



Mayan girls look into the studio window of a community radio station in Guatemala.

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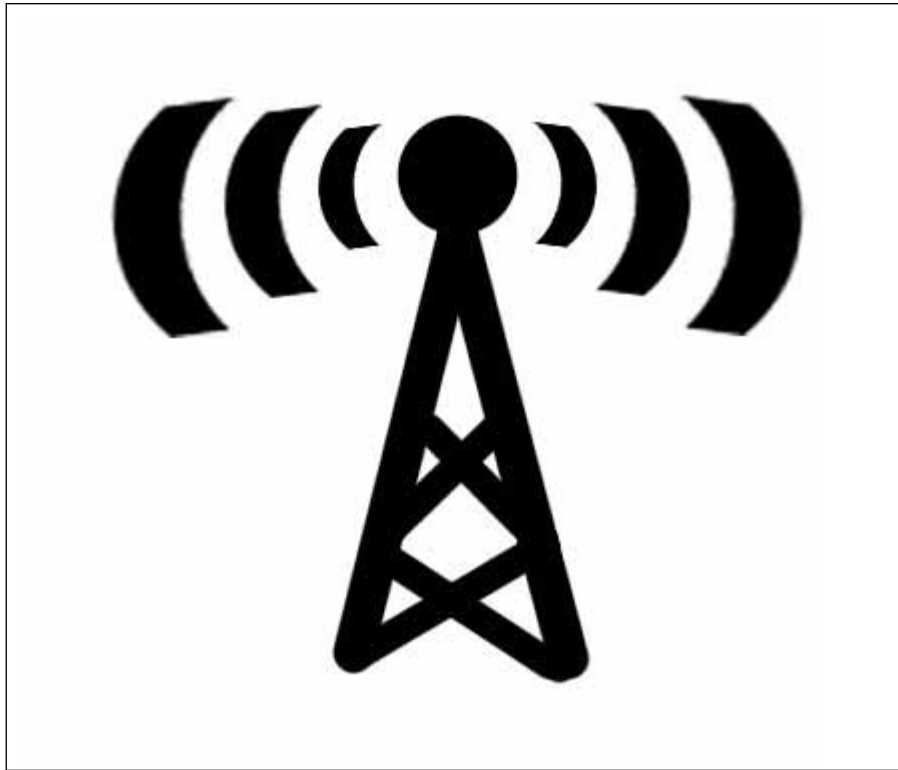
Cultural Survival Voices

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On the Air

Why Community Radio might be the right thing for your community



In the age of the Internet, it may seem that radio stations, particularly small community-based radio stations, are an old, useless means of communicating. But for many indigenous communities, radio is the ideal tool for defending their culture, their land, and their rights. Cesar Gomez Moscut, who is the Mayan coordinator for Cultural Survival's Guatemala Radio Project, points out that indigenous communities have been under assault for hundreds of years and the current "aerial assault," while not physical, is no less dangerous. "It's this globalized, monolithic wash of culture that's being spread on the airwaves—the globalization of culture," he says. Most countries have powerful urban-based radio stations broadcasting music from the city and other countries. There's nothing wrong with that, Cesar says, but if it's the only soundtrack you hear, it erodes your culture. Indigenous communities have to take matters into their own hands. They can't stop that assault, but they can use the same technology to present a counterbalance to it. Indigenous communities and individuals, he says, cannot rely on anyone else to do this for them. Who else but community members are qualified to put the content on the air that

will act as a counterbalance to the assault on that community? Radio is a way that they can take matters into their own hands on a community level.

A community radio station—that is, a low-powered station that is owned and run by the community and that broadcasts only to that community—has many advantages. Not every community needs to (or can) have their own television station or large FM station. Those are expensive operations made to work for a large population. But setting up a community radio station can cost as little as \$1,500 and can be maintained for a few hundred dollars a year. The cost benefits apply to the audience, too. In poorer communities, most people cannot afford a television set or computer, but many can afford to buy a small radio. And that radio does not require wires to be run to every house or even electricity—battery-powered handheld radios can do the job perfectly.

