



Women's Human Rights and Community Broadcasting¹

by María Eugenia Chávez, translated by Bianca Miglioretto

In Mexico there are more than 1400 radio stations. 1149 of them are commercial and 347 have a permit; 759 are AM and 473 FM stations². Up until 2004 only one station being run by a civil citizen association had a permit – Radio Teocelo, in the community of Teocelo in the state of Veracruz. This radio station received a permit to legally operate in 1964 but for 40 years all permits requested by civil society groups were denied. In 2004 however, after long negotiations between AMARC³ and the Mexican government, 10 community radio stations finally received permits to operate. But none of them are owned or run by women or a women's group. Even though it is a principle in community radio to promote women's participation and gender equality, women's participation peaks at 30 per cent⁴ only.

Until a decade ago⁵, women's participation and the inclusion of a gender perspectives in broadcasting were only common in state and privately owned broadcasting. In the late 1980's to the early 1990's, feminist production groups that were working directly with women, popularised the concept of women's community communication where journalists and communicators used broadcast spaces to discuss women's issues from a gender perspective. It was in these spaces that issues such as domestic violence, sexual and reproductive rights and health, political and social rights of women etc. were discussed for the first time. It was during this time too that SIPAM (Salud Integral para la Mujer, Integral Health for Women) began its radio project and joined the efforts of other feminist organisations in initiating discussions on "women's issues" from a rights-based perspective and not just from their traditional reproductive role.⁶

SIPAM developed a radio project with a community perspective that has taken up topics related to women's rights and public opinion. It contributed to the local, national, regional and international debate on social inequality that is reality for half of the population in our country.

Salud Integral para la Mujer, Integral Health for Women

SIPAM is a feminist organisation that works to defend and promote women's sexuality and respect for their sexual and reproductive rights as integral for personal, cultural and political transformation. Since 1991 SIPAM has introduced the use of gender sensitive language in broadcasting, especially in programmes that focus on defending women's human rights. It initiates debates on women's health, sexual and reproductive rights; violence and its roots and consequences; women's access to means of communication and the construction of women's citizenship, focusing on their political participation; while applying a partisan-grassroots approach to disseminate information using different radio formats.

SIPAM's radio project seeks to democratise the means of communication in Mexico as promoted by AMARC. In 1994. SIPAM shares with a common "political project committed to and positioned in the concrete local problems and rooted in the social context."⁷

For more than 15 years SIPAM has been experimenting with the tools that radio offers to pursue a political agenda in building public opinion. It takes advantage of the knowledge and experience of journalists and communicators in consultation programmes, radio debates, health features, radio workshops, reports, testimonies and radio dramas. Hundreds of women have contributed to these productions as hosts, anchors, musicians, producers, coordinators. Women have likewise engaged as active agents in their communities, organisations, or municipalities in these radio programmes, encouraging other members of the community to share their stories, ask questions and express their opinions.

The first radio programme of SIPAM, We are no longer patient, laid the ground for the dissemination of SIPAM's as well as other feminist organisations' political work. Given the legal and economic barriers for a civil society organisation in the years prior to 2004 to obtain a permit to broadcast, the only option for SIPAM was through a government radio outfit. This collaboration was a heavy financial burden for the organisation, nevertheless we were able to obtain funding from a German foundation.

The collaboration with other feminist communication groups at the national, regional and international level was very important to consolidate SIPAM's radio work in terms of concepts, methodologies as well as technical know-how. SIPAM has formed valuable alliances with Latin-American feminist news agencies such as Isis Chile; Comunicación e Información de la Mujer, A.C.; FEMPRESS; Radio Internacional Feminista; the Women's International Network of AMARC Latin-America and the Caribbean; and the European-Latin-American Network, Interconexiones.



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In 2003 SIPAM began a new radio project targeting youth, The OK Cybercafé, which was broadcasted on 1350 AM ((la XEQK, “The Citizen Radio”) of the Mexican Radio Institute. The youth participated directly in this radio project, giving students from the Institute for Higher Media Education in the Capital District the opportunity to produce radio features, acting as disc jockeys and hosting some programmes. This project was the first one to be designed for and by the community youth.

