



## AMARC Asia-Pacific

# NEWSLETTER

## Message

Dear friends and partners,

I am aware of the monumental challenges that all of you are facing in addressing the crisis – risking your own lives to keep your radio stations functional. There are additional challenges of reduced income and revenue. The link between state and society is weakened, leading to problems in governance, lack of information, misinformation and so on. At the same time, I also am constantly inspired by your creativity and your will to keep going. The current crisis is not just the COVID-19 virus but also how the virus has revealed all the existing weaknesses of our society-whether it is economic inequality or social discrimination.



Governments and international institutions are struggling to find a cure and undoubtedly it will be found in the near future. Yet, once we have seen what the crisis has revealed to us about ourselves, we cannot forget it, nor can we pretend to go back to the old normal. The task is on all of us to think about what the new normal should look like. Such a social re-imagination of the future cannot be done from above. It is a task to be done from below.

Who gets heard and what is said are both indispensable for us to collectively understand what the crisis means to us - in terms of how we interpret its practical and broader significance for our lives. In such a task I believe, community broadcasters are absolutely crucial. Regardless of what changes are taking place at the macro levels, all of you will be redefining what it means to be a 'community' in a time of crisis. I want to reassure you that we are doing our best to support you in any and every possible way and will continue doing so. I wish you the best for your stations as well as for your personal health and well-being!

*Ramnath Bhat, President, AMARC Asia-Pacific*

## Editorial

Dear readers,

We are returning with a new issue of the AMARC Asia-Pacific newsletter at a rather difficult time. The world is under the seize of a pandemic that is beyond our worst imaginations. As of now, more than 350,000 human lives have been lost, while there has been a devastating impact on millions of livelihoods.

The impact of the pandemic on community radios is distressing. On the one hand, journalists and broadcasters, as frontline workers, are personally exposed to risks of the infection. On the other hand, community radio stations are confronting mortal threats on their incomes, making it hard for them to conduct work as usual. Even as the stations strive to stay on air, lack of income, and logistical difficulties is pushing them towards closure.

There are other concerns, too, that expand beyond the present public health crisis.

Almost half of the world's population lives in the Asia-Pacific region. It is estimated that the region is home to nearly 900 million of the world's poor. In several countries across the region, community radios are the only viable medium of reaching out to the public with vital information to fight the dreadful pandemic. Losing community stations will mean losing the most critical communication link with the largest portion of the most vulnerable population. That would be a dangerous situation for humankind. Therefore, AMARC Asia-Pacific has called upon governments of the region to set up support mechanisms so that we can ensure that community radios are not compelled to pull out the plugs.

It is in times of great difficulty that the onus of ensuring freedom of expression at the grassroots, lies on the community radios. While the sector's support to national and local governments in initiatives aimed at emboldening public health condition is unconditional, community radios have to remain vigilant that the pandemic is not used as an excuse for the abuse of human rights.

Recent statements from leading world human rights bodies have warned against governments failing to uphold human rights obligations in their responses to the COVID-19, especially by limiting access to information about the spread of the virus and implementing restrictions in discriminatory or arbitrary ways. In such circumstances, the role of community radios become vital to disseminating public health messages. Community radios must continue questioning actions of the government to ensure that people's rights and freedom are not short changed.

AMARC Asia-Pacific is proud of the work its members have carried out despite the difficulties. We thank all our partners, donors and supporters for keeping their faith intact!

Yours truly,

*Suman Basnet, Regional Director, AMARC Asia-Pacific*

# Cover Story

## AMARC Asia-Pacific Campaign against COVID-19

On April 21, 2020, AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional office launched a campaign against the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was launched with the objective of providing community radios a platform for accessing credible and validated information about the Pandemic for informing communities to protect their health, lives and livelihoods.

