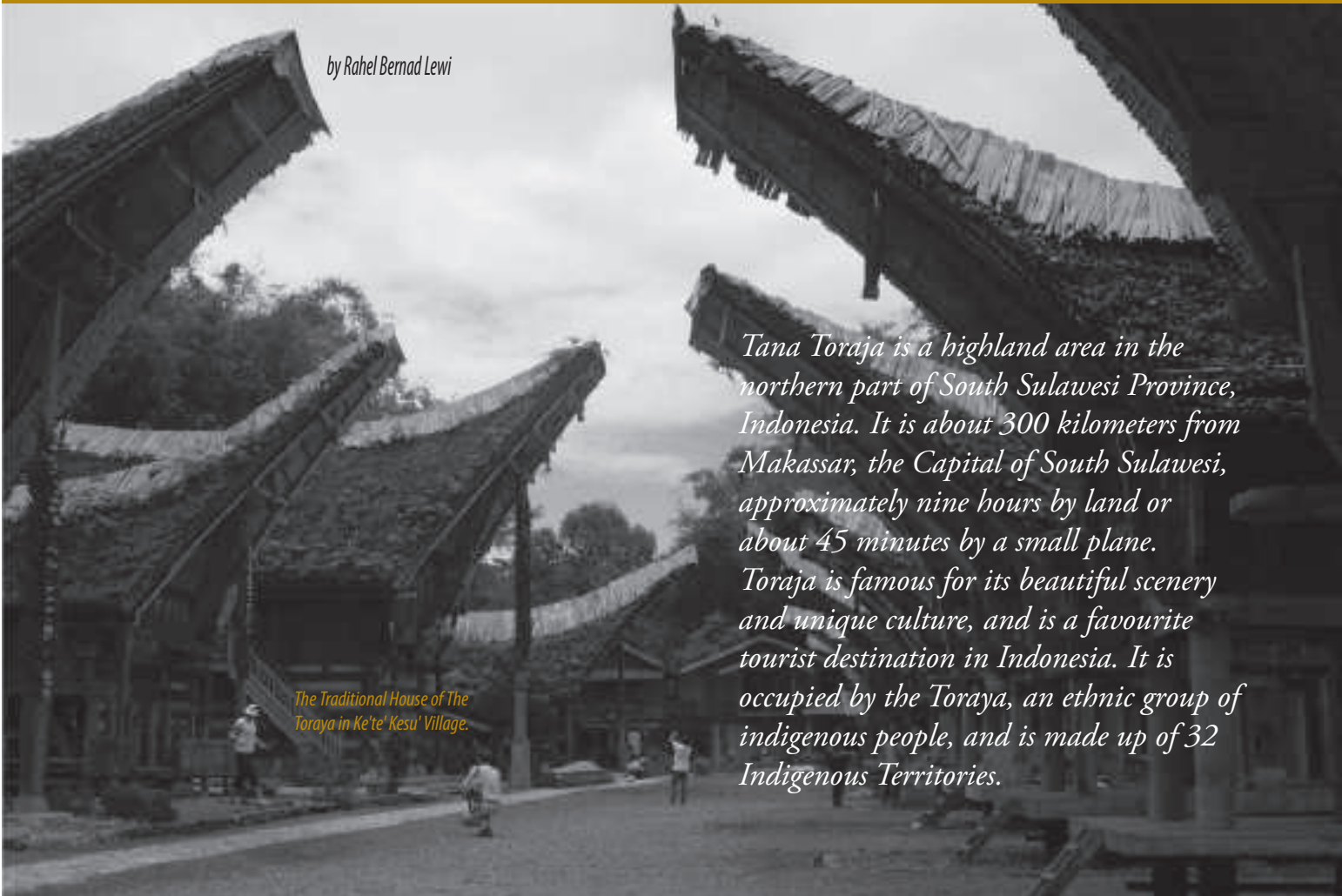


# Advocating and Campaigning for the Protection of the Environment through Community Radio

by Rahel Bernad Lewi

*The Traditional House of The Toraya in Ke'te' Kesu' Village.*

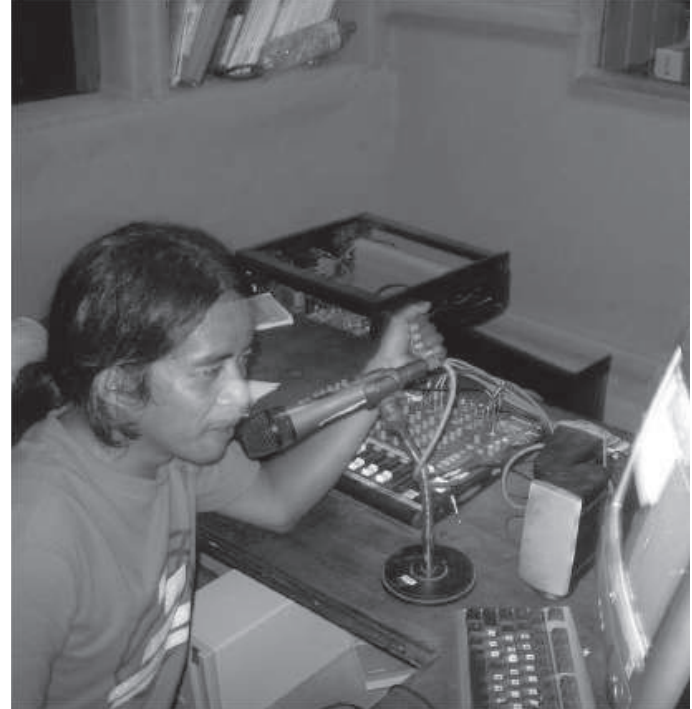
*Tana Toraja is a highland area in the northern part of South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. It is about 300 kilometers from Makassar, the Capital of South Sulawesi, approximately nine hours by land or about 45 minutes by a small plane. Toraja is famous for its beautiful scenery and unique culture, and is a favourite tourist destination in Indonesia. It is occupied by the Toraya, an ethnic group of indigenous people, and is made up of 32 Indigenous Territories.*



