

Towards Gender Equality– the Journey of **AMARC-WIN** Asia Pacific

by Bianca Migrietto

Celebrating its 20th anniversary

Twenty years ago, a group of women at the third AMARC¹ World Conference (AMARC 3) in Dublin felt the need to push for stronger and more equal women's participation within the emerging community radio movement. They formed the Women's International Network (WIN) within AMARC. This year, AMARC-WIN celebrates its 20th anniversary. What started with a group of women at AMARC 3 in 1990 has now developed into a global network with active sections in the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia Pacific, with its members continuously working towards active participation of women in the structure of AMARC.

AMARC is composed of four regional chapters, each with its own women's international network. These chapters likewise have their own board, with one to two seats reserved for the vice president/s of their corresponding women's international network. Having these seats reserved for WIN representatives ensures that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into the leadership of all regional sections of AMARC, as well as into its governance at the global level. This mechanism also ensures that the stronger participation of women in the community radio sector is included in the AMARC agenda.

AMARC-WIN Asia Pacific (AP) is the youngest among the regional AMARC-WIN sections, as it was officially launched at the first AMARC Asia Pacific Conference in November 2005 in Jakarta, Indonesia. Though women community radio practitioners in the Asia Pacific region benefitted from the struggles led by their sisters in other parts of the world in earlier years, and while they did not have to fight for their space, there were no active discussions as to why there was a need to organise women in community radio in a separate network. There was also no talk about why it was necessary to empower women and incorporate a gender perspective through and in community radio stations. Some AMARC members simply did not understand the rationale behind WIN, but did not dare to question what is a standard in other – older – AMARC sections. This glaring reality reflects a need to continuously educate men and women regarding the importance for women's spaces in progressive movements.

A survey: Where are the women in community radio in Asia Pacific?

Given the undisputed start of AMARC-WIN AP in November 2005 with the support of the AMARC International and the AMARC AP regional office, the first task was to identify women in community radio who were interested in forming the network, as out of the 150 participants of the first AMARC AP conference only 37 were women. In 2006 AMARC-WIN AP, in partnership with Isis International,

conducted a survey among its member stations and networks on the situation and needs of women in community radio in the region. Though responses were not overwhelming, with only 27 responses from 12 countries, it was an important starting point.

Results from the survey show that there is no significant difference in the proportion between males and females in terms of staffing community radio. However, examining the results with a gender lens, a different picture can be gleaned. In terms of leadership and technical positions in radio stations surveyed, it can be seen that women make up only 28% of leadership positions. While this is comparatively better than in mainstream media where women occupy only 3 to 5% of leadership positions² it is evident that women continue to be marginalised in decision-making in the community radio sector.

Action Research: Turning the results of the survey into concrete actions

The results of the survey were discussed among women community radio broadcasters from Asia Pacific at AMARC 9 World Conference in November 2006 in Jordan. Following the discussions, it was decided that an exchange and training seminar on learnings and experiences in natural and anthropogenic (disasters that are a result of human activity) disaster response from a gender perspective for women community radio broadcasters in Asia Pacific would be organised. It was emphasised that this seminar should include capacity building on community radio management, technical and feminist content development skills.

A year later in December 2007, a meeting of thirty women community radio broadcasters took place during the Global Knowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. This meeting gave birth to the idea of developing a gender policy for community radio. The meeting, aside from having been able to conceptualise such an initiative, also empowered members of WIN AP as they began to take responsibility for WIN Asia Pacific. They actively contributed their

Where are women in community radio in Asia Pacific?

POSITION	TOTAL	WOMEN	IN %	MEN	IN %
Overall staff	291	130	45%	161	55%
Leadership positions	75	21	28%	54	72%
Technical Staff	54	15	28%	39	72%
Administrative Staff	61	27	44%	34	56%
Program Producers	108	47	44%	61	56%
Volunteers	315	137	43%	177	57%

ideas, shared their experiences and voiced their opinions and demands.

Alongside the development of the gender policy, AMARC WIN worked closely with Isis International in conceptualising and coordinating the seminar decided on in Jordan. The project is called Women Making Airwaves for Peace (WMAP) and included the conduct of cross-cultural radio seminars for women broadcasters on the role of community radio in peace building and disaster response and mitigation.

Coordination and initiative from the regional AMARC office

Another milestone reached by WIN was the hiring of Prativa Chhetri as project officer based in AMARC Asia Pacific who was in charge of coordinating activities of AMARC WIN AP, including the regular contribution of WIN-articles in the AMARC newsletter, as well as providing support and monitoring for the international radio campaigns of WIN to commemorate international women's day and the 16 days of activism towards ending violence against women. These have boosted AMARC's efforts towards increasing women's participation in community radio and has, for the most part, contributed to the creation of a vibrant, active and dynamic AMARC WIN AP³.

