

AMARC Asia-Pacific NEWSLETTER

Year 13, August 2017



Editorial

Dear Reader,

It feels great to be back with another issue of the AMARC Asia-Pacific Newsletter!

Lack of community media friendly legislation accompanied by constant oppression of media and freedom of expression continue to pose serious challenges for the growth of community radios (CR) in the region.

The absence of legislative acknowledgment of the social contribution of CR in turn gives rise to financial sustainability challenges that hinder the path of natural growth of the CR sector.

Difficulties caused by a rapidly changing technological landscape coupled with geographical isolation are also causing problems related to the sustainability of CR.

In spite of these challenges, strength gained out of community ownership and participation in content development have empowered local communities to move forward development agendas, achieve inclusiveness and participation, peace building, good governance and accountability through CR.

CR persists because it is rooted in the communities, highlighting the importance of social sustainability as its key aspect.

Even as we continue to struggle to achieve CR friendly policies and regulations, to promote widespread participation and access, and to develop CR as an important contributor for local development, we celebrate the success of community broadcasters in different parts

of the region and the world, that inspire us to pursue the path of community broadcasting in the first place.

In this issue, we present success stories of community radios and the challenges they face. We also have stories of new initiatives such as the ComDev Asia Initiative – an effort towards linking community radios to family farmers of the Asia-Pacific Region.

Across the length and breadth of the region, women continue their struggle to live a life of equality and dignity and to use CR towards that goal. This issue continues to highlight the role of women in community broadcasting and the contribution community radios can make towards women's empowerment. This time we have stories from Indonesia and Fiji highlighting different ways in which women are engaging with CR.

A short story from Bangladesh where CR stations are discouraging a social malice speaks volumes about the potential of local broadcasters.

This issue also carries the story about a unique experiment called 'CR hosting community centers,' that was carried out in Nepal in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake.

And there is more.....

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue as much as we did putting it together.

With warm wishes, Suman Basnet.

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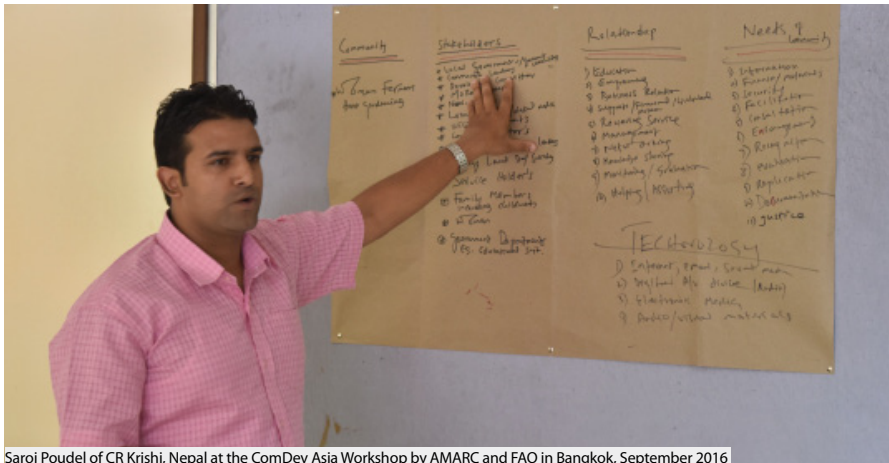
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Linkage between Community Radios and Family Farmers to be Strengthened

By Prativa Chhetri



Saraj Poudel of CR Krishi, Nepal at the ComDev Asia Workshop by AMARC and FAO in Bangkok, September 2016

World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the College of Development Communication (CDC) of University of the Philippines Los Baños (CDC-UPLB) have renewed their commitment for jointly promoting communication for development as a key element in agriculture and rural development. An existing MOU between AMARC and FAO since 2008 was recently renewed to further strengthen collaborations and activities at regional and global levels.

AMARC has been selected as the main partner for linking with community radios (CR) working in rural areas, especially in areas where rural agriculture and family farming is dominant. AMARC also brings into this collaboration the capacity of facilitating interactions with and participation of other local partners.

The main goal of this initiative is to enhance capacity of institutions and particularly community radios in the region to include communication for development as a key factor for sustainable development. Improving communication between family farming units and local radio stations is a key element of this initiative.

