

Empowering Communities, Informing Policy: The Potential of Community Radio



*femLINKPACIFIC's mobile
women's community radio
experience: 2003-2008*



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Credits

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The information in this publication is based on our organisation's experience and lessons learnt through the development of our mobile women's community radio station femTalk 89.2 FM, including our women's Weekend Broadcasts with our team of young women broadcasters – Generation Next – and the establishment of our rural women's community media correspondents network. Information is also sourced from AMARC and UNESCO.

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Preface

In 2006, while addressing the Pacific Islands Information Communication Technology (ICT) Ministerial Meeting on Pacific Plan and the Digital Strategy, the late former Secretary-General of Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) acknowledged the efforts of the region's women's groups in empowering themselves through owning and operating their own radio stations.

Elaborating on the Digital Strategy in Wellington, New Zealand, Greg Urwin reiterated the recognition of ICTs as an important tool for empowering communities in the Pacific with new opportunities.

The Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan recognises that: "Broadcasting, which simultaneously uses local, regional and global content, has been a largely neglected area of ICTs in the Pacific. Newer technologies, through the internet, audio streaming, community FM broadcasting and digital satellite radio, offer means to better achieve coverage, improve the content in broadcasting and to improve on independent, traditional and community media. So far, countries in the region have been unable to fully utilise this cost-effective mass ICT with its potential to provide high quality education, health and other services, as well as entertainment. The Digital Strategy aims to expand the opportunities that convergence and digitalisation offer to broadcasting services through private, non-state agencies (NSAs) and government channels. In the Pacific, with its range of scale and other diversity, there is a demand for thinking globally while acting locally. The essence of the Digital Strategy will be identifying those areas where synergies exist – in regulation, market or standards – and promoting regional solutions, while identifying the needs for local action and providing support to local agencies."

While Pacific leaders finally made a connection between gender equality and ICTs in the 2004 Revised Pacific Platform Action, as well as in the 2006 Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan, the actual work on making this link began much earlier with women's community media initiatives.

Taking their cue from Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), a broad-based agenda for promoting and protecting women's human rights worldwide that was adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), women's NGOs took it upon themselves to fill the crucial gap of lack of access to information and means of self-expression of women left by the mainstream media.

Section J of BPA is about women and the media. It has two objectives: increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

Women had long recognised that while in the past decades there has been an increase in the number of newspapers and publications, commercial radio and television and digital media, women's representation in the media has been minimal. And in order to play a key role in society and in their development, women needed to be informed on what was going on around them and also have a means to speak on what was happening and have their voices heard – which could only be possible through having their own media.

It was this notion of empowerment which gave birth in 2000 to femLINKPACIFIC: Media Initiatives for Women. The founders of femLINKPACIFIC had realised during the Blue Ribbon Peace Vigil throughout Fiji's political crisis in 2000, that women's peace efforts continued to be marginalised from the mainstream of decision making, and that in order to create greater visibility and understanding of women's peace efforts, there was a need to provide alternative and additional viewpoints and analysis to the mainstream media coverage.

Inspired by the work of Peacewomen, who developed and enabled the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 titled "Women, Peace and Security", femLINKPACIFIC recognised that women's

media also had a role to play in advocating for women's participation in peace-building and conflict transformation, while also providing coverage of a range of women's peace initiatives. This, femLINKPACIFIC believes, is one way to challenge the political status quo where women too often are relegated as victims. By offering a "safe media space" for women from different communities to speak, femLINKPACIFIC is also able to repackage and deliver this information to the national, regional and even international level to advocate for women's participation in all levels of peace-building.

In 2004, femLINKPACIFIC established a women's mobile community radio station, femTALK 89.2FM. This radio-station-in-a-suitcase has been taken out to rural and semi-urban women around Fiji, providing them with an opportunity to speak on issues concerning them while also allowing them to suggest how these issues could be resolved.

femTALK 89.2FM was a bold move because it challenged the status quo of existing decision-making structures in Fiji by enabling women to speak openly on common matters and, crucially, it also involved young women. The suitcase radio has also been used as a training tool to empower women to speak to each other and with their communities.

femLINKPACIFIC believes that once people are able to share their opinions freely and safely, then only can we say that democracy is at work. This is what community radio is all about. It is about giving voice to the voiceless, being a communication channel for the marginalised and demonstrating the possibility of the democratisation of information and communication channels within societies.

Most importantly, femTALK 89.2 FM has proved that community radio is able to involve women and to treat them not merely as a target audience, but as participating agents, a valuable source of information and as peace-builders for their community and country.

Over the years since its introduction, the mobile radio station has become an important tool in femLINKPACIFIC's work to meet the overall objectives of the organisation's Community Empowerment Programme. This programme aims to ensure policy-makers,

mainstream media and broader civil society are more informed of women's positive influence in communities and to make women stronger advocates for peace and security issues. The Community Empowerment Programme also works to provide anecdotal evidence from women in communities to help lobby for improved implementation of gender equality goals and commitments (such as UNSCr1325).