The Campaign website has scripts of public service announcements that can be translated and broadcast by local broadcasters. Partner radios have been reminded to repeat each message for at least one week, which is important to help listeners remember a message and act on it. Two types of messages are available: general PSA scripts--do's & don'ts of COVID-19 and PSA scripts for the vulnerable audience.

Partner radios have been advised to adapt and phrase the announcements in a way that is relevant to local conditions. Radio stations have been reminded to repeat each message for at least one



Photo Credit: Community Radio Naf 99.2



Community Radio Khayae FM, Myanmar. Photo Credit: AMARC-AP

week, which is important to help people remember a message and act accordingly. The ongoing campaign has so far has attracted more than 50 community radios from 13 countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

The Campaign is already guaranteed to reach 1 million listeners across the region, which includes vulnerable people and communities such as women with special conditions, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, refugees and migrants, family farmers, those involved in the informal economy, those with inadequate social services, those lacking other sources of information and those with limited capacity to cope and adapt.

In this emergency phase of the pandemic, the Campaign against COVID-19 is focusing on messages that are short and simple to understand. As the pandemic situation evolves further, AMARC Asia-Pacific will help community radios develop diverse kinds of longer format radio contents. The campaign is supported by the

Kathmandu, New Delhi and Bangkok offices of UNESCO, Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC), Shaplaneer Japan, Heinrich Böll Stiftung South-East Asia Regional Office, International Media Support (IMS), BHN Association Japan, UNDP, UN-FAO and Asia Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Bangkok.

Community radios across the Asia-Pacific region are working hard to help communities deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic. Community radio broadcasters have risked their lives to serve up to date information to their communities. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) is proud of the admirable work of its members. The Campaign is an initiative aimed at complementing the work of community radios against the COVID-19.

Visit the campaign website at: [amarc-ap.org/COVID-19](http://amarc-ap.org/COVID-19)

# ComDev Asia and AMARC-AP: Promoting awareness against COVID-19



As part of the Participatory Communication Plan, ComDev Asia is organizing, together with AMARC Asia-Pacific, initiatives and campaigns to promote awareness and disseminate credible information about COVID-19 to the public. These initiatives are especially targeted as family farmers.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Asia-Pacific region has the largest number of family farms in the world. It is home to 60 percent of the world's population and to 74 per cent of the world's family farmers. The Asian Farmers' Association (AFA) terms Family Farmers as Frontline workers in the Fight to Eradicate COVID-19 and has called for active support towards them from all quarters. AFA has stated, "healthy food during this crisis can become less accessible, less affordable and less available. And when food is scarce, the likelihood of hunger and food riots becomes stronger."

The ComDev is a regional initiative in communication for rural development promoted by FAO together with its regional and national partners. ComDev Asia steers a common agenda in communication for rural development

in the Asia-Pacific region. It facilitates an interactive web-based community of practice that promotes dialogue, strengthens collaboration, and advocates for communication policies and services in agriculture and rural development. As a regional initiative, ComDev Asia has adopted family farming and the United Nations

Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) as a main priority, identifying three main lines of actions: 1) participatory communication, 2) rural communication services, and 3) enhanced communication capacity of POs and other institutions. There is also a fourth element on awareness and outreach for the UNDF.

The 2020 ComDev Asia participatory communication plan (CDA-PCP) for family farming aims to promote the participation of family farmers in sharing knowledge and skills, engaging in policy dialogues, and enhancing communication capacities. Specifically, the CDA-PCP seeks to:

- Share experiences and knowledge resources on participatory communication for family farming
- Family Farming (UNDF)
- Document and share stories of family farming and its organizations
- Facilitate partnerships among organizations, community media, and institutions of family farming at the regional and country levels
- Engage family farmers in dialogue on policies and programs
- Promote inclusive rural communication services as integral part of policies and programs on family farming
- Improve the communication capacities of family farmers and their organizations

Visit the campaign website at: [comdevasia.org](http://comdevasia.org)

# My experiences of COVID-19

A community-broadcaster from Nepal tells his story in the time of the pandemic.