Prior to this, Between stove, pots and dreams, a citizen’s initiative, was introduced through a collaboration of various organisations for parliamentary dialogue. The collaboration was composed of the women’s desk of the Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez de Oaxaca; the Study Group “Rosarios Castellanos”; the indigenous radio XEGLO, the Voice of the Sierra Norte de Oaxaca, located in the village of Guelatao; and SIPAM. In this case the strategy was to train women in the community and youth from the region in radio production with the

objective to share our radio capacities with other democratic radio spaces.

To strengthen citizen and community participation and to ensure a gender perspective in radio broadcasting, SIPAM initiated another project in 2005, which involved young radio producers working with women living with HIV/AIDS. For about a month, both groups interacted with each other, and participated in a workshop on human rights, HIV prevention and the right to information. During this interaction, the women shared their stories and experiences as they talked about their environment, their attitudes and expressed their needs.

The intense communication between the young people and the women living with HIV/AIDS resulted in radio production characterised by the young people’s view on how to treat the issue of HIV/AIDS. It was truthful and based on scientific information yet also infused with the learnings from SIPAM’s work in the area of HIV/AIDS and most importantly, enriched by voices of the women living with HIV/AIDS themselves.

Through this project, SIPAM does away with the myth of “objectivity” in journalism. In traditional journalism, interviews mainly aim to obtain vital information from diverse sources to create a “balanced” reportage. The process by which SIPAM had conducted this project moved beyond this traditional paradigm, towards one that transforms a source of information into a medium, to enable them to communicate and make visible their stories.⁸

The radio work of SIPAM was only possible because it was grounded in the political agenda to work towards the recognition and implementation of women’s human rights, particularly sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to information and free expression. When SIPAM concluded the project We are no longer patient, its success inspired a new initiative based on a similar concept but adapted to new technology while still rooted in community communication.

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I-radiando: Interactive Women was born in 2005, broadening SIPAM's journalistic coverage and radius of action, to include transmittal through internet podcasts from its website (www.sipam.org.mx), aside from airing in AM transmissions. Further, the project has helped SIPAM contribute to the local, regional and international communities by opening and

encouraging discussions and debates on various topics that are of importance to the organisation.

SIPAM broadened its platform to include the use of the new information and communication technologies to project its work to other populations, disseminating stories earlier published in other countries. Presently SIPAM is in a process of re-structuring and re-defining its strategies and objectives, which also decides over the continuation of the radio work with all the potential of the internet to continue to defend women's rights. No doubt another chapter of the herstory will be written. ♦

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Endnotes:

- 1 Excerpts from Los derechos humanos de las mujeres y la radiodifusión comunitaria, una propuesta de SIPAM con metodologías y experiencias (Women's human rights and community broadcasting, a response by SIPAM with methodologies and experience).*
- 2 Datos de la Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes: http://dgp.sct.gob.mx/fileadmin/user_upload/Estadistica/Infraestructural/Comunicaciones/CSRYTV.pdf*
- 3 AMARC – French Acronym of World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters*
- 4 Diagnóstico de género en la red de mujeres de AMARC México (Gender diagnostics of the women's network of AMARC Mexico) (2004) Representation of the women's network of AMARC-Mexico (Archive of SIPAM). Percentage based on the participation of two women's organisations.*
- 5 We situate the expansion of community radios in Mexico from 1999, after the strike at the Autonomous National University of Mexico when various student radios originated that supported other communities in opening their own radios. Till then community radios appeared and disappeared rapidly because they were either closed by the authorities or unable to sustain economically nor politically.*
- 6 We refer to "women's programs" by commercial radios that reinforce domestic role.*
- 7 Calleja, A. y Solís, B. (2007). Con Permiso, La Radio Comunitaria en México (With your Permission, Community Radio in Mexico).*
- 8 In the approach of social journalism or community communication the interview becomes a medium by which the journalist or communicator induces a dynamic relationship of ethics and respect where the interviewer explores and generates communication processes with the interviewee in order to know her/his live, her/his concerned and his/her responses. It is in this moment that the interviewee (child, women, mayor person) becomes a dynamic actor, telling his/her story and performs her/his right to free expression and to communicate her/his vision of the world. El periodismo como factor de equidad (Journalism as a factor of equality) (<http://www.periodismosocial.net/default.cfm>).*