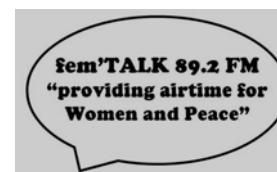


femTALK 89.2FM the Mobile Women's Community Radio initiative is 1 year old today !

Suva, Fiji Islands
05 May 2005



femTALK 89.2FM Fiji's mobile women's community radio initiative was launched a year ago today at the Asia Pacific meeting of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations with the participation of a team of student broadcasters from St Joseph's Secondary School.

On that day, the President General of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO), Maria Eugenia Diaz de Pfennich reminded the participants at the conference of the importance of radio, in particular community radio for reaching women in their communities:

"Radio is a very important tool for women, especially women in developing countries, and despite the growth in universities and an opportunity to especially strengthen and support women and peace initiatives across the Fiji Islands," she said.

Since then, the small community radio initiative, operated and managed by femLINKpacific: Media Initiatives for Women, has continued to stage local broadcasts in the capital city Suva:

"We have had limited funding assistance since the launch, and our first broadcast in May 2004, which was assisted by a grant from AUSAID, and it has been the sheer commitment from members of our management collective, such as Judith Ragg our Chairperson who has mastered the skills of technical rigging and partner NGOs – from ECREA where we staged our monthly broadcasts, the women's group of the Fiji Disabled People's Association, led by Angiee Chand who have been regular contributors to the broadcasts, Henry Rigamoto who coordinated the members of Interfaith Search and just our hands on volunteers like Noa Taylor, Kirsheena Kumar, James Bhagwan, and all those who contributed their time and efforts to each broadcast, including new partners like RRRT. Much of what we undertook in Suva last year wouldn't have been possible without our St Joseph's school broadcast team Narisha Karan, Mary Benefield, Adi Paulini Vesikula, Prerna Shukla, Frances Nawaqatabu and Sonal Ben " says femLINKpacific Coordinator, Sharon Bhagwan Rolls



The first broadcast took place at St Joseph's Secondary School on Sunday May 23rd, and in the theme of the radio initiative, "women speaking to women for peace" coincided with the commemoration of the International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament:

"As we unpacked the suitcase radio equipment for the first time we very privileged to have the technical support and assistance from those with the right technical expertise especially Mick Cornish of COMMTech Fiji in Suva. And when we staged our broadcast in Lautoka in January this year, Richard Lucas and his team of COMSFiji Lautoka, also provided us with valuable support. The technical support is vital when managing broadcast equipment especially for a small project like ours – unlike the mainstream broadcasters we don't have a team of technicians on staff!"

The other support that has been extremely valuable to femLINKpacific has been the "NGO incubator" where they are based inside the Caines Jannif head office, together with the Virtues Fiji Project. This has meant less worries about overheads and more chance to work on projects.

From May, through to October in 2004, sometimes disrupted by power shut downs, monthly Suva broadcasts, were organised and these served as an important learning ground for all who have participated in the broadcasts:

“Rather than rush off into the rural communities, we had to learn the ins and out of our equipment, get our volunteers and interested members of the women’s network to understand how to operate the equipment, and more importantly give women in our network a chance to “see the radio” and experience the operations of the equipment.”

The field tests eventuated with the additional support femLINKpacific received from UNESCO, who assisted femLINKpacific purchase the equipment and also provided a follow IPDC grant for follow up training and community radio consultations:



(left) Regulars on air the FDPA women's group

“The IPDC grant enabled femLINKpacific to stage a follow up consultation and training with women and young women in Suva which resulted in a special broadcast to commemorate the Global 16 days of activism campaign against gender violence, and also reaffirmed the process that would best enable women in their local communities. At this consultation, through our existing partners network, in particular ECREA and FRIENDS, and the FDPA women’s group we brought in women from the North and West to serve as (for now our volunteer) focal points. We have been able to provide our focal points in the west and the north with a recording kit each, to enable them to record stories in their local communities, through the work they are doing.”

The appointment of focal points has been an important learning process also. femLINKpacific is mindful that their focal points are already volunteering and working hard in their communities with limited financial support: “It is critical now that we strengthen this working relationship and also equip our focal points accordingly. This will need funding support from donors who are willing to see the strengthening of a flow of information not just to women in local and rural communities but also from them as well.”

*Right: The FRIEND broadcast team
...on air during our first broadcast in
the western division, January 22 2005*



Following the November training, local broadcasts have been staged in Navua and Lautoka, and an intense week of consultations in Labasa:

“Our first broadcasts outside of Suva were very exciting and once again validated much of what we had anticipated from a technical perspective, and at the same time also reiterated the important need for pre broadcast consultations and preparations. The local meetings in Labasa also are very important to this process of community radio development, because we seek to engage with the women in their communities and they must be comfortable to have us bring the radio broadcasts or radio productions to them, especially when we are operating in the capital

city and they are miles away on another island or province, so we hope more people will understand that our women's community radio initiative is not just about getting women on the radio in huge numbers, but progressively working with them to develop and produce their stories for broadcast, in a way that also builds bridges amongst women from different ethnic and faith backgrounds."

Women in Navua in pre broadcast preparations...what are our issues ...preparing to be interviewed Our community broadcast process enables women to prepare for their broadcast



So where to from here?

femLINKpacific is very pleased that the New Zealand Commission has provided them with a grant to revive the Suva broadcasts:

"This will have a more focused approach on our development policy objectives, and we will once again be working with the National Council of Women and the Soqosoqo Vakamarama membership, but more specifically women's groups who have a priority focus on women and peace and women in shared decision making. At the same time, we hope to be able to generate greater interest and mobilise the necessary resources to maintain these local broadcasts and then to take the women's radio to the North." In a few months, as part of a project being coordinated by the Foundations of the Peoples of the South Pacific, the women's radio will be undertaking broadcasts in Sigatoka and Ba.



Like all broadcast operations, femLINKpacific also has a licence to operate and manage their mobile women's community radio, unfortunately as there is no license category for community radio just yet, so the annual licence fee is a mJOR challenge:

"Here's hoping for some positive reform in the legislation and regulatory framework for community broadcasting," says Bhagwan Rolls

And financial sustainability is always a challenge.

"I know at some stage we are supposed to be financially viable – but I don't see that happening too soon with the women's community radio – after all we are non commercial or non profit and so we don't run advertisements, and we cannot expect the women to be paying for this "service", so as we work towards strengthening our overall operations this will obviously be in the forefront of our deliberations. In the meantime we can only hope that there is enough interest to give us the support we need to keep taking the radio to the women in their local communities."

For more information about the mobile women's community radio project, femTALK 89.2FM

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