Ultimately, the organisation also believes that through the model of operations it has developed since 2004, including the establishment of the Community Media Centre, they have a positive strategy which can assist to empower more women in target communities articulate their visions for equality, development and peace from local to national level and beyond, using appropriate information-communication technology.

The deregulation of the radio industry in the mid-1980s, followed by public sector reforms in the 1990s transformed the industry. A combination of reduced government funding and advances in technology led to a reduction in staff numbers and a shift away from public service-driven programming towards commercially-focused radio. 'Jukebox' music formats are the main feature of commercial radio stations and public service broadcasting, which remains resourced through a contractual arrangement with the government, has continually failed to reflect and uphold gender equality commitments by the state. Critically, the two biggest national women's networks – the National Council of Women Fiji and the Soqosoqo Vakamarama – were never consulted in the development of public service broadcast content or during the ongoing review of programming quotas.

All this meant that on radio women and their issues remained relegated to the context of recipes, entertainment news, and nothing too radical which could challenge the patriarchal status quo.

In response to this reality, femLINKPACIFIC established femTALK 89.2FM. The radio station offers women a "safe space" to articulate and exchange their viewpoints and encourages women to speak to each other and with their communities. As a way to implement the station's slogan "Women speaking to women

for peace”, the mobile broadcasts feature pre-produced reports and interviews recorded-as-live in local languages accompanied by an English translation. The stories and interviews are taken from one community to the next, sharing views and opinions rarely heard on mainstream radio.

femTALK 89.2FM is enabling women and young women to have a voice and share an opinion about a range of social, economic and political issues that will help bring about sustainable development and peace.

Each broadcast is an opportunity to promote the potential that exists within women leaders in local communities to identify critical development priorities as well as advise development programmes. The women who participate in each broadcast are free to express their opinion and belief, in a peaceful and inclusive manner. The radio broadcasts are an opportunity for women to be heard by leaders from those in local government to the leadership of district and provincial councils, who remain predominantly men. During the broadcasts in the capital city, these interviews also reaffirm the need for national decision-making to be inclusive of rural women’s realities.

By December 2007, femLINKPACIFIC had conducted more than 40 women’s weekend broadcasts in Suva, 11 rural broadcasts elsewhere in the country, produced 12 community videos, more than 36 monthly e-news bulletins, as well as 12 editions of our regional and national publication, femTALK, and

numerous national and regional media and policy action alerts. Through this output femLINKPACIFIC has demonstrated the possibility of working at a range of levels to contribute to bringing about a change in the political and decision-making sphere in Fiji and in the Pacific islands region.

We have been able to increase the visibility of Pacific women’s experiences from national to international level by being an available women’s, peace-based media outlet and clearing house.

In Fiji, we are now working to establish a national community radio network, to build on our pilot initiatives and to expand our network of ruo incr

initiatives also have the potential to inform and enable gender-inclusive reconciliation programmes, serve as an information and communication network for initiatives, as well as acting as a mechanism for the early detection of conflict indicators.

Community radio can be safe, trusted and respected channels of information for a range of stakeholders, especially women, who remain sidelined from mainstream media content. The next step is to strengthen and

expand community radio operations with women in local communities.

It is hoped this handbook will provide women with some basic knowledge of how to set up a women's community radio and make efficient use of it for their development. It builds on the experience of femTALK 89.2FM which over the years has held many successful broadcasts around Fiji and helped take marginalised women's voices to national and international levels.



Why women need their own radio

Across the Pacific Island region, even with the advancement of new media such as television and the internet, radio is still the most accessible medium of mass communication for a majority of the people. From the comfort of one's sitting and bedroom, village gardens and fields, to offices and in taxis and buses one can hear the sound of radio.

Radio reaches people who cannot read the daily newspapers or watch television because of language, geography or cost barriers. Many of these people live in rural areas and many are women.

Between 2005 and 2007, femLINKPACIFIC participated in a research partnership with ISIS-International Manila with support from the International Development Research Centre, to consider the most appropriate information and communication tool for the empowerment of rural women. The People's Communication for Development (PC4D) publication released in March 2008 is the culmination of the research, as well as the experience of more than seven years of work by femLINKPACIFIC in developing women's community media initiatives "from scratch".

For femLINKPACIFIC, participating in the research project was an opportunity to delve into the realities of why we do the work we do and an important opportunity to link up with

women undertaking similar work in the project countries as well as contribute to a substantive study of the reality of women and communications.

The research project was also a critical way to identify the most appropriate means of information and communication to support the empowerment of rural communities, with a special focus on women's access to information and communication.

What is important is that there is greater appreciation of the gender-power relations in the context of how a woman, especially in our rural communities, is or is not able to access information. Women's personal empowerment is closely linked to the availability of information. Is the information, for example, available in a format that she can understand or share further?