Namaste! I am Rajesh Ramtel. I work with Radio Dhading 106 MHz, in Dhading Nepal. It is a community radio station, which employs five staff and ten regular volunteers. Nepal has been under lockdown since March 24, in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. I have been staying at the office for the past few weeks to run the daily operations of the station.

## Coping with fear:

Broadcasters are among frontline workers at these times of crisis. We are all fearful of COVID-19 but call to duty is our priority at the moment. As a responsible staff serving a community radio station, we are constantly faced with threats of infection, but we're also trying to maintain safety of all of us working at the station.

We do not have sufficient masks, gloves, and supply of sanitizer. Given the limited resources we function under, we will have problems reporting, if the number of infected people increases significantly.

## Challenges:

Currently, the financial crisis is one of the main challenges facing our station. We are supported by advertising and with the economic prospects down at the moment, we have limited sources of income. Income from advertising was also our source for paying salary to the staff. Right now, we do not have a constant source of income. Another challenge is to mobilize volunteers. People who used to help voluntarily to run radio programs, have problems coming to the radio station or go out on field visits. This affects our content. We are working with very few staff members now due to the lockdown. The office infrastructure is very basic and so, we cannot station many staff members at the office during the period of lockdown.



Photo Credit: Rajesh Ramtel

## Success:

I was in my village during the first week of lockdown. I found that everyone was listening to the radio because there is no facility for cable lines for television. The listeners said that they received plenty of information from the radio about COVID-19. They said that community radios were the most credible and accessible source of information for them. Talking to fellow community members made me realize that this would be a good time to share useful information through community radio.

Since the lockdown, we have made many COVID-19 related PSAs for the communities in local languages. Some of them were in Tamang and Chepang languages. It has helped share information about COVID-19 and its preventative measures.

This lockdown has also taught us to work more efficiently by multitasking. I am operating the console, reading the news and producing awareness programs. Despite fear and challenges, I am doing my part as a community broadcaster to create awareness in communities. It has made me happy to be able to serve at a time of need. I feel proud to be a community radio worker because I am bringing information to people who seldom have other sources of information. They are also happy which has inspired me to do more. Thank you for reading!

“

We are all fearful of COVID-19, but call to duty is our priority at the moment.

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# Community Radio during Pandemic

Women Activists' Experiences in Indonesia - Ressi Dwiana

Citra Melati FM, a community radio station in West Java, had to reduce its broadcast hours after the government announced restrictions to curb the spread of coronavirus. Indonesian government announced the first two positive cases of COVID-19 on March 2, 2020, quickly following it up with restrictions. On March 31, 2020, the government issued a decision on the status of a Public Health Emergency by imposing a Large-Scale Social Restriction, commonly known as PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar). The policy narrowed public space. Health protocols are strictly enforced; one of them being prohibition of gathering. This prohibition directly affected the life of community radios, whose studio is often the center of activities for communities. Radio Citra Melati is managed by Gini Gusnayanti, who also works as a teacher. She is supported by two presenters, who live outside the sub-district. They have to go through a tedious commute process and go through check-points to arrive at work. This has increased broadcast responsibilities for Gini.

To make up for radio activities, Gini has embraced internet technology. She shares authentic, timely information about COVID-19 and safety, mostly centering around child-parent relationship and other educational information. From the beginning of this pandemic, the station had to adjust its broadcast schedule to a maximum of three days a week. The radio is located in the red zone, categorized by the government, according to the risk



Citra Melati 107.7 FM Indonesia

level under the PSBB policy. Areas that implement the PSBB have tightened the movement of their communities. Schools have been closed. Foreigners who wish to enter the area are being asked the purpose of their arrival. Gini is also a mother, and all of her three children have been staying at home for almost two months now. In order to maintain the health of all family members, she has limited outdoor activities for the family. The most difficult thing for her as a mother is to explain to her children and make them understand and obey the prohibition of playing outside. Luckily, all of her children are busy with distance learning activities. Assignments and tests keep them occupied and keep them engaged even though they have been locked up at home for months.