FAO and AMARC Asia-Pacific with support from CDC-UPLB have also agreed to renew the ComDev Asia Initiative (www.comdevasia.org) as a regional platform

to document experiences and promote knowledge sharing and joint initiatives in communication for development as applied to agriculture and rural development.

The Asia-Pacific region comprises 60% of the world's population. 70% of the world's family farmers – also known as small scale farmers or subsistence farmers – come from this region. Family farmers produce 80% of the region's food. The ComDev Asia Initiative is about bringing community radios closer to the family farmers, speaking on their behalf, becoming relevant to them, and contributing towards greater food autonomy and food security at local levels.

Rural communities need reliable and accessible information sources to be able to adapt to new challenges and improve their livelihoods. At the same time, local producers and their organizations need to articulate their demands and establish two-way communication processes with policy makers which the ComDev Asia Initiative will undertake through promotion and advocacy for effective rural communication strategies.

AMARC-AP, UN-FAO and CDC-UPLB will be organizing capacity building workshops, e-consultations and broadcast campaigns with focus on good practices, implementing inclusive and demand-driven ComDev services in the agricultural sector, and improving the participation of community media and community based organizations in support of family farmers.



Mario Acunzo, FAO Communication for Development Officer spoke to AMARC Asia-Pacific about the ComDev Asia Initiative and the objectives of partnering with AMARC:

What is FAO's objective for pursuing ComDev Asia Initiative?

FAO considers communication as a central element of agricultural and sustainable rural development. Access to information, dialogue and knowledge sharing among various rural actors are essential for improving family farming and providing small holders with opportunities to improve their livelihoods and face emerging challenges such as food insecurity and climate change. Communication for Development (ComDev) combines participatory approaches and communication methods, and integrates the use of community media and the ICTs focusing on the appropriation of communication process and media by local communities. Within these frameworks, FAO promotes partnerships with community media in developing countries as a strategy to enhance local capacities and to advocate for rural communication services as part of agricultural and rural development policies. ComDev Asia is a regional initiative established as result of the partnership between AMARC and FAO.

What are the advantages of partnering with AMARC Asia-Pacific for the Initiative?

AMARC Asia-Pacific has proven to be a solid regional hub that provides assistance to several radio federations and community radios through the region. It is a valid channel to upgrade the capacities of those entities as communication centers, enhancing their skills in strategic communication planning and monitoring and improving agricultural knowledge systems linking up community radios with research centers, extension services and farmers' organizations.

A comparative advantage of ComDev Asia is the important work done in documenting evidence of the role of community media on the ground and advocating for regulatory frameworks and policies that recognize their role in

Continued on page 3

development. Those are elements that will greatly contribute to the launching of ComDev Asia initiative, which is being carried out in collaboration with AMARC Asia-Pacific.

What will be FAO's role in taking forward the Initiative in the coming days and in longer term?

Within the context of ComDev Asia, FAO will act mainly as a broker linking up FAO projects and decentralized office, agricultural institutions and farmers' organizations with community media and community radio network. The FAO ComDev team will provide guidance in relation to the use of communication methods and tools as well as in the design of ComDev strategies at the regional and national level. Finally, special attention will also be given to fostering south-south cooperation in the field of ComDev.

Community Radio Host Centers for Survivors of Earthquake

By Poonam Maharjan



Local women of Gorkha district in Nepal playing musical instruments and singing during one of their visits to the Community Center hosted by Radio Gorkha.



Experts talking to the community members about nutritious foods at a Mobile Community Center organized by Radio Namobuddha in Kavre, Nepal.

In a unique experimentation, five community radios in as many districts of Nepal hosted Community Centers within their station premises from August 2015—four months after the 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit the country—until March 2017. Inspired by the Japanese experience of running community centers after the Fukushima disaster in 2011, the main purpose of the Centers was to provide a physical space for the earthquake survivors to spend some peaceful time over tea and coffee, help each other forget the suffering the disaster brought upon them and promote community healing.

Initially, the Centers functioned as information hubs and the radio staff informed visitors about their entitlements and other relevant issues. Over time, the Centers evolved into spaces where community members came to sing and dance, read newspapers and use Internet, hold meetings and discussions on issues concerning the community, or just be.