Because the stations are small, the content is ideally tailored to that community. The programming can address the specific issues of that region, and they provide solutions to problems and information that is particular to that area. For example, the station can broadcast information about farming

in one particular valley or health information about an illness that people in the community are dealing with. Community radio is also an ideal tool for reinforcing language and cultural traditions. In Guatemala, where there is a network of 140 indigenous-run community stations, several towns report that their language, which had been spoken only in the home and was falling into disuse, is now being spoken on the street in regular conversation because people were hearing it on the radio. And local music, which tends to be unique to each valley and village, was returning because young people were hearing it on the community radio station.

There is another, indirect benefit to community radio: people develop pride in their identity. Sometimes this is simply a byproduct of hearing their language or music being broadcast on the same terms as the dominant culture. Other times it is the consequence of a deliberate program. For example, again in Guatemala, one of the programs broadcast on community radio was a drama about indigenous rights that featured a young woman who learned that the law allowed her to wear her traje to school (the traje is the Mayans' traditional dress). After the broadcast, several young girls wore their traje to their school, and when the teacher told them they couldn't, the girls cited the law they learned from the radio, and the teacher relented.

A community station can also strengthen the community on a practical level. The station will need volunteers to operate it, musicians to perform on it, and local people to speak on the programs. Stations also often involve community organizations and regional nonprofit groups. In a situation where the station is started and supported by the community itself, it will need a way to generate revenue, and that usually means having local businesses buy advertising on the station. That helps the local economy and provides another way for everyone in the community to be involved.

In addition to the benefits that come from being local—most community stations have a broadcast radius of only three to five miles—a network of community stations offers all the advantages of larger populations. The stations in the network can share expertise and ideas. If one station has found that a particular kind of program works well, they can share that information with other stations so they can improve their own programming. And if they have discovered a technical solution to a problem or a unique form of funding, that, too, can be shared. They can pool their resources to buy or create programming that a single station could not afford or trade content to broaden the scope of their content. There are also political benefits. In a

place like Australia, where very small communities may be separated by very large amounts of space and otherwise isolated, radio networks can help indigenous communities join with others in a cause and develop political strength. As one of the examples above indicates, radio is ideal for rights education.

The other articles in this edition of *Voices* detail how community radio has been put to use in indigenous communities in Australia and in Guatemala, but those are just two drops in an ocean of functional community radio stations around the world. In the Peruvian Amazon, radio has given traditionally ignored locals a voice. A radio program known as *Bienvenida Salud!* (*Welcome Health!*) broadcasts ideas about feminism and encourages discourse over reproductive rights. Further north, the National Campus and Community Radio Association works to improve Canadian community-oriented radio stations that broadcast in English, French, and indigenous languages.

Across the Atlantic, *Radio Baraza* is being set up in Africa by several organizations, including the Kenya Wildlife Service. It will be run by the local Maasai people and will teach community members best practices for conservation and wildlife protection. *Radio Free Asia* is a nonprofit corporation that broadcasts in nine indigenous languages to residents of eight countries in the Far East. Their reporters have won a number of human-rights and journalism awards in the past five years. Sok Ratha, for instance, was awarded the 2006 David W. Burke award for distinguished journalism for his reporting on the Cambodian government's mistreatment of the Montagnard refugees, an indigenous group from Vietnam.

A nonprofit organization called VOICES has begun an effort to decentralize India's radio system by pushing for community radio stations. They, in fact, want to import ideas about community radio from other countries, including Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

Clearly, indigenous community radio is growing. Perhaps it would help your community, too. Exploring that possibility is the purpose of this issue of *Voices*. To show you how community works on the ground, we have included case studies of two community radio stations: one, in Guatemala, is part of a network that has grown from the bottom up, and the other, in Australia, is part of a network that was established and is supported by the government in a top-down approach. And finally, we give you an article that describes what you need to start your own community radio station.

