asia-Pacific organized the 'Regional Civil Society Peacebuilding Network Partners' Meeting 2025' in Kathmandu, Nepal, from 10–15 October 2025 with support from the *Civil Peace Service of Brot für die Welt*. The meeting brought together civil society and community media representatives from Southeast and South Asia to discuss peacebuilding, digital transformation, and regional cooperation through community media.

The six-day program included thematic discussions, peer exchanges, and a field

visit to *Radio Sindhu 105 MHz* in Sindhupalchok to observe how community radio contributes to local dialogue, inclusion, and post-disaster recovery.

Key sessions included presentations by Arti Jaiman on 'Internet-First Radio' and by Dr. Lily Thapa, Member, *Nepal Human Rights Commission* on gender justice and peacebuilding. Participants emphasized the importance of digital innovation, gender inclusion, media literacy, and stronger regional solidarity in responding to misinformation and shrinking civic spaces.

The meeting concluded with commitments to strengthen cross-border collaboration, support hybrid community broadcasting models, and promote peace-oriented communication initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region.

This newsletter is produced by Utsab Khadka & Robert M. Bichler for AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Office, Kathmandu.

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