In addition to hosting Community Centers at the stations, Radio Namobuddha and Radio Dhading also organized mobile Community Centers. They took along doctors, nutritionists and engineers to address queries of community members who were not able to visit the Center at the station. Such visits were opportunities for collecting sound bytes for the radios to use for content development.

The Centers deepened the relationship between the radios and community

members and instilled a sense of ownership towards the radios. This in turn led to community members finding it much easier to share their concerns and problems with the radio staff than anyone else in the community. The radio staff too made it a point to listen and help despite working under tight deadlines with limited human resources.

During the final evaluation of the project carried out in March 2017, it was learnt from the radio staff that issues raised by visitors ranged from ones that affected the whole community to ones that were very personal in nature. For example, community members from Neupane village in Dolakha district visited the Community Center hosted by Radio Sailung to complain about wild monkeys coming in groups of hundreds and destroying crops. The radio produced news and other programs regarding the issue which prompted the District Forest Office to take immediate action.

On the other hand, a local woman in Chautara of Sindhupalchowk district visited the Community Center hosted by Radio Sindhu to request them to help find her lost goat. "A goat is a precious asset for a farmer's family and I could see the anxiety on her face. We immediately prepared a notice about the lost goat and aired it on our radio. The goat was found soon after," said Dil Maya Khadka, in-charge of the Center at Radio Sindhu.

Community Centers used the connection with community members

to collect and disseminate information, design programs based on the visitors' recommendations, and record the visitors' voices in all forms like interview, folklores, religious *shloka*, etc. Similarly local journalists also recognized the Centers as an important news source of the region. They often visited the Centers to establish sources and look for human interest stories.

Government agencies, NGOs and community based organizations also identified Community Centers as a space for sharing insights and promoting development agendas more effectively. This led the Centers to collaborate with many of such organizations, which in turn paved way for the Centers' sustainability.

In the final review meeting of the project, Station Manager of Radio Namobuddha, Bhakta Syangtan shared: "The earthquake shook us in numerous ways, and although the Community Centers focused on addressing problems of the earthquake survivors, we soon realized that there were other problems that affected people since much before the disaster. That's why we kept an open mind and dealt with all sorts of issues that were received in the Centers."

The Community Center Project - implemented by AMARC Asia-Pacific was funded by 'Shapla Neer - Citizens' Committee in Japan for Overseas Support'. It ended in March 2017.

Interview

Toyoaki Komatsu, Shapla Neer

Photo: AMARC-AP



Komatsu san (left) with Sano Mahadev, a community member in Sindhupalchowk district, Nepal.

What inspired Shapla Neer to support community centers in the earthquake affected areas of Nepal?

After the earthquake hit Nepal, we saw lots of governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in relief works. Even as we tried to support the ongoing initiatives, we realized that there was more to be done. We met many people affected by the calamity who had not received any help, and they didn't know where to go to claim help as promised by the state. Inspired by the community center we had established in Fukushima, Japan,

after the 2011 earthquake, we decided to open such centers here too. The basic idea of opening the center was to bridge communication gap between community members—especially those affected by the earthquake, and the stakeholders.

What do you see as the main benefits of community radios managing community centers? How are they different from the ones set up in Japan?

In Fukushima, the community center was established near a big shopping mall, so that people who came to buy grocery and other things would drop in at the center out of curiosity. The strategy was successful and an increasing number of persons started to visit the center. In Nepal, as the community centers are managed by the community radios, the users feel more connected and have a sense of ownership of the space.

By having the community radios host the community centers, community members have a space where they can connect with each other and have the community radio raise their issues through its broadcasts. Similarly, community radios hosting the center have also utilized the space as an

information center where community members are their source of information to produce news and other programs. This has helped attract stakeholders' attention towards the issues and concerns of the community members.

What has setting up community centers in Nepal taught you?

Setting up a community center was a fairly new concept here and we didn't have extensive experience regarding this either, so it has been a great learning experience. When we started this project, we were not sure about what sorts of people would visit the centers and what all would come out of it. But now we know that such centers can play a vital role in bridging the communication gap between communities and stakeholders. Nepal is still prone to natural hazards, so it's a good idea for other I/NGOs, CBOs, and government bodies to help establish more community centers.