Unlike Gini, Indah Catur Cahyaningtyas another community radio activist has been spending a lot of time outdoors. She is an active

member of the COVID-19 Prevention Task Force at the sub-district level. With her husband's support, she has been trying to ensure that government aid will be delivered to people affected by COVID-19 who really needed help. The focus of their activities is the fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Alongside government aid, Indah is also active in collecting donations from the private sector around Banyuwangi city. Indah has joined the JRKI-East Java COVID-19 Volunteer Team that produces public service advertisements (PSA) on COVID-19 countermeasures. They have produced two PSAs. One PSA specifically targets children's listeners. The other portrays a child's longing for her friends and school. These are shared



Indah Catur Cahyaningtyas interacts with community members

experiences for millions of children in Indonesia and throughout the world today. The PSA's help promote information on proper health procedures, such as washing hands, wearing masks, and not leaving the house at the time of pandemic. The PSAs were produced at Indah's home studio. This studio, before COVID-19 was

used for talent schools managed by her and her husband. But since the pandemic spread in Indonesia, teaching and learning activities in schools were suspended, and the studio had to be closed. Although

they no longer receive income from the talent school, Indah is grateful that she and her husband are able to use this time to support the communities with much needed information.

*Ressi Dwiana-*

*The author is a Lecturer and PhD candidate at Universitas Medan Area, Indonesia. Her thesis and dissertation researches are on community radio in Indonesia.*

## A historical account of AMARC

World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters  
- Michel Delorme

The year was 1983 when it occurred to me to bring the world of community radios together in Montreal. The first challenge was to get the idea accepted by radio stations in Quebec, because the costs of such an event would reduce funding for local radio stations. The project, with its enormous costs involved, was accepted with reservation. This was the first step to founding of the World

Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), which would eventually go on to find a life of its own; nurtured by founders and partners.

Our initial motivation was to get to know community radios from around the world. What we first needed to get started was, details of community radios all over the world. A team from the University of Quebec in Montreal produced a portrait of the great diversity of democratic and non-commercial radio around the world. This study served to establish the type of broadcasters that the association would group into its solidarity, and exchange network.

The community radio leaders came from different wave liberation movements in Europe, in the USA, with the Community Radio network (NCRA), in Latin America with popular and educational radio stations,

and from Africa with the experience of rural radio. Their coming together also brought together ideas of liberating radios from the monopoly of government and business organizations and making it available to common people.



Assembly	Year
AMARC 1	Montreal 1983
AMARC 2	Vancouver 1986
AMARC 3	Managua 1988
AMARC 4	Dublin 1990
AMARC 5	Mexico 1992
AMARC 6	Dakar 1995
AMARC 7	Milan 1998
AMARC 8	Kathmandu 2003
AMARC 9	Amman 2006
AMARC 10	Buenos Aires 2010
AMARC 11	Accra 2015

**AMARC ASSEMBLIES OVER THE YEARS**

Europe, Latin America, USA and Canada, Africa, Oceania were identified at the first assembly. The search for funding for the first assembly required that we be convincing, but also realistic and relevant to the context of the Year of Communication (1980). We produced a balance sheet study carried out by a university team and made contacts to obtain the collaboration of several partners. I carried out the financing procedures, administered them and reported on their use. Funding required vigilance from the outset to establish our credibility for the future of AMARC.

The AMARC Secretariat in Montreal played a leading role in the start-up and evolution of the organization, for communications, fundraising, management and administration. At the end of the first assembly in 1983, Montreal, it was decided to meet in three years in Vancouver to prepare for the creation of an NGO. From the first assembly, regional meetings of national organizations called for each region to be represented on the NGO board and for regional networks to play an active role in planning and carrying out AMARC projects.