Mayan Radio: A Case Study

By Marc Raifman

Most stations in Guatemala are small, but community radio does not need expensive equipment to be effective.



Guatemala's indigenous peoples have suffered more than most, having endured 36 years of a government campaign of genocide that killed more than 200,000 people and devastated villages and families. Today, the country's indigenous peoples are rebuilding their communities and their cultures, and community radio is one of the principal means for doing it. Guatemala is one of only two countries in the Western Hemisphere with a majority indigenous population. Guatemala's indigenous population (principally Mayan) speaks 25 different languages. Now that democracy is taking hold, it is important to ask how indigenous people can participate in the nation state so they are better served by their government—but without having to sacrifice their own distinct cultures. While Guatemala now has an uncensored press, its commercial radio stations, television, and print media are available only in Spanish and rarely address the interests of indigenous communities, particularly in remote rural areas. Community radio stations, on the other hand, which broadcast in indigenous languages, provide a vital and reliable source of news and information about health, human rights, development, the environment, and other issues critical to Guatemala's indigenous populace. The country's 140 community radio stations, which broadcast locally (the average broadcast range is 3 to 5 miles) in indigenous languages provide a crucial venue for primary school education, and supply both the public and private sector with an active, participatory mode of communication. National police use them to broadcast health

and safety alerts; municipal governments use them to announce public meetings; environmentalists use them to educate farmers about sustainable agricultural methods; educators use them to provide distance learning programs; and businesses, large and small, use them to advertise. Community radio also provides a forum for public debate and the interchange of ideas—a key element of any democratic society.

The community radio station of San Pedro La Laguna is an excellent example of one Guatemala station serving its indigenous population while promoting democratic participation in the state. The town, spread across a steep hillside on the mountain-ringed Lake Atitlan, features narrow cobblestone streets with a riot of wires and balconies connecting the buildings overhead—renowned as one of the most beautiful places in Central America. With a population of 13,000, San Pedro is noted for its onion farms and fishing industry as well as for tourism. In the breezy evenings along the lakeshore, women sort onions that will be carried to market by boat the following morning. Unlike many Mayan communities where indigenous language is fading, virtually everyone in San Pedro speaks both Tz'utujil Mayan and Spanish. Approximately half of the community's children attend primary school, and 35 percent attend middle school and classes in all schools are taught in Tz'utujil and Spanish. Many of the town's indigenous people, particularly women, still wear their traje—the elaborately woven traditional clothing. Radio San Pedro's listeners grow coffee and work in tourism (hotels, restaurants, shops,

transportation, and traditional crafts) and other service industries. The average family income is less than \$2,000 per year, and 98 percent of all families grow their own corn and other crops. The average family in San Pedro La Laguna has eight people, and very few women work outside the home.

There are two doctors serving San Pedro's 13,000 residents in private clinics. One clinic operates in the Catholic church and the other in the Evangelical Baptist church. The doctors are assisted by three nurses and one rural health care provider. The most common health problems afflicting the people of the area are diarrhea and intestinal diseases and malnutrition. Sadly, radio station volunteers report that the community's most pressing problems are drug addiction, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, homelessness, lack of waste disposal, and pollution of the lake waters.

The center of town is dominated by a colonial-era whitewashed church and the market square. The central square has lots of music available, including pirated CDs and DVDs. And above the square in an enclosed balcony on the third floor is the studio of Radio San Pedro. The station is a simple, basic affair set up in two rooms. The balcony room is where the programs are conducted. A few posters decorate the walls, but otherwise it is bare. A wooden table stands in the center of the room with a microphone on it and two chairs—one for the DJ and the other for a guest. The second room, connected by a soundproof window, houses the station's equipment.

Radio San Pedro serves 33,000 people in San Pedro and the neighboring villages. Typically broadcasting from 4:00 to 9:00 PM daily, Radio San Pedro operates with an all-volunteer staff. The station's 20 volunteers range in age from 17 to 65; they are teachers, students, tradesmen, farmers, and homemakers. The director, Hugo Tuch Petzey, is a community leader and principal of the primary school.