Second AMARC AP conference: A leap forward?

Women's participation higher by 10 % - ONLY!

While there has been an increase in the number of women participating the AMARC AP conference, it has not been very significant. From 37 out of 150 in 2001 to 88 out of 250 in 2010, there had only been a 10% increase in women's participation. Though this is progress that must be acknowledged, for me, as the regional WIN Vice-President on the board, it was a rather disappointing result.

While we have worked hard in ensuring the equal participation of men and women in most AMARC AP activities and in several other spaces such as the Global Knowledge Conference and World Social Forum, and have garnered the support of the AMARC Executive Board and regional office, there is still a lot of work to be done.

According to the survey, the following are among the most important changes the women community radio broadcasters want to bring to their radio stations are:

- To increase women's access to leadership, decision-making and management;
- To increase access to all aspects of radio production, especially technical tasks; and
- To have more gender-sensitive and feminist programs and perspectives in the radio station.

The most important training needs that the women broadcasters mentioned are:

- Production and technical skills including ICT;
- Gender and feminist perspectives in community radio programming;
- Journalistic skills (e.g., interviewing, script writing, anchoring, reporting); and
- Management, administration, sharing of decision-making.

For instance, 30 of the 88 women participants in the conference in Bangalore were brought in by Isis International through its Women Making Airwaves for Peace project. This consideration made us realise that other actors have also been bringing participants to the conference and yet it did not necessarily mean they will be paying the same attention to gender parity. Of the three biggest delegations to the conference (Bangladesh 23, India 62 and Nepal 73) women and men were almost equally represented in the Indian delegation. The Bangladeshi and Nepali delegations both had less than 20 % women. While the participants sponsored by AMARC and Isis International were gender balanced, other funders brought more men than women to the conference. The lesson learned from this experience is that in order to reach gender balance in future conferences, AMARC should be more affirmative towards women's participation and sponsor 60% women and 40% men.

Gender perspective in all major plenary sessions

Women were very active participants throughout the second AMARC Asia Pacific conference, which is definitely something to be proud of. As such, we were able to provide a gender perspective on all the topics discussed in the plenary sessions during the conference, such as legislation, climate justice, food security and diversity. One plenary session was on gender equality and women's empowerment. Further, there were several workshops that had strong gender perspectives, all because of the active participation of AMARC-WIN AP and the WMAP participants. The women who were present were definitely visible and heard throughout the conference, and their increased participation was obvious.

Young women's participation

The Women Making Airwaves for Peace project of Isis International brought a significant number

of young women to the conference in Bangalore. For many of them it was the first international conference and had been an enriching experience. "It is a very empowering and exciting opportunity for me to attend this conference. The good thing

Women Making Airwaves for Peace (WMAP)

Women Making Airwaves for Peace (WMAP) is a cross-cultural radio seminar for women broadcasters on the role of community radio in peace building and disaster management organised by Isis International in collaboration with AMARC-WIN Asia Pacific.

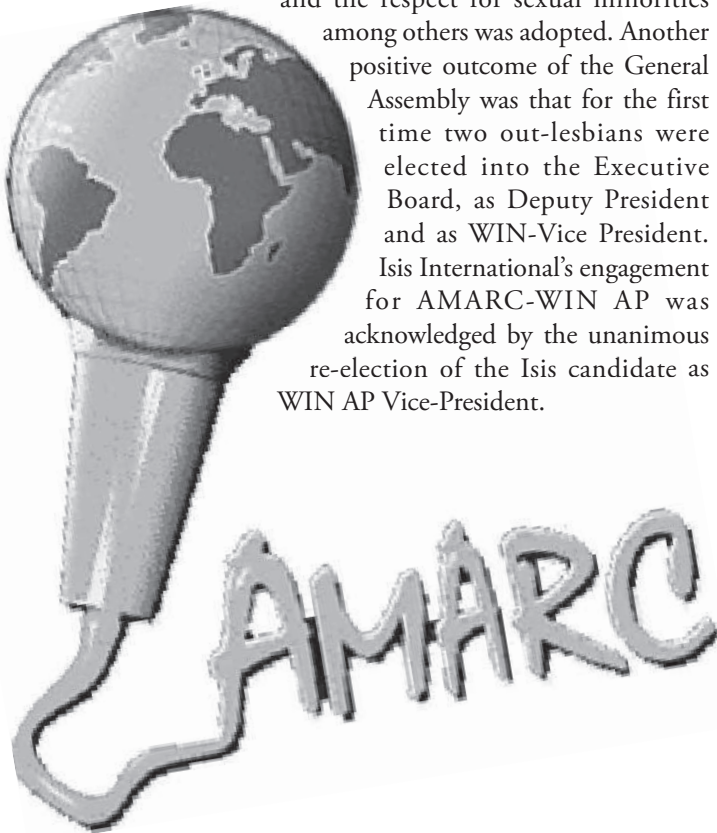
is, because we had the WMAP seminar just before the conference, I already know several participants so I never felt lost or intimidated and always found a familiar face I could relate to," said Karuma D'Souza of DRISHTI⁴. The young women made numerous contributions to the conference, including making presentations in a workshop on engendered climate justice and disaster mitigation, serving as rapporteurs in plenary sessions and workshops, and performing onsite conference documentation by recording the plenary sessions, taking pictures and writing summaries of the different speeches. These were uploaded on the AMARC website and thus gave access to people who were not able to attend the conference to the different presentations.