When planning developments relating to new ICTs, there is a need to consider infrastructure issues and whether or not communities are able to contribute to local programming as well. This reality also includes the critical role of interpersonal or face-to-face communication with rural women's group. This means the delivery of information directly to women in their communities, and the development of community media initiatives to document women's issues, their stories, such as femLINKPACIFIC's campaign, "My Life, My Issues, My Peace and Security."

The research has also been an opportunity to highlight Pacific realities. With the partici-

■ Based on the keynote speech by Joan Yee at the launch of the PC4D report in Suva, March 11, 2008.

pation of the HELP Centre in Papua New Guinea it was shown that despite the use of the term "global village" in relation to the internet, Pacific women's realities when addressing information and communication have remained marginalised for too long.

Building on work previously done by ISIS and other groups, this study provides the first detailed analysis of the relationship between communication tools and the empowerment of women in the Pacific region and it looks at how intermediary groups (such as NGOs and civil society organisations) use communication tools to empower grassroots women. It also looks at what "empowerment" means to the participants in the survey and articulates the benefits perceived by women, such as economic independence, political participation, the building of community solidarity, self-transformation and societal transformation.

Each country had also identified issues that were important for their women: violence against women in PNG, the caste system in India, and peace and security and the disabled in Fiji.

The study covers both traditional tools, (such as theatre and face-to-face discussion) and new tools (such as radio and television, print, cellular phones and computers), and raises the question of whether ICTs are the best medium of communication for development.

One of the strengths of this study is that a very wide selection of organisations were interviewed.

The specific findings make for very interesting reading and it is fascinating that in this era of computers, the internet and the "information super highway", the study found that oral communications such as story telling, popular theatre and face-to-face interaction were "the most empowering way of sharing information between intermediary groups and the grassroots women".

The Fiji case study, involving the Catholic Women's League under the leadership of Susana Evening, documented the importance of personal relationships and women's engagement in development projects and activities, in empowering women. This shows that the personal and human touch still over-

rides everything and is something that we cannot ignore despite the prevalence and power of new technologies.

Communications tools such as radio and film were identified as the most effective tools in interacting with grassroots women. It also noted that print media in the form of books, newsletters, posters and brochures were rated quite highly in PNG and Fiji.

This is a reminder of the usefulness of the print media as long as large segments of our population are denied the benefits of electricity. And even when they do have electricity and access to modern gadgets, the joy and satisfaction of reading is an activity that is treasured by many.

The study provides us with many examples of the lengths and trouble that women go to so they can be in contact with the world and how the new technologies are helping. One such case is that of Rosalia who lives in a remote area in Labasa. Rosalia takes in her stride the task of riding out on horse-back to a certain point so that she has reception for her mobile phone to receive or give messages.

Radio was identified as the most accessible communications tool for grassroots women in four of the countries studied: Fiji, PNG, India and the Philippines. (For Thailand, television was the most popular medium).

The reasons included:

- ▶ to reach rural areas;
- ▶ Linguistic flexibility as vernacular languages can be used;
- ▶ Literacy is not an issue;
- ▶ Costs are low;
- ▶ Electricity is not required;
- ▶ The technology is simple and easy to use.
- ▶ With the popular "talkback" sessions, it is interactive.

Another reason we take very much for granted is that usually people can listen to radio while at the same time carrying on their normal work or household activities. This is one of the powerful advantages that radio has over television and other visual media.

femLINKPACIFIC has also invested valuable work in developing and implementing its innovative "suitcase radio" initiative. This gives a powerful non-commercial avenue to ordi-

nary women to enable their voices to be heard on our radio waves and to receive information that empowers them, leading to a better quality of life.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the quality of information being communicated can be more meaningful as there is less dependence on commercial advertisers, and the content goes beyond entertainment or cooking tips to include dialogue on social, economic and political issues not normally found on the commercial airwaves.

femLINKPACIFIC is also involved in other media initiatives (like the feminist literature that is available for reference at its Community Media Centre) and has also persisted in lobbying and advocating for the inclusion of commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, and

other agreements and protocols. One of its successes has been the recognition of the importance of broadcasting to communities in the Digital Strategy of the Pacific Plan. The strategy recognised the need to improve broadcast content and on independent, traditional and community media. This has been referenced in the Fiji section of PC4D.

The PC4D study verified what most of us already know: while the internet and email, computers and mobile phones have much to offer, these were the least accessible to our ordinary women. Some of this "technology deprivation" may be explained by the absence of the necessary infrastructure such as electricity and networks especially in rural areas, but also because of the low levels of technological literacy among the population, the high costs of the new technology and the depths of poverty amongst our peoples.



What is community radio?

Community radio is characterised by the active participation of the community in creating news, information, entertainment and culturally-relevant material with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. With training, local producers can create programmes using local voices.

The community can also actively participate in the management of the station and have a say in the scheduling and content of the programmes.

