

# Women, Grab the Microphone!

by Bianca Miglioretto



**W**omen come from everywhere, go everywhere and talk about everything. So let's grab the microphones and occupy the airwaves. Because if we look at mass media and at radio in particular, the presence of women in every sphere of society and life is just not reflected. There are fewer women than men heard over the radio and if women are projected on radio it is often in a very voyeuristic and sensational or traditional way, full of stereotypes that are far from our realities.

Community radio or participatory radio, as they are also called, offer the best opportunity to women to grab the microphone and talk about the issues that interest them, play women's music seldom heard elsewhere, raise the consciousness on gender issues, inform women about their rights. Women have a lot to say and what they have to say shows a completely different, powerful, diverse, and active picture. This in turn shows the big contribution of women to society and their important participation in changing the world.

## **THE HERSTORY OF THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL NETWORK IN COMMUNITY RADIO**

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the world organisation of community radio, unites participatory radio stations all over the world and contributes to the development of the community radio movement along with the principles of solidarity and international co-operation. The idea of creating a Women's International Network (WIN) within AMARC came about at AMARC's Fourth World Conference in Dublin in 1990, where a group of women found a space to discuss their issues and proposed establishing permanent links among women working in participatory radio around the world. They also demanded the creation of a position for women on AMARC's otherwise regionally defined board of directors.

In the fifth AMARC conference in Mexico in 1992, AMARC-WIN, which has co-ordinators for each world region, was formally institutionalised. The women's vice-presidency, a permanent position now on the board of directors to represent the interests of women, was also officially established. The objectives of the WIN were defined as follows:

- ① Encouraging exchange among women working in community radio around the world
- ① Training for women
- ① Funding to develop the network and implement specific women's projects
- ① Create a code of ethics to guarantee the equal treatment of women working in AMARC member radio stations.

### **DEVELOPMENTS IN DIFFERENT REGIONS**

During the reporting at the sixth AMARC Conference in Senegal in 1995, it became apparent that WIN was best developed in Latin America and the Caribbean where they have up to 200 members. These members regularly receive materials that help in their radio work. Regular training with a gender perspective is also conducted for women. WIN in Latin America counts on the strong support of the regional AMARC office in Quito, Ecuador. In 1998, they were able to organise a radio campaign on women's human rights with songs,

radio spots and radio dramas on cassette. These cassettes were sent out to 1,200 community radio stations.

Organising in Africa started in Senegal. But as AMARC had just started in 1995 and, in many countries, the state's monopoly on broadcasting first had to be broken to pave the way for community radio, WIN in Africa has yet to fully develop. But there is a lot of potential especially among rural women. AMARC Vice-President for Africa Lynn Wanyeki emphasised this in her speech at the seventh international AMARC Conference in Milan, Italy in August 1998.

In the first Pan-European AMARC conference in 1994, women from Europe defined their objectives and aims. A year later, organising started in Eastern and Central Europe. Besides conducting training for women, WIN-Europe has produced a directory called "Women's Voices Crossing Frontiers," which contains profiles of over 40 women's radio programs, collectives and stations all over Europe. Since July 1998, WIN-Europe has also been counting on the strong support of the women's co-ordinator at the AMARC-Europe office.

Asia is another region with big potential. There are few community radio stations but the initiatives in several countries to establish community radio are strong. In India, a new broadcasting law that allows community radios to be established is about to be introduced. In the Philippines, a few local FM community stations have already been established. The Seventh International AMARC Conference held last August 1998 held in Milan decided to prioritise Asia. Isis International-Manila has been fertilising the ground for a WIN in Asia with projects on training and research for women in radio in Asia and the Pacific.

In Oceania and Northern America, there are very committed and active women who work closely with WIN. Yet, a network still has to be established in both regions.

At the international level, WIN has produced a series of cassettes on crucial women's issues such as violence against women and the effects of poverty on women. These



cassettes contain French, Spanish, and English features and interviews from women in different parts of the world. The cassettes are sent out to different radio stations.

### THE FUTURE OF WIN IS FEMININE

Again at the seventh AMARC conference, a day, whose theme was "Women grab the microphone!" was dedicated to WIN. It gave space to more than 70 participants to exchange experiences and ideas, and to set priorities for the WIN. The priorities mentioned above are still valid as WIN's general guidelines, but in Milan, WIN was also able to detail these priorities some more:

#### 🕒 Training needs

Training needs differ from region to region. In Asia and Africa, women see basic radio training, including training on broadcast legislation and radio management skills, as most urgent. In Europe, the priorities are more on training in new technologies and training for specific groups such as migrant women. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women want to focus on fundraising and gender perspectives. One thing in common is the keen need for more technical skills, trainers' training and production of training materials in different languages.

#### 🕒 Exchange

Every conference expressed a strong wish not just to have exchanges of information but also to share experiences by giving women the opportunity to work for some time in a community radio station in another country. This enlarges women's visions of what community radio can be and we can directly learn from each other. Up to now, such an organised exchange has not materialised. We have to overcome economic and language barriers and the first step will be to produce a directory of different women's radio projects that can host women from other radios and other countries.

#### 🕒 News Digest Service

In radio, we want to broadcast news about women who are neglected by mainstream radio reportage. We also want to inform people about women's activities in other parts of the

world. For this purpose, Cyberbrujas in Latin America established a news digest service for community radio in Spanish. Isis International-Manila is in the process of developing a multi-lingual Internet-band News Digest Service in Asia and the Pacific.

#### 🕒 International Networking

While WIN is more developed in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe, the priority for the coming years is Asia and Africa. But WIN should also keep Oceania and Northern America in mind. In both regions, a lot of community radios exist but in the seventh AMARC world conference, these regions' representatives reported that women in these regions are facing a backlash. Thus, one finds fewer women now in community radio compared to the early '90s.

Up to now, committed women have been doing most of the international networking on a voluntary basis. But WIN has grown to a point where it has become difficult to continue working in this way. Most of these volunteers already do a lot of volunteer work in their own community radio stations. It is time for all these work to be recognised and WIN has so many ambitious and challenging plans. One of its priorities is to be to employ a co-ordinator for WIN in the international office of AMARC. Together we can further develop and strengthen WIN, and through it give support to the many women all over to get access to the airwaves and to democratise broadcasting.

Fatou Binetou from Senegal said in the seventh AMARC world conference: "In WIN is a space where we can create complicities and discuss how we can support each other, shoulder to shoulder, to achieve our aims." 🏹

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