Toyoaki Komatsu is the Secretary General of Shapla Neer and Immediate Past Country Representative for Nepal.

Community Radios in Indonesia Promote Women's Empowerment

Reported by: JRKI

Community radios in Indonesia, under the leadership of the Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI) have renewed commitment for promoting women's empowerment through community radios. JRKI is also actively developing partnerships with governmental and non-governmental agencies for forwarding the agenda of women's empowerment through community radios.

Explaining the JRKI's initiative, Sinam M Sutarno, Chairman of JRKI, has cited the role of community radios in women's empowerment as stated in the Toronto Platform 1995. The platform encourages community radios to increase women's access to the media, including women's participation in decision-making and management of the media, and to use media in promoting women's active participation and equality in development.

In December 2016, the Ministry for Women Empowerment and Child Protection in collaboration with JRKI conducted a two-day workshop on producing women empowerment and child protection radio content. The workshop saw participation of the representatives of 25 community radios.

Speaking at the workshop, Fatahilah Rais, Deputy Assistant of Media Participation,



Participants at the workshop on producing women empowerment and child protection radio content.

Ministry for Women Empowerment and Child Protection said that information on how to prevent or how to report violence against women and children is hard to find, especially in rural areas. As a result, many cases of violence are not reported. He further stressed on the importance of community radio's involvement in providing information to the rural community, and opined that the role of the community radio needs to be supported by the government—in this case by the Ministry for Women Empowerment and Child Protection.

Speaking at the workshop, Sinam M Sutarno stated that the main purpose of the

workshop was to improve participants' capacity in understanding issues of violence against women and children. "Participants should be able to use information from the workshop to produce radio content that can effectively discourage malpractices in the society," he said.

In the workshop, the participants were also facilitated to produce three public service advertisements with three specific themes: Stop Violence against Women, Village Budgeting for Women Empowerment, and Women's Right on Reproduction Health.

Indonesia

Hapsari FM: Community Radio for Women Empowerment

By Idha Saraswati

Since 2009, Hapsari FM, a community radio at Lubuk Pakam, Deli Serdang, in North Sumatra, Indonesia, has been on its path to empower women through on-air and off-air radio programs.

Advocating against violence against women and promoting women's economic empowerment are among its main focus areas. For eight years, Hapsari FM and its volunteers have given their best for the upliftment of women in Lubuk Pakam. Their efforts are recognized and appreciated well beyond Deli Serdang; in 2016, Siti Khadijah, Manager of Hapsari FM received SK Trimurti Award from the Indonesian Independence Journalist Alliance (AJI).

In this brief interview, Siti shares her story about Hapsari FM, and why community radio still matters despite advancement in information and communication technology.

When was Hapsari FM on air for the first time?

It was in 2009. Hapsari FM Radio is one of the programs under Hapsari—a non-governmental organization founded in 1990 in North Sumatra. It started its radio program in 1997—much before Hapsari FM Radio was established.

How many staff does Hapsari FM have right now?

We have around 10-20 people to run Hapsari FM. We accept anyone who wants to join, and they join as volunteer, so we do not pay them. Most of our volunteers are women.

How about your target listeners?

All community members around Lubuk Pakam are our listeners. However, women in that area are our primary target listeners.

What does Hapsari FM actually do for the women?

We are now focusing on our campaign to stop violence against women. We do so by organizing several group meetings, on-air program, hearings with the relevant stakeholders, and also provide support for violence survivors. Besides that, we are also continuing with our women's economic empowerment programs.

Tell us about the kind of on-air programs you run in support of your campaign.

We have talkshows supporting our campaign. Besides, we play several jingles, and our radio presenters also disseminate key messages related with our campaign during their regular programs.

So far, in its efforts for empowering women, what are the challenges Hapsari FM has faced?

One of the main challenges is that when our male listeners hear information about



women suffering from violence, more often than not, they blame the victim instead of the perpetrators.

Hapsari FM decided to focus on Lubuk Pakam since the very beginning. Was that decision made because of the many cases of violence in the area?