Numbers are not indicators for decision-making power

Another awakening came during the General Assembly of AMARC AP on the last day of the conference, as when we looked around the room, we realised that not even one fourth of the voting members were women. Many women in attendance did not represent a voting

member of AMARC. Moreover, if there were two participants from the same organisation (a man and a woman) it was usually the men who were holding the higher position and thus had the voting power, as each member organisation has only one vote. This reflects the situation in many radio stations, where the leadership is predominantly male. In WIN we realised it is not enough to bring more women to conferences, we also need to make sure that they have the voting power, so that we really can participate in the decision-making processes in our movement.

Despite women's minimal participation in the general assembly, important resolutions were passed that strengthened women's positions Asia Pacific's community radio movement. The Gender Policy for Community Radio was adopted by a large majority of participants. A resolution that demands a WIN-coordinator in the regional office was likewise approved. Also, the Bangalore Declaration, an important document with strong points on gender equality and the respect for sexual minorities among others was adopted. Another positive outcome of the General Assembly was that for the first time two out-lesbians were elected into the Executive Board, as Deputy President and as WIN-Vice President. Isis International's engagement for AMARC-WIN AP was acknowledged by the unanimous re-election of the Isis candidate as WIN AP Vice-President.



AMARC 10: Celebrating Gender Equality?

Learning from the experience of the 2nd AMARC AP conference, we hope that at the 10th AMARC World Conference this November in Argentina there will be a more equal participation between men and women. AMARC WIN is very happy and excited about the decision of the AMARC 10 preparatory committee to observe gender equality. However, many women from the Asia Pacific region will not be able to participate because of the distance and the travel costs involved. I am very happy to note that as of 10 days before the conference the delegation from Asia Pacific is composed of 24 women and 29 men (only 10% difference). Again, the Nepali delegation is the largest and is composed of only two women and 12 men! However, it is notable that both of the delegations from Indonesia and the Philippines are composed of more than 60% women. We strongly count on our sisters from WIN Latin America and the Caribbean to make meaningful contributions to the outcomes of the conference. Our contribution from Asia Pacific will be the Gender Policy for Community Radio which we will present to the International General Assembly for adoption.

Challenges for WIN Asia Pacific in the next four years

The last five years of organising the AMARC-WIN in Asia Pacific have shown that within the movement there is an aspiration for women's empowerment in and through community radio. However, much of the time individual radio stations do not give women the same opportunities to develop as men. Moreover, men in leadership positions are often unwilling to share their power. They have not yet realised the great potential of the full participation of women and the inclusion of women's issues in the broadcast programmes for their station.

Therefore, the implementation of the Gender Policy for Community Radio in the individual stations is of utmost importance. So far what we have is a promising document

but we need to develop instruments for its concrete implementation, which include tools for needs assessment, implementation plans and impact evaluation. Further we need to continue the capacity building for women in radio management because the women need to be prepared to take up leadership positions so that they are able to proactively contribute to the radio station. More training and exchange in technical production and feminist content development must be organised as requested by WIN members. Last but not least, we need to invest more efforts and clear strategies to the equal participation of women and men in our movement. AMARC should be an example to its members and to society at large. Gender equality must not remain a goal that we hope to achieve in the distant future, but should be something we are practicing Right Now! ◆

The Gender Policy for Community Radio

The aim of the Gender Policy for Community Radio is to help radio stations understand and strive to meet their obligations towards women in their diversities. It covers the needs of women in conflict situations, differently abled women, women from minority groups, including lesbian and transgender women.

A copy of the gender policy may be downloaded from the Isis International Website.

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Endnotes:

- 1 French acronym for the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.
- 2 Based on a report by the International Federation of Journalists, 2001.
- 3 Last March 8 there were 27 contributions from Asia Pacific in 7 languages from 13 different radio stations and production groups. Compared to March 8, 2005 when there was just one contribution from the region. This is a clear indication that AMARC WIN AP has developed into a vibrant, active and dynamic network.
- 4 DRISHTI is an organisation that works towards the democratisation of the airwaves in India and has been in the forefront in the fight for communities' right to own and manage their own community radio stations. To know more about DRISHTI, visit <http://www.mydrishtimedia.org>.