Secondly, it is essentially a non-profit enterprise. In these days of highly commercialised broadcasting, the ethos of community radio remains independence and responsibility to serve the community and not the advertiser. As the station is owned by the community it also maintains some responsibility in the running of the station.

Thirdly, community radio programming is designed by the community to improve social conditions and the quality of its cultural, economic and political life. The community

itself decides what its priorities and needs are in terms of information provision.

Over the years community radio has become an essential tool for community development. People can recognise themselves and identify with community radio, in addition to communicating among themselves.

According to Greg Urwin, the late former Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat*, all stakeholders — from national ICT advisory committees, regional organisations and the donor community — need to play a role in ensuring that ICT policies and plans are well supported and are relevant to all sectors of the community. "When you get right down to it, this sector is, after all, about empowerment," Urwin said. This recognition at a political level is critical, especially for women and civil society groups, who will

* Speech by Greg Urwin, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Islands ICT Ministerial Meeting, March 30, 2006.

need to constantly remind policy-makers that these promises of empowerment through ICTs have been made. It is particularly important for women who are still struggling to take their rightful place as legitimate stakeholders to ensure that whatever technology and media forms are used will meet the needs not only of the private sector, information-technology professionals and the national planning offices, but also of women, the majority of whom are in rural communities, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

Community radio is a tool for empowerment

Community radio is more than just a medium for broadcasting information. It is an opportunity to further democratise information and communication channels to enable Pacific communities to advocate for their issues, to tell their stories.

Community radio and other appropriate technology will enable women to inform and lobby for their development needs, whether these are demands for governments to address local infrastructure needs, provide better medical services or through contributing to discussions on constitutional and human rights issues.

For this advocacy to be successful it needs to start with capacity-building and training for young women and rural women to make the connection with policy-makers through their local programme productions so that women and their communities challenge existing personal, institutional and systematic barriers to their development and empowerment.

There are three different kinds of radio stations:

- **Public radio:** This is radio which is owned and operated by the government. It is normally there to serve the general public in the way which the government thinks is best;

- **Private radio:** This is radio which is owned and operated by individuals or companies. The main purpose of this sort of station is to make money, and;

- **Community radio:** This is radio which is owned and operated by a community or

members of a community. The main purpose of this sort of station is to develop the community. AMARC, the World Association of Community Broadcasters, describes community radio as follows:

"When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority and makes good humour and hope its main purpose; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice or a publicity gimmick; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated, not even the musical dictatorship of the big recording studios; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship, that is community radio."

Community radio can involve a township, village, district or an island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, such as femTALK 89.2FM which focuses on women's issues.

One thing that distinguishes community radio from public-service broadcasting and commercial radio stations is that the operators of community radio stations are interested in participatory social development and not making money.

By encouraging participation in social development, community radio provides everybody a chance to help in improving the quality of life in that particular community. Almost all community radio stations are formed on the belief that it can become the means through which their communities could improve the quality of their lives.

femTALK 98.2FM was established to address the decision-making status quo in Fiji and enhance the participation of women in social, economic and political spheres. femTALK 89.2FM has developed a programme format which continues to provide women an opportunity to access information and news, as well as take to the airwaves themselves.

Principles of community radio

Community radio is a process. It is not simply about producing radio programmes to put on air; it is about developing your community by using radio.

Community radio is both for the community and by the community. The community is understood to be the owner of the radio station. The community participates in all aspects of the station, from establishment to management, administration to financing.

The functions of community radio are as follows:

■ **Creating a diversity of voices and opinions on the air:** Community radio, through its openness to participation to all sectors and people in a community, creates a diversity of voices and opinions on the air. These include people representing different ethnic, social and religious backgrounds and gender. A function of community radio is to try objectively to air all sides of a discussion, without itself taking sides.

» *femTALK 89.2 FM travels out to women and their communities, offering women a safe space to voice and exchange their viewpoints. It encourages women to speak to each other and with their communities. As a way to implement the station's slogan, "Women speaking to women for peace", the mobile broadcasts feature pre-produced audio reports and interviews recorded as live in local language and featuring an English translation. The stories and interviews travel from one community to the next, sharing views and opinions rarely heard on the mainstream radio.*

■ **Provide a diversity of programmes and content:** Community radio usually broadcasts a diversity of programmes in a variety of formats and styles. These can include roundtable discussions, news reports, interviews, talk-back shows and live broadcasts of meetings in the community. Content also covers a wide range of topics and is mainly determined by the lifestyles and livelihoods of the community and by the problems it faces.

» *When femLINKPACIFIC staged its first*

community radio consultation in 2003, participants were drawn from a range of NGO and CSO partners, including Interfaith Search Fiji, the YWCA, the women's network of the Fiji Disabled People's Association (FDPA) as well as the Aids Task Force of Fiji. They contributed to the development of the station philosophy and programme ideas for the weekend broadcasts.