The biggest challenges lay in our ability to raise funding: could we be up to our ambitions? How would we cover the operating costs of AMARC, which will finance projects, including support for radio development and the creation of an exchange network? The other concern was about the representative and dynamic organizational structure in its actions that we had to create. Who would be the members: the national and regional associations or is it the local radio stations? These elements had to be defined to create AMARC in Managua, Nicaragua in 1988. Women members formed their network within AMARC during the Mexico City assembly in 1992. Asia added to regional networks in the early 2000s.

By the time we arrived in 2000, the context for media operations had changed enormously. New technologies had propelled trade and communications, from local producer to global. Local radio, however, retains its role of communication and openness in this new environment. The creation of a virtual network offers an opportunity to create a global NGO serving local media without having to hold very expensive conferences! And that's where the role of organizations like AMARC come in.

In our time of great technological changes and the globalization of trade, AMARC will have to adjust its mission according to the reality of the media industry. We will always have to anchor ourselves in its mission of democratizing the media, popular participation in production and exchange and support between the local media.

The core ideas behind pushing the existence of such a network was so that people could meet and discuss their reality and the impact of radio. This allows everyone an opportunity to be able to benefit from the wide variety of radio experiences with a common goal of democratizing communication!

For full interview, visit: <https://amarcap.org/index.php/nwletter-page/>



Michel in front of the first AMARC 83 poster - signed by members of the first board. Credit: Michel Delorme, Canada



My last speech as President at the opening of AMARC Conference in Dublin, in 1990 Credit: Michel Delorme, Canada

*This article is based on an interview with Michel Delorme on 8 April 2020. Michel is the founding President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).*

## News

### AMARC Asia-Pacific to publish “Community radios, conflict resolution and peace building in Nepal”

AMARC Asia-Pacific has received support from the Bread for the World/ Brot für die Welt, Berlin for developing a publication on the role of community radios in conflict resolution and peace building. The publication “Community radios, conflict resolution and peace building in Nepal” will be aimed at augmenting the role of community radios in addressing challenges of unresolved conflicts, peacebuilding and transitional justice issues.

The bilingual electronic publication in Nepali and English languages will include testimonies, articles, documents and facts pertaining mainly to the experiences of community radios of Nepal in relation to conflict resolution and peace broadcasting. While reflecting on how best to handle conflicts through community radios, the publication will help increase awareness among community broadcasters about their role regarding peacebuilding and transitional justices and provide relevant content material on the subject. The publication will be ready for distribution by December 2020.



Olifa Khatun (with specs), an exchange participant from Bangladesh with Dilmaya Khadka of community radio Sindhu, Sindhupalchowk district, Nepal.

### Bangladesh–Nepal community radio exchange project extended for three years

The Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC) has renewed its support for the exchange of community radio broadcasters between Bangladesh and Nepal. AMARC Asia-Pacific and Rupantar-Bangladesh have partnered since the year 2016 to facilitate the exchanges. Altogether 16 participants (10 female and 6 male broadcasters) have so far participated in the exchanges between 2016-2019. During this period, exchange participants mainly focused on producing content about ‘health communication and education.’

Given the success of the previous rounds of exchanges, NOREC has agreed to fund the exchanges for an additional three years (2020-22). The new round of exchanges, scheduled to start in April 2020 has been postponed until the beginning of 2021, in view of the ongoing pandemic. Altogether 32 broadcasters from the two countries will be participating in the next round of exchanges.

The participants work in community radios of the host country for an entire year. In the next round of exchanges, they will be stationed in community radios in their host countries for producing participatory content linking public health facilities at the local levels and basic human rights.

“Community radio is 90% about community and 10% about radio. When setting up community stations, the first thing people start with is radio, which is a name of a technology. If you start with technology, before long there will be a huge gap between the radio and the community. Get community first.”

*Late Zane Ibrahim Bush Radio, South Africa*

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