Yes, the number of violence against women in the area is quite high even today. The problem is, many women think that it is taboo to talk about violence that takes place inside their homes. They do not have courage to share their problems. We wanted to encourage and facilitate them to speak against all sorts of violence, but primarily, domestic violence.

Last year you received an award from AJI Indonesia. How was that?

In 2015, a member of AJI Medan asked me to send him my CV. But at that time, he did not say anything about the award. Several months later, another AJI member interviewed me. He said that my name was on the SK Trimurti Award's nomination list.

This is the second award. Lely Zailani, the founder of Hapsari FM Radio had earlier

won the Ashoka Award in 2000 for her idea and effort to use radio to run women empowerment campaigns.

How did it feel to receive the award?

To be honest, I never expected any award. But it feels good to know that what I have been doing is being appreciated by other people. I will continue to focus on women empowerment by providing a wide space for them to express their concerns and opinion. Every woman can talk about anything at Hapsari FM Radio.

Considering the recent development of information and communication technology, do you think community radio is still important, especially for your target audience?

Yes, it is still important. We deal with rural women who have limited access to technology, therefore radio is more relevant. They can listen to our programs while doing their daily chores.

Community radio in Bangladesh speaks up for domestic girl workers

By Toyoaki Komatsu, Shapla Neer

Community radios in Bangladesh are collaborating with Shapla Neer for disseminating messages about domestic girl workers to raise mass awareness about its implications on the child and the society as a whole.

After successfully broadcasting informative contents over partner stations, Shapla Neer designed a radio drama series on the same issue to generate more understanding among people in the grassroots who send their girls to work as domestic help. While collecting feedback, several people mentioned that they had always viewed this as normal, and never considered it as a social problem.

Boshir Ahmed, in-charge of Radio Chilmari 99.2 FM said that raising the issue of girl

domestic workers through community workers was a novel concept. "Since it is so common in Bangladesh to have girls as domestic help, we did not think of it as an 'issue.' We did not think of the many underlying problems related with this 'culture,'" he said.

After having decided to raise awareness about this sensitive issue in partnership with local community radios, Shapla Neer first arranged an orientation session with the staffs of radio centers on Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy 2015.

Shapla Neer has been working with six radio stations this year. Two radio drama series and two talk shows will be put on air to raise awareness through the partner community radio stations.



News

PIL on FM Radio: Government Reply Sought

July 2017, India: A public interest litigation (PIL) was filed by Common Cause seeking the quashing of the unreasonable provisions in the policy guidelines and grant of permission agreements of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of Government of India which prohibit the broadcast of news and current affairs content on FM and community radio stations.

On January 12, 2017, counsel for Union of India (UOI) sought time to file the counter affidavit. On February 14, 2017, the Court observed that the UOI's counter affidavit highlighted the gradual progress of the policy guidelines in this regard. The counter affidavit contended that the revised guidelines permitted community and FM radio stations to broadcast news and current affairs sourced exclusively from the All India Radio, in its original

form or translated into a local language/dialect. The Court, however, felt that the government should consider extending the content of news and current affairs which was already in public domain. The Court granted six weeks to the govt. counsel to obtain instructions. This matter was posted for hearing on April 5, 2017.

Common Cause in 2013 had filed a petition seeking the quashing of the provisions of the Policy Guidelines and of the Grant of Permission Agreements framed by the Government which prohibited private FM Radio and Community Radio stations from broadcasting their own news and current affairs programs on the same footing as television and print media.

(Reproduced with permission from Common Cause, <http://www.commoncause.in/>)

Workshop organized on 'Raising Public Accountability through Community Radios'



June 2017, Kathmandu: Thirty community radio broadcasters selected from districts affected by the 2015 earthquake in Nepal learnt about disaster management communication, hazard, vulnerabilities, public accountability and media, and the relation between media and humanitarian organizations at a capacity building training workshop organized by AMARC Asia-Pacific with the support of World Association of Christian Communication (WACC). The five-day training workshop was titled "Community Radios Intervening on Behalf of Earthquake Affected Communities" and was held in June 2017 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The capacity building training workshop aimed at enhancing the competence of the community radio broadcasters to not only serve the information needs of the local

communities but also make interventions on their behalf to improve the benefits of the state-led reconstruction process.