Programmes such as the Women's Civil Society Hour, the Market Report, Look at My Abilities, and an interfaith segment, provide an opportunity for representatives from Fiji's broad civil society network to share news and information during the weekend broadcasts – either through pre-recorded or live segments.

Interviews from the network of rural correspondents continue to provide rural features for each broadcast, while international segments, such as those from UN Radio is downloaded from the internet. Monthly features produced by the Regional Media Centre of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community are also featured.

A pre-broadcast consultation to help define the content for each rural broadcast is held with local women's leaders before they go to air from their communities. During the consultation, the women also identify local officials who they would like to hear from. Pre-recorded segments are produced during field visits with local women participating every step of the way. Having pre-recorded segments means it is easier for the rural stories to feature in each local broadcast. And so when 89.2FM is switched on during the designated broadcast hours, the community is able to tune in to their stories and issues, as well as hear features from other locations.

■ **Encourage open dialogue and democratic process:** Community radio is helping further democratise information and communication channels, and enabling people to not only air their grievances but also provide a platform, for women in particular, to develop and relate their solutions.

■ **Encourage participation, sharing of information and innovation:** Community radio encourages participation by providing

a platform for debate, analysis and the exchange of ideas and opinions.

► Since 2001, femLINKPACIFIC's "Not Just Sweet Talk" campaign has been a media initiative specifically targeting national elections. It has become a platform to document the experiences and stories of female candidates, while also being an avenue for local communities to address development priorities.

At the same time, femLINKPACIFIC has also forged a positive partnership at the local government level – in Lami, Nausori, Labasa, Nadi and Ba – to strengthen the participation of women in local-level development planning and implementation.

Pre-broadcast consultations staged with the local government authorities mean women can access local government officials, sometimes for the very first time. Interviews with local officials,

in particular the mayors and the town clerks, are also highlighting the potential for community radio to be a meeting space between officials and local citizens, which can be strengthened to enhance a more participatory process for consultations and decision making.

■ **Give voice to the voiceless:** Community radio gives voice to the voiceless in the community such as the women, youth and ethnic minorities who would otherwise be ignored.

No community can change and develop equally and satisfactorily without the active participation of its women, youth and minority groups.

► Each broadcast on femTALK 89.2FM is an opportunity to promote the potential that exists within women leaders in local communities to identify critical development priorities as

femTALK 89.2FM: 'Suitcase radio' story

femTALK 89.2FM's story began with a shared vision following the attempted civilian coup of May 2000. It is another initiative of femLINKPACIFIC — to promote "women speaking to women for peace". femTALK 89.2FM operates to bring people together in a safe space to share their views and opinions.

The quest to establish a women's community radio initiative led to femLINKPACIFIC's participation at the 2003 World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Conference in Kathmandu, Nepal. It was there that femLINKPACIFIC's founding coordinator, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, with assistance from UNESCO, first found the radio in a suitcase.

The "suitcase radio" was identified as the most appropriate equipment for the organisation to develop "Women's Weekend Radio" broadcasts in the capital, and more importantly, take radio out to women in rural communities. UNESCO further assisted in funding a series of consultations with a range of NGO partners including representatives of the Fiji Disabled People's Association, Interfaith Search Fiji, the YWCA and other women's NGO partners. By September 2003, the station philosophy and programme format had been developed and by the end of that year the organisation had successfully acquired a community radio broadcast licence.

femTALK 89.2FM was launched in partnership with the Catholic Women's League on May

5, 2004 at the Asia Pacific Conference of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.

The first team of broadcast volunteers was a group of fifth form students of St Joseph's Secondary School who hosted monthly broadcasts in Suva with assistance from ECREA. Throughout 2004, the organisation also prepared itself to take the suitcase radio out to rural communities. This meant becoming more familiar with the technical operations of Fiji and the Pacific's first mobile women's community radio station. Networks with rural groups had to be developed and resources from the donor community had to be mobilised to support its operations.

At the same time, to prepare women, including representatives from the rural communities, and women from marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities, femLINKPACIFIC also staged broadcast-centred training programmes for women and young women drawn from the national women's NGO networks.

The commitment to youth empowerment, through the use of community radio has evolved into the "Generation Next project", which now has trained close to 20 young women as community radio broadcasters, including four young women with physical disabilities who stage the Women's Weekend Radio broadcasts in the capital.

tion. They can be drawn from local groups and networks.

