

Planet Radio: Sharing Community Programming Over the Internet



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Keane Shore

[Photo: Radio is an important communication medium throughout the South.]

An international broadcasting association is helping community radio stations in the South use the Internet to strengthen their programming.

The [World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters](#) (AMARC) has more than 2,500 members and associates in 110 countries. AMARC created its Internet initiative, Moebius/Planeta Radio, to counter unequal access to telecommunications, says [Lorencita Pinto](#), the Programme Director. The goal is to democratize the airwaves by helping small, often low-powered, community radio stations around the world produce and share radio programs featuring different viewpoints than those of mainstream media.

Three functions

Supported in part by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Moebius/Planeta Radio has three functions. It allows member broadcasters around the world to exchange radio programs through an online archive. It has a lower-tech backup redistribution system so that members without web access can also exchange programs using older communication methods such as fax and surface mail. The project also runs a training program to teach members digital radio production, so they can feed the archive.

AMARC launched Moebius/Planeta Radio as a pilot project in Latin America and the Caribbean in March 1998. It hopes to expand into Africa by early 2001. Moebius/Planeta Radio hosts a central website where member radio stations can upload complete programs, texts, or sound clips, and radio producers (as well as other interested people) around the world can access them for re-broadcast or other purposes.

Diversifying information

According to Pinto, many community radio stations want to diversify their information sources. Some stations need to fill 24 hours a day with programming, seven days a week — a challenge, even when their employees are highly creative. "It's a difficult task. It's difficult because they don't have the technical resources or financial resources."

"We decided to use these new technologies to strengthen our network through member collaboration," she says. "This was how the program was born — it's an international program for distribution, exchange, and training among community radio groups. It facilitates access to information combining Internet and radio."

Online exchange system

Pinto notes that the online exchange system is not a live webcasting system, but rather a library of MP3, RealAudio, and text-based files created by and for members. AMARC is developing a radio kit for members that would allow each of them to upload audio and text files to the central website automatically. "What's interesting about this is the way in which the website is supposed to be fed — and that's where our challenge is," she says. At the moment, many community radio stations lack digital production capability.

Using this resource, AMARC members want to bend it to their aims. Most of the participating stations want to do more than fill airtime by simply reading mainstream newspapers. They want to produce information that reflects a diverse range of perspectives. For example, AMARC helps support non-commercial music, a women's network, and individual native groups' programming.

AMARC goals

At the same time, AMARC members try to remain consistent with the aims of community radio. They pledge, among other things, to contribute to the expression of different social, political and cultural movements, and to promote peace and friendship. Their programming expresses sovereignty and independence for all peoples, international cooperation, non-discrimination, and respect for different cultural identities.

AMARC was formed in 1983 in Montreal after a meeting of community radio advocates there. Its programs and projects are organized around six current priorities: advocacy, solidarity, access to information and new technologies, support for social struggles, public education, and gender equity — all of which were 'inspired' by AMARC's defence of the 'right to communicate'.

Keane J. Shore is an Ottawa-based writer and editor. (Photo: courtesy of the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network)

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If you have any comments about this article, please contact info@idrc.ca.

For more information:

Lorencita Pinto, Moebius Programme Director, 666 Sherbrooke Ouest, bureau 400, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3A 1E7; Tel: (514) 982-0351; Fax: (514) 849-7129; Email: lorencita.pinto@amarc.org

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[Is Internet Access Helping or Hindering Civil Society Organizations?](#), by Curt LaBond

[MISTICA: Expanding the Internet's Capacity for Development](#), by Keane Shore

[Participatory Innovation and the Internet](#), by Keane Shore

[Using the Internet to Help Street Children in Latin America](#), by John Eberlee

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