The capacity building training workshop helped the community radio broadcasters understand the need to ensure preparedness amongst themselves and do the required homework well in advance in order to warrant smooth flow of information in the aftermath of any disaster. They are also working towards ensuring accountability and good governance at local level through their radio programs.

Another notable feature of the training workshop was the encouraging number of women participation. AMARC, in line with its commitment to gender equality in all its activities, ensured more women participants in the training despite majority of the early applicants being men.

AMARC Asia-Pacific coordinates community radio study tour by Bhutanese community broadcasters



Community broadcasters from Bhutan at Krishi Radio, Dhading, Nepal. Also seen are station manager and other members of Radio Krishi.

June 2017, Kathmandu: A team of seven community radio broadcasters led by representatives of the Tarayana Foundation and Read Bhutan visited community radios in Nepal in an observation tour. They visited radio stations that differed in terms of location, thematic focus areas, management and ownership structures, and participation. The team was mainly interested in learning about sustainability of community radio stations and participation of local community members. The community radio sector in Bhutan is only a few years old and it is trying to learn from good practices of community radio in different parts of the Asia-Pacific region. Last year, AMARC Asia-Pacific coordinated a similar visit by Bhutanese policy makers and community broadcasters to Indonesia.

Introductory CLP workshop for Nepali CR broadcasters



Photo: AMARC-AP

May 2017, Kathmandu: Anushi Agrawal of MARAA, India held a day long introductory workshop on Community Learning Program (CLP) for representatives of community radio stations in Nepal. The workshop was held in Kathmandu in May 2017. It covered a general introduction of the CLP process and ways in which it could be used in the Nepali context.



Kristin Slesazek of Bread for the World (BFTW) visited community radio stations and temporary settlements in Kathmandu valley to meet earthquake survivors. BFTW supported WACC to carry out the program with AMARC Asia-Pacific.

News



Photo: AMARC-AP

Exchange participants Saki and Naiema from Bangladesh and Krishna and Sona from Nepal with Prativa at the AMARC Asia-Pacific office in Kathmandu.

First Round of Bangladesh – Nepal Exchange of Community Radio Broadcasters Started

March 2017, Kathmandu: Two community radio broadcasters each from Bangladesh and Nepal are currently participating in the first round of an exchange program support by FK Norway – Exchange for development.

Participants from both countries will work with CR stations in the host country for six months to learn and also share from their experiences. At the same time, exchange participants will contribute towards the crafting of Community Learning Program (CLP) handbook for community broadcasters, which will be produced at the end of the third round of exchange.

Indigenous CR Network formed in Nepal



March 2017, Kathmandu: An Indigenous CR Network has been formed in Nepal by broadcasters and stations working with the objective of promoting rights of the indigenous people. The ICRN membership currently comprises 20 community radio stations. “To work with communities of indigenous people towards solving challenges faced

by them through peaceful means and to further strengthen mainstreaming of their concerns and rights through community radios is our main objective,” said Jagat Dong, Chairman of ICRN. “Our primary aim is to encourage members of indigenous communities, especially women and dalits to join community radios. We will be engaging in advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building to achieve our objectives,” he further said.

For further details, please contact: indigenousradionet@gmail.com

Community Radios for Disaster Risk Reduction in Indonesia

February 2017, Jakarta: Four AMARC members in the Asia-Pacific region -- FMYY of Japan, JRKI, COMBINE Resource Institution and University of Atma Jaya Yogyakarta of Indonesia have embarked on a collaborative project on ‘Enhancement of disaster risk reduction capacities utilizing community radios on the basis of government-residents’ collaborations in Indonesia.’ The project, which officially began from April 2017, is being aided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

AMARC Asia-Pacific is represented in the project steering committee by its board member Imam Prakoso. Imam’s presence in the project will ensure that experiences and knowledge accumulated by AMARC-AP on community radio vis-à-vis disaster Risk reduction benefits the new project.

The project aims to establish replicable examples of disaster risk reduction through community radios in the selected project areas, with the aim of scaling up later.



Photo: ACORAB

Subas Khatiwada, newly elected President of ACORAB

ACORAB Elects New Executive Committee

January 2017, Kathmandu: The Sixth National Convention of Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) Nepal held in Kathmandu on January 7, 2017 elected a new executive committee under the leadership of Subas Khatiwada as the President of the committee.