»» *femLINKPACIFIC was still a very small organisation when the suitcase radio was being developed. Through discussions with key NGO and CSO partners, it was agreed that volunteers would be invited from women's civil society sector. In 2004, with the assistance of the Catholic Women's League, a team of broadcast volunteers was assembled to assist the coordinator launch the station and stage monthly broadcasts.*

These monthly broadcasts enabled representatives from a range of groups, including ECREA, Fiji Media Watch, Interfaith Search, the FDPA women's group, as well as RRRT, to prepare and host their monthly radio segments. Recognising the need to develop a core team of broadcast volunteers, femLINKPACIFIC then invited young women from the National Council of Women's network to participate in training and demonstration broadcasts. This initiative has evolved into the Generation Next project which sees a core group of young women, including two in-school volunteers, working with femLINKPACIFIC to produce and stage the Women's Weekend Broadcasts. The volunteers all receive a monthly volunteer allowance. One of the key lessons learnt is that to sustain the work of the women's radio project, especially to support the expansion of the women's community radio, there is a need for a full-time radio project officer.

■ **Sources of money:** These are the people who provide the money to support the station.

»» *The implementation of femLINKPACIFIC's community radio project has been a series of pilot projects since 2004. While femLINKPACIFIC's coordinator had substantive mainstream broadcasting experience, she had to adapt this to develop and manage a community radio project. In order to secure funds from a range of donors to support training workshops, rural broadcasts, the resourcing of young women broadcast volunteers, rural correspondents and focal points, femLINKPACIFIC developed a series of funding proposals for each activity. The proposals covered everything from rural consultations and pre-broadcast planning meetings, to field visits, publicity and awareness*

raising. Regular communication with development partners, not just limited to project reports, has assisted in also creating awareness of the aims and objectives of this women's media initiative.

■ **Suppliers of support services:** These are people who will offer all kinds of support like training and general information.

»» *femLINKPACIFIC continues to develop a growing database of support-service providers such as those for technical support and suppliers of information.*

Second step: The broadcast licence

- ▶ Is there a law for community radio?
- ▶ How do you get permission to broadcast?
- ▶ Who gives the permission?
- ▶ Do they say what you can broadcast?
- ▶ Do they say where you can broadcast?
- ▶ Do you have to pay them?
- ▶ How much and what for?

When planning to establish a community radio station, the first step is to find out what your government says about community radio. Applying for a licence is when you ask the government for permission to broadcast. You will need to talk to your government to find out exactly what you need to do. The amount of time it will take for you to get a licence will be different in every country.

You will have to work with the government or representatives of the government because:

- ▶ They are the ones who will give you permission to broadcast;
- ▶ They will have rules about what you can broadcast;
- ▶ They will have rules about how you can make your money and how you spend it;
- ▶ They will have rules about how the station is managed;
- ▶ In fact governments can have rules on anything relating to your station. All of these rules will affect what you can do and the way you run the station, which means these rules will affect your sustainability.

»» *In Fiji, as in most Pacific Island countries, the regulator within the Department of*

Communications is responsible for the allocation and management of the broadcast spectrum. As femLINKPACIFIC found, there was no standard application form. Instead the organisation was required to provide information about the suitcase radio and programme format, highlighting the proposed broadcast operations.

We included the following information about femTALK 89.2FM's development objectives:

- ▶ The traditional decision-making structure does not allow women, especially from the rural population and the poor, to communicate openly on common matters;

- ▶ By taking a small mobile radio unit out to women and communities, femLINKPACIFIC will give them a "safe space" to articulate and exchange their viewpoints;

- ▶ Through a low-power transmitter, we will encourage women to speak to each other and with their communities. Once people are able to share their opinions freely and safely, then we can say we are truly experiencing democracy.

Coverage and target audience: The primary target audience of femTALK 89.2 FM is rural and semi-urban women whose stories and issues do not make the news or even non-government organisation information (NGO) networks such as newsletters and websites. NGOs, government and regional partners working with grassroots women also benefit from femTALK 89.2FM as it helps disseminate their development information. Since femTALK 89.2FM is a mobile community radio it is always on the move and covers areas with a primary focus on four key rural communities: Ba, Nadi, Labasa and Nausori.

Actual location: We had to provide details of the location for each of our weekend and rural broadcasts.

Equipment selection: femTALK 89.2fm uses a complete station in a suitcase which includes a 100-watt transmitter capable of providing coverage within an 8-12 kilometre radius.

Because of it is a mobile station, the regulator had to ensure that the frequency allocated to our low-powered transmitter would not interfere with other broadcasters.

femLINKPACIFIC pays an annual broadcast fee covering the frequency allocation as well as an operating fee, reflecting the non-profit nature of its community radio operations.

Third step: Station programming

Any successful radio station must appeal to the interests, tastes, and desires of its audience. What makes programmes for a community radio different is that, in addition to pleasing, entertaining and perhaps providing some general enlightenment for its audience, they also seek to facilitate change, social progress, and better living conditions in the community the radio serves. The unique advantage that community radio has over any other type of broadcasting in winning audience is its ability to be specifically relevant to the particular needs, interests and desires of its relatively small audience.