**The population** of Tana Toraja, as an indigenous community, live in and around the forest, making access to information from television and the internet difficult. Printed media such as newspapers and magazine have also not been seen as a viable alternative as many of the people are illiterate, having a more prominent oral tradition. The most effective form of information dissemination for the Toraya has been the use of community radio. It was in this context that we formed Community Radio Swara Tamborolangi in October 2001. It was created with a simple concept in mind — that is to accelerate the effort to revitalise the traditional values and community sovereignty on natural resource management. Through Radio Swara Tamborolangi, the Toraya people can discuss and share their insights about community — based natural resources management.

Climate change, due to environmental degradation is a very important issue and has resulted in debates and discussions across various levels – from grassroots communities to international spaces. For indigenous peoples in Tana Toraja, climate change is about unpredictable farming schedules caused by prolonged droughts and incessant rains and flooding and how these in turn can have a negative effect on their family and livelihoods. Like in many other communities, the environment is the life-source of indigenous peoples. It is where they get everything they need for their daily life, and in Indonesia, indigenous women have a very close relationship to the environment. In Indonesian culture, we believe that the environment is the Mother of all other things that surround it and that from mother nature, life begins.

However, even with this way of thinking, the women of Toraja, especially those who live in the remote areas, are not as privileged as the men in their communities. Gender stereotypes do not allow women to take ownership of the environment and have often excluded them from participating in discussions about environmental issues. Women are expected to be plain housewives, do the domestic work, so many of them are uneducated and not are considered as an important part of the community. Because



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of these stereotypes, women bear the brunt of the responsibilities and suffer the most due to climate change.

This is what we sought to change by establishing Radio Swara Tamborolangi.

Since its creation, Radio Swara Tamborolangi has raised the awareness of women about their role in the community and the relevance of their contributions towards addressing environmental issues. The women volunteer as broadcasters to spread information about the role of indigenous women in protecting the environment. Campaigns are done through on air and off air programmes. Through on-air programmes like Public Service Announcements (PSA), news, interactive dialogue, live reports and features, indigenous women become actively



*Dialogue with a young women about Environment issues.*

Photo courtesy of Rahel Lewi

engaged in environmental protection as they are constantly reminded by women broadcasters, who speak the local language that they have a very important role in protecting the environment from harm because their daily activities are very closely linked with the environment.

Through these programmes, the women are also provided information on how to minimise use of plastic material, paper, sanitary napkin, etc. They are also provided with tips on how to save water, how to grow and care for trees and other plants around their home. The programmes also educate women about how to use fuel and electricity more efficiently to save energy and how to maximise the use of renewable energy. The women are also made aware that they bear great responsibilities in climate change mitigation and prevention and encourage them to participate or initiate efforts to stop illegal logging in their communities.

Moreover, because Toraja is located on the mountain area, it plays a very important role in the sustainability of water supply in other districts of south Sulawesi Province through the so called water tower for farming. Women are made aware that the lack of water supply causes drought that result in low harvests or none at all. Consequently, this affects food supply in the community and will in turn cause the increase in prices of produce, like rice. More importantly, the Toraja is also the source of water for hydroelectric power. Thus, the lack of water may impact the power supply of neighboring communities and provinces. Through the radio programmes, we are able to inform women that all of these are likely to put unnecessary burdens on them making them more vulnerable.

Radio Swara Tamborolangi also seeks to preserve local, indigenous knowledge about the environment. The Toraya is composed of 32 indigenous territories, which makes the region rich in local and indigenous knowledge. However, these local knowledge can die if they are not properly documented and if they are not passed on to the younger generations.

In Toraja, women play a major role in passing on the local wisdom to the younger generation. As such, the women are taught how to take care of and cultivate local plant species so as to preserve biodiversity and also ensure food sovereignty. They are educated to reduce the use of chemicals such as fertilisers and insecticides in agriculture and are encouraged to practice organic farming.

With radio programmes of Radio Tamborolangi, women are encouraged to participate and to share their knowledge and experiences with other women. This gives them a good chance to increase their confidence in public speaking and in voicing out their aspirations and ideas. From our experience, women who have been actively involved in our radio program have become more confident and empowered.

Aside from these on-air radio productions, we also conduct focus group discussions within the community about climate change and collaborate with local non-governmental organisations for capacity building for women towards income generating activities. For instance, women are trained how to make bamboo briquette by recycling bamboo used to build cottages during funerals which are then thrown away. The training helps women recycle the used bamboo to sell for additional income. In cooperating with other local NGOs we have also conducted training on how to make organic fertilisers and insecticides, and have held workshops on how to recycle paper.

We hope that in the future there will be more women participating in our radio programmes, both on air and off air, to share their skills, knowledge and experiences. This will greatly strengthen and improve our environment, our communities, as well as the women's participation in the radio programmes. ♦

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