ANNEX 2

Report on AMARC 9 Global conference in Amman Jordan November 2006

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) met for their 9th triennial conference in Amman, Jordan, from November 11 to November 16 2006. Hosted by Jordan's AmmanNet Radio Station, the conference was attended by 300 radio practitioners, development professionals, and community radio scholars from 94 countries. This year's conference, "Voices of the World - Free the Airwaves," provided a space for attendees to engage in training workshops, share stories and experiences, evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the international community radio movement, and create a strategic plan for 2007 - 2010.

Representing a movement that began with tin miners' radio stations in Bolivia in the late 1940's, AMARC currently has over 3,500 members on five continents. As reiterated in the conference proposal's Executive Summary, "Radio is the most widespread electronic communications medium in the world, and a unique means of providing freedom of expression for the poorest communities. In particular - and in contrast to commercial radio - community radio puts the tools of communication into the hands of individual citizens for cultural expression, news and information, dialogue and development." The AMARC 9 Conference themes included "Removing the Barriers, Increasing Impact," "Media Freedom in the MENA Region," "Amplifying Women's Voices for Gender Equality," "Media, Freedom and Social Justice" and "Building Our Movement," as well as workshops on how to build radio transmitters, create wireless networks, and produce radio dramas.

CR FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Amman Declaration recognises "the powerful role that community radio (CR) plays in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by raising awareness of the key development challenges across the world and promoting peoples' participation in and ownership of development process." Attendees at the AMARC 9 conference provided strong testimony as to how CR has been successfully impacting development initiatives. Representatives from successful communication organisations like South Africa's Soul City, London-based PANOS, and Mexico's Comunication Comunitaria discussed how CR health and educational programming is working to help reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the use of entertainment education and extensive community outreach efforts. Some key successes discussed at the conference included strategies for poverty reduction through providing access to information, knowledge-sharing, and educational programming, as well as the ability of CR to facilitate disaster relief and to play a key role in conflict resolution.

One of the focuses of the conference was how CR has been used to address the underlying power inequalities that contribute to the marginalisation of women in many regions of the world. AMARC's Women's International Network (WIN) was particularly active at the Jordan conference, with a full day of conference activities dedicated to empowering women through CR and improving the plight of women journalists. Panels included speakers like Yamena Zuraqi from the Algerian "Femmes en Communication" and Ade Tamesca from the Indonesian "Woman Journal Radio Program" who discussed

the importance of using CR to reach out to victims of gender violence, providing women with a sense of agency and encouraging them to speak out against a "culture of shame" that prevents many such cases from being reported.

To this end, the Amman Declaration stated that "Media plays an important role in highlighting and promoting women's role in conflict transformation, peace building and reconstruction and in expediting national, regional and international peace processes" and called for "Women's access to and participation in decision-making in the media (to) be guaranteed at all levels."

AMARC AND THE MENA REGION

The Amman conference marks the first time an AMARC conference has been held in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as well as the first time there has been an organised AMARC delegation from this region. Independent, privately-owned AmmanNet Radio Station first approached AMARC about the possibility of hosting the conference while at AMARC's 8th triennial gathering in Katmandu. Interested in further developing alternatives to state-controlled media in a region where there is little or no community media or, in some cases, active repression of free media, AmmanNet representatives believed that hosting the AMARC conference was a great way to introduce the "community radio movement to the Arab media, (as well as to) social activists." As AMARC's intention is to convene in regions that have demonstrated both a high need and desire to establish community radio stations, Jordan was a thought to be a great location for the 2006 conference and some 60 people from Syria, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Morocco attended the conference.

AMARC Treasurer Elizabeth Robinson cited "the proliferation of the idea" of community radio in the MENA region as one of the most important accomplishments of this year's conference. Says Robinson, "The opportunity to hear one's voice is empowering. It gives you authority in ways that we only confer to certain special people. To understand that what you have to say might be as important as something someone in Washington might say is valuable." To this end, AmmanNet has agreed to act as a temporary base for the MENA work group, and members from the region will continue to meet to work on initiatives like facilitating training for CR practitioners, lobbying for less restrictive media legislation, and empowering minorities in the region. These efforts are reflected in the Amman Declaration, which states: "Independent media can play a significant role in achieving sustainable peace and promoting social development in the Middle East and North Africa region."

The conference culminated with the construction of a radio station in the rural town of Resha, Jordan, nestled in the Great Rift Valley. Implemented by the Prometheus Radio Project (PRP) - a United States-based non-profit organisation that advocates for a free, diverse, and democratic media - AMARC members, PRP staff and Resha locals worked for one week to build a low-power FM station to provide the people of Resha with a local source of news, information, music, and dialogue. Says PhD student Kristen Shamas, who participated in the build, "Having spent days soldering and planning, and having learned of the global movement for participatory media and communication rights, our new friends saw Radio Resha not only as their radio station, but also as their chance to contribute to a broader community that transcended their remote locale."

OBSTACLES FACING CR

Though CR programming content was an important part of the AMARC 9 agenda, much of the conference focused on creating an enabling environment for community radio (CR), with an emphasis on demonstrating the impact of CR at the regional and local levels. Said AMARC International President Steve Buckley, "In the struggle to establish community radio, we invariably go through two stages. One is the fight for the right to exist and the other is the struggle to work to be effective in really making a difference." During many of the panel discussions, CR practitioners shared stories of the difficulties in obtaining station licenses, of fighting government control and censorship, and of the constant burden of financial constraints. Addressing these concerns, AMARC identified "the lack of proper enabling legislation" as the principle barrier to the further development of community radio and, in the Amman Declaration, called for governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other social actors to promote policies to ensure financial and technical assistance for community-based media, including the allocation of public funds for development communication projects. The Amman Declaration, comprised of 26 resolutions, also called for equal access to media, improved communication rights for broadcasters, and rules to prevent concentration of media ownership by corporations.

EVALUATING IMPACT

A major topic of the conference that was not prominent in the final Amman Declaration was that of evaluating the impact of CR. During the opening remarks of the conference, Executive Director of the African Women's Development and Communication Network and former AMARC Deputy President Muthoni Wanyeki acknowledged that "one of the issues that AMARC has been grappling with is how we measure or evaluate the meaning and impact of CR. We all know that CR works, that content and process make a difference in people's lives. The problem is how do we show that it works?" Though much has been written about the power of CR, there is still no reliable, replicable and quantifiable way of evaluating the impact of CR. When faced with the task of evaluating the impact of CR programming, many radio practitioners state that the mere existence of their stations and their ability to survive under such difficult circumstances is a testament to their impact on a community. However, in order to retain the interest of key stakeholders, to secure funding and to promote enabling legislature, evidence that CR is effective in promoting positive social change and development cannot remain largely subjective and anecdotal.

The overwhelming sentiment of the conference was that the impact of CR could not be measured so much through an external evaluation of social change within a community, but rather through an assessment of the process of participating in community radio. Development professionals often focus on the message or the content of CR programming as the most important factor in creating social change, whereas CR practitioners will frequently cite the change a community undergoes when it creates its own media. In this context, evaluating the impact of CR becomes increasingly difficult. The next steps in understanding and improving the effectiveness of CR must include the development of an evaluation process that is as participatory as CR itself.

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