- ▶▶ When developing the programme format for femLINKPACIFIC, women and their communities were at the centre of the discussion, recognising that they are our biggest resource, the sources of information and the experts on their issues. In "mapping our women's network community", femLINKPACIFIC recognised that our best entry point was through the two national women's organisations – the Soqosoqo Vakamarama and the National Council of Women. By working through the leaders of the range of affiliates of the NCWF we were able to reach out and meet women who could participate in our community radio broadcasts.

This was a further opportunity to enhance the local content of each rural broadcast. After all, people will listen to themselves if they are on the radio. They will also listen to friends and family. It is a very easy way to get people listening to your station – put them on air and strengthen the participatory approach of consultation. The women in the local level pre-broadcast consultations therefore have an opportunity to share their opinions and ideas for the broadcast; write and record stories for each broadcast, and; participate in panel discussions with other women. Women therefore are directly involved in making the programme.

The most important level of community participation in programming is the production of recorded voices. It is the opportunity in which the entire community can be heard and eliminates constraints like closeness to the station, whether they have telephones and so on.

The suitcase radio station

When femLINKPACIFIC decided to establish a mobile women's radio station, we did so realising that the "suitcase radio" was built for mobile broadcasts while also providing us with the key components for any radio station:

- ▶ A complete FM broadcast station capable of operating within or beyond existing commercial power networks;

- ▶ The 13.8/28 volt DC power requirement permits battery operation from solar or other charging sources to reach that last mile that is so important in educational broadcasting;

- ▶ Suitable for portable or fixed operation with all components operating from a single DC source;

- ▶ Equipment can be easily modified with plug-in connections for easy maintenance and operation;

- ▶ This unit provides a complete broadcast station in a self-contained unit that is fully portable. It can also be utilised as a permanent FM broadcast station;

- ▶ The console portion of the system is ideal for community access to existing networks;

- ▶ Has the option of a 30W or 100W unit (femLINKPACIFIC has a 100-watt unit which provides a 8–12 kilometre transmission radius);

- ▶ It readily accepts any audio source for re-broadcasting, including satellite and off-air programming.

Field equipment kits have been developed for our rural correspondents, broadcast volunteers and focal points.

Once again the decision to use analogue tape recorders resulted from the need for the equipment to be appropriate and accessible. Each tape recorder can be used by women with limited vision or limited technical skills.

A playback facility means women are able to hear themselves after a recording session. Tapes and batteries for the analogue tape



The radio station console is also accessible for persons with limited technical experience, and also for persons with visual impairments. In fact, one of our broadcast volunteers who has not had sight has been able to teach herself how to operate the broadcast console because of its features.



Analogue tape recorders being used in the field.

recorders are also available in rural communities.

We have also found that these tape recorders are also appropriate when we are producing radio segments for our rural broadcasts.

Using a format which we refer to as "recording-as-live" we are able to easily package up field productions, without having to consider the need for technical post-production during field assignments.

The future: A women's community radio network

femLINKPACIFIC has a vision for a Pacific Islands Community Radio Network where women have an equal role in the management of a network of community radio stations which link Pacific communities together.

While this will require a range of negotiations at various levels, from regulatory to programme level, we believe this can be the realisation of what the Digital Strategy is all about. What is required is practical collaboration between key development partners and other community media practitioners and advocates.

We believe this will enable:

- ▶ Community radio stations to be used as a critical bridge between communities and will increase the recognition of the role of community radio as a component for inclusive communication, strengthening of democratic processes and peace-building;

- ▶ A Pacific's-own model for implementation, based on femLINKPACIFIC's development of community radio in Fiji (2003–2008) and will also ensure a gender-inclusive approach so there is equitable participation of women and young women, as well as people with disabilities; it will serve as a critical bridge to demonstrate the opportunities that exist for communities when commitments such as CEDAW and the Revised PPA are incorporated from the local to the national level;

- ▶ Community radio stations can be vital channels of information to inform a broad range of policy interventions and relevant programmes from development partners. Linking with other information-communication networks, including internet and satellite communication will enable development agencies to access community radio stations to share information about programmes ranging from health and agriculture, to culture and arts;

- ▶ The community radio station will serve as a critical link between communities and local governance structures – whether these are traditional or modern (like local govern-

ment authorities), contributing to the strengthening of local good governance efforts;

- ▶ It will serve as a practical communication platform for the marginalised, thereby assisting in the increasing awareness of critical development issues from the perspective of those too often rendered invisible in local and national development planning;

- ▶ It will be closely linked to the development of an information-communication network for conflict prevention and the promotion of the human security framework;

- ▶ By engaging communities in radio content production, women and their communities will given the opportunity to articulate their stories as well as offer community-based poverty eradication solutions which will be channelled to policy makers in the capital city;

- ▶ Community radio programme content will be mainstreamed to a broader network of listeners;

- ▶ Contribute to the development of a cadre of Pacific island community radio broadcasters drawn from youth networks who will serve as the producers of local content.