ACORAB also expanded federal wings by electing seven federal executive committees comprising eleven members of all seven federal states of Nepal. A three-member Central Audit Committee has also been elected. A total of 278 community radio representatives participated in the convention and the assembly. The newly elected National executive committee will work for a term of three years.

FemTALK: Radio is Us!

By Sian Rolls, with the femLINKpacific team

“In May 2004, as the then Coordinator of femLINKpacific, I witnessed a new reality – our first suitcase radio broadcast,” reflected Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKpacific’s Executive Producer-Director ahead of a month-long commemoration of World Radio Day on FemTALK89FM. “That broadcast hosted by student volunteers brought the diversity of Suva-based

Continued on page 8





civil society together – human rights and disability activists, ecumenical groups and the Fiji Media Watch – they all became part of a monthly broadcast.”

“In that journey since then, I have often been asked about our audience. Our community radio approach with FemTALK89FM has been that our target audience, the women, in rural communities are defining the content.”

This has resulted in investing in a rural community media network, resourcing conveners, correspondents and production meetings. Radio is reaching the women because it’s their program.

“Since femLINKpacific’s early days, I was putting in practice my personal beliefs that amplifying women’s peace and security via a media platform would enable more women to feel confident enough to discuss their issues in a safe space that wasn’t commercially driven but for and by women,” said Tabua Salato, femLINKpacific’s General Manager.

Salato is not alone in her beliefs:

“In the early days, when we just had a tape recorder, I embraced community radio as a tool to engage women, record their voices and document their narratives,” continued Adi Vasulevu, femLINKpacific’s convener for the Northern division. “This was key as Fiji was emerging out of conflict at the time.”

“We needed to break the silence, so we created an enabling space where women’s thoughts, voices and ideas mattered.”

“FemTALK89FM is the only platform where space is given to the women as well as other minority groups in the community,” added Losana Derenalagi, one of femLINKpacific’s conveners in the Western division. “From the mat, it amplifies and increases their visibility as leaders in their community.”

Look At My Abilities, hosted by women from disability networks, continues as a weekly show since 2013. We also have Rainbow Connections, the launch of which coincided with the International Day against

Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) 2013 with our LGBT allies.

Investing in the future

Fane Boseiwaqa, now a convener in the Western division, started out as a young woman, out of school and looking for something to do. A wife, mother and leader in her own right today, she recalled the investment in her over a decade ago.

“As a founding member of the Generation Next project (2007-2011), I was given the confidence and felt empowered as a young woman to have a voice and speak out on the issues that women and young people faced in the community,” she said. “The suitcase radio station, travelling around Fiji, was a platform for the women to come together and have a safe space.”

Sulueti Waqa also began her community radio journey as a volunteer. Encouraged by her mother in the Western division, Waqa started as a volunteer in the capital city and is now a key member of the team in the Northern division’s Labasa Community Media Centre.

“It is not only a tool to educate the women, but also the policy makers so that they are aware of the issues in the community,” she shared. “It has also helped me develop my understanding of other technology – not just using a tape recorder, which is sometimes the most accessible and appropriate technology – but finding new ways and new equipment to document, compile and share the voices of women in all their diversities.”

Not only have we seen the value and power of community radio as women through our networks grow, but ourselves.

“At 15, I saw my mother and Sharon Rolls broadcasting at the Labasa market with rural women singing into a strange-looking machine,” said Lucille Chute, femLINKpacific’s Program Assistant based at the Northern division’s Labasa Community Media Centre and Adi Vasulevu’s daughter. “When I asked my mother, I was so excited to find out that it was a suitcase radio station where you could speak, share your stories and even sing – which would be broadcasted on the radio.”

“We would be visited by the suitcase radio before we got our very own in 2011, becoming the first and only radio station on Vanua Levu. It brought together all the rural women; they were afraid, shy and silent, but they kept coming to talk and share.”

As we embark on the 13th year of FemTALK89FM, we celebrate all that we have been able to achieve and our vibrant network of women in all their diversities. We commemorated the World Radio Day on February 13, but it most definitely is not just a one-day event. Our radio broadcasts say ‘Radio is You’ everyday.

For more information

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