

we've **got** male

Bridging Gaping Inequalities in Community Radio

by Suman Basnet



In this article, Suman Basnet, Coordinator of AMARC AP, shares his views on the role of men in the struggle for equal access for men and women in community radios and the community radio movement, as well as how men can support the implementation of the gender policy for community radio.

Women are underrepresented in all sectors of the society. Though laws and policies are in place, unequal representation of women is a challenge facing the world. It is more so in the under developed and developing countries where women face discrimination right from their birth and throughout their lives.

In the community radio sector especially in Asia Pacific region the participation of women has been increasing over the years but the gap between men and women remains huge. In order to address the gap the Women's International Network of Asia Pacific introduced the gender policy for community radio.

The gender policy for community radio explains what gender equality is and how it can be achieved. It is a tool to implement and has broadly pointed the six areas in which it can be implemented.

The Asia Pacific region is very diverse and dynamic and it offers an interesting insight into the innovativeness and resilience of the community radio movement. The traditions, the attitude and the political situation of a country are instrumental in addressing gender issues.

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For example the community radio movement in Nepal is very strong and has been playing an important role in fighting for civil and political rights and for bridging the information divide between the urban and rural areas. However, the issue of gender equality is far from satisfactory.

In Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population and with an active community radio sector, the role of women is very often limited to working as announcers or presenters.

In India, which has only recently got its own community radio policy, we hope to see more women run community radios like the “Rudino” radio operated by SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association).

For most of the countries in Asia Pacific like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos and Sri Lanka, the concept of community radio is still new and yet to take hold.

In my years of having worked in AMARC Asia Pacific I have tried to understand why is there so little participation of women in community radio.

First the term “gender” does not translate well in local languages. For the urban people it is a term associated with donor’s fund and a lingo to be adopted for use in the office but not to be practiced at home. For the rural people who often come from a patriarchal society, it means uplifting women at the cost of men.

Patriarchal traditions dominate life styles in the Asia Pacific region. Mostly men are the decision makers. It is difficult for a woman to break the barrier.

AMARC follows a policy of equal participation by women and men in all of its activities. However serious difficulties are encountered in implementing. The low number of women in the community radio sector, their being mostly in low positions within the organisation, and the general hesitation on their part to move out of the framework that the patriarchal society has placed upon them are some of the key impediments. Often it is the male managers of the station who wish to avail of the opportunity themselves rather than give their staff a chance to build their capacity.

While conducting trainings there are very few women opting to learn the technical aspect of radio management. This is either due to lack of technical knowledge or interest and lack of appropriate technology like women friendly organisational setups, training material in local languages, etc. I have met many women broadcasters who have taken for granted that technical aspect of production is a job that only men can handle! Unless women learn the technical side to production and radio management the gendered technological divide will remain.

As a male person, I think that the first and foremost step to bring about a gender equality in community radio is to carry out gender sensitisation activities at massive scales for all that are in charge of the decision making including those that run the governance. The concept of

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“gender” which includes both men and women must be ingrained with the ultimate aim of bringing attitudinal change.

The station governance must enforce positive discrimination towards women to include them in all levels of station management. The years of experience and knowledge required to fill certain posts must be reduced for women candidates. It is not enough to say that qualified women candidates should apply. Experience and skill requirement for women candidate must be reduced in order to give them the opportunity to learn and increase their knowledge.

It is not sufficient to say that programmes for and by women are being aired on the radio. It is important to take into consideration what time the programmes are being aired and if the

programmes address the needs of the women of the community.

Unless the station governance and management make concerted effort to include women in all station activities and to build her capacity the issue of equal gender representation in community radio will still be wanting. Women community radio broadcasters on their part must shed their inhibition and come forward to increase their knowledge and skills.

As a promoter of community broadcasting, I know how strongly women are coming ahead and no one can stop women from claiming their rightful place any more. There are very committed women champions for this cause and they are very aptly supported by activists, community mobilisers, trainers, fund raisers, and organisers. Men on their part need not fear women making strides ahead. It is in the best interest of men to be a facilitators rather than impediments. After all it can be a win-win situation! ♦

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