It is critical that as part of the proposed implementation plan there is a need for clear policy-related frameworks addressing regulatory, content and community-based operations as follows:

■ Community radio regulatory framework:

The following steps are recommended to enable the necessary regulatory environment:

- ▶ Pacific island regulators are assisted to review and update their broadcast legislation to ensure a category for community broadcasting (radio and television);

- ▶ The new legislation will ensure that community radio broadcasters are only required to pay for the broadcast spectrum fee, and if necessary a minimal operating or administration fee;

► Pacific island regulators will allocate a set of frequencies for their community radio network;

► Pacific island regulators will assist in facilitating technical support through existing telecommunication companies or national broadcasters as part of a "community service" provision.

■ **Community information centres (CICs):** A policy for the operations of the CICs will be needed to ensure that these centres operate in an equitable manner, so that access to the CICs is assured at all times for women and young women, persons with disabilities and other minority groups, who have traditionally been marginalised from the development of the ICT sector in our region.

This policy would also ensure that participation in training programmes and the development and production of content is inclusive and reflects the diversities of these communities.

■ **Technical support:** Whether community radio operators choose a complete radio-in-a-suitcase as used by femLINKPACIFIC or a low-cost radio broadcasting unit such as the prototype of a "radio-in-a-box" recently developed by the Studio Technology and Training Team of the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) for UNESCO (■ **See box on this page**), technical support services are critical for the communities.

■ **Role of the SPC Regional Media Centre:** It would be critical from the outset to ensure a clear role and operations system for the SPC Regional Media Centre and a partnership agreement or understanding between the centre and femLINKPACIFIC, the community radio station operators. Such a partnership will ensure a systematic approach to the production and collation of a regional broadcast

Hi-tech radio-in-a-box



The UNESCO/ABU "box" measuring around 55x50 cm contains a laptop, mixer, CD/cassette player and a 30W FM transmitter. The "box" can be used to produce radio programmes using a portable digital audio recorder, microphone inputs or other pre-recorded

material; schedule play lists for playback automatically and broadcast via the built-in FM transmitter.

UNESCO commissioned the ABU to design and build the box which should cost within US\$5000. The equipment was sourced from various parts of the world and met the cost requirement. The laptop is the heart of the system, being used for editing with freeware software and for the play-out of scheduled programmes also using freeware. Using the portable digital audio recorder, interviews and other events taking place in remote areas can be recorded. This material is then downloaded via the USB port to the laptop, where it can be edited and prepared for broadcast.

The 30W transmitter can be tuned to any frequency within the FM band by a very simple setting process. The transmitter, which is only 13 cm in height, is heavily screened to be able to be used close to audio sources without interference.

schedule, a quality control system, which would also include programme production or editorial guidelines, while also enabling the local broadcasters to have a sense of autonomy in their operations.

It should also be noted that the SPC would need to develop their own regional production system and ensure relevant technical, administrative and human resources for the production of content for national/local broadcasts, as well as regional programming.

Proposed implementation plan

Whether it is setting up a regional network or one community radio station, based on femLINKPACIFIC's community radio model, we advocate the following implementation plan:

■ Phase 1: Months 1-6

Key activities:

- ▶ Staging of community radio consultation with CSO network which serves as an introductory process for the introduction of community radio;
- ▶ Development and submission of community radio licence application;
- ▶ Development of technical support plan for the community radio station;
- ▶ Identification of a pool of youth who will be given introductory radio training as community radio broadcasters.

Key outputs:

- ▶ At least CSO leaders understand the principles and objectives of community radio and lend their support to the proposed project and have an understanding of the initial implementation phase(s) including the sourcing of local material from civil society projects and activities;
- ▶ The establishment of a community radio management committee to support the project implementation. This will also include a key technical support provider for the project;
- ▶ 10 youth representatives trained to support current documentation plans who become volunteers with community radio station and who commence documentation of local stories including women and community leader profiles, profiles of CSO network (organisational stories);
- ▶ Production and submission of community radio licence application; monitoring of

the licence application process;

- ▶ Project report from the technical adviser and local hosts.

■ Phase 2 (Upon approval of licence): Months 6-18

Key activities:

- ▶ Importation of the suitcase radio;
- ▶ The technical adviser conducts training and demonstration broadcast for (a) community radio volunteers, (b) community radio committee, and (c) broader civil society network and mainstream media;
- ▶ Local broadcasts are conducted by the community radio volunteers managed by the CR committee under the leadership of the host organisation;
- ▶ Staging of end-of-phase review and planning for rural broadcasts with consultant and local monitoring and evaluation consultant.

Key outputs:

- ▶ Suitcase radio arrives in the country;
- ▶ Technical rigging and test of the equipment;
- ▶ Five-day community radio training programme and demonstration broadcast is conducted as a community event;
- ▶ At least 12 monthly community radio programmes are broadcast from the broadcast site;
- ▶ Project review report and outcomes document from end of Phase 1 consultation including a rural broadcast plan and budget.



NOTES



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