Half of the radio broadcasts are in Spanish, and half in Mayan. Mayan language programs broadcasting regularly include *Mother Nature*, *Music and Words of My People*, *Meeting Jesus and Mary*, Catholic Mass, *Fiesta Tz'utujil*, *World News*, and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Programs broadcast in Spanish include *My People's Marimba*, *Yes to Life and No to Drugs*, *What's Going on in Guatemala* (a program on national politics), *Coffee Talk* (a dis-



cussion of coffee farming and harvesting techniques) and sports news. As the list of programs suggests, the station has an emphasis on practical information, and the format tends to feature community participants and local experts talking to each other about these subjects. There is also a focus on disadvantaged groups like women and children, as well as local music. Petzey is very interested in keeping the station operating from the bottom up, promoting strong community involvement.

Volunteers and community members alike appreciate all that the radio station has to offer. One long term volunteer says, "The station has great news and cultural programming. It even has children's programs in Tz'utujil every Saturday. The air time is split 50/50 between Spanish and Tz'utujil." Community members also say that the chance to receive important information about farming, healthcare, and current events in their native own language promotes their Mayan traditions in the face of increasing external cultural pressure.

"The station informs people about what to do and then they take action," says Broadcaster Juan Javier, of *La Vida del Campesino*. "The information pertains to the environment, to farming work, political issues and to the domain of the household. Women listen at home and learn how to manage their finances, how to save money for the family. Many people don't know about saving, but people can't be spending more than they earn and they have to learn this. The radio addresses all of these issues to teach people how to improve their lives."

There are more than 140 community radio stations in Guatemala that are owned and operated by indigenous people.

Community Radio Australia

By Lara Balian



Palla Masina - On Air at
Radio Goolarri,
Australia.

The community of Broome, part of the Kimberly region of Western Australia, is home to one of the most culturally diverse regions of Australia. Of the 654 indigenous communities in the nation, 158 reside in the Kimberly Region, where half of the total population is of indigenous descent. That's why community radio is so valuable here.

The community radio of Australia transcends the diversity of the nation and rich history of indigenous culture. After a widespread movement for community radio in the 1960s, Australia has grown

into a well-developed and large community radio sector. Unlike the case of Guatemala, where the system is grassroots-based, community radio in Australia is largely funded and supported by the government and other nonprofit media organizations. There are three main bodies working to support community radio stations. The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) regulates broadcasting and issues licenses to community stations, which it defines as those that represent, provide for, and encourage involvement from the community, are nonprofit, and comply with the community broad-

casting codes of practice. The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, registered by the ABA in 1995, provides the code of practice for community broadcasters, which consists of rules on content, sponsorship, and volunteers. Lastly, the Community Broadcasting Foundations, formed in 1984, is a nonprofit funding agency that distributes funds from the government to different areas of community broadcasting.

Because not every media service receives part of this funding, other organizations have developed to support indigenous radio stations, such as the National Indigenous Radio Service Limited, which provides assistance to indigenous media organizations that do not have the staff or capital to provide 24-hour broadcasting. Other organizations include the Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media Association and the Australian Indigenous Communications Association.

Stations in Australia are very diverse. Some larger stations may have more variety of programs, or the means to provide training workshops for other stations, lend out equipment, or even have paid staff. More remote stations may have more focused content, are completely voluntary, and rely on others for support. But no matter the size, all community radio stations work to support local participation and cultural expression.

The Aboriginal-owned and run Radio Goolarri in Broome, which launched in 1991, exemplifies the importance of community and governmental support in developing an indigenous community radio station. As station manager Dot West explains, "It first got established with people in the community wanting their own media organization. It was very much formed out of the musicians of the region—like Jimmy Chi, Steve Pigram, and Wayne Barker—wanting their music to be heard and also the community wanting their voices to be heard." At the time, indigenous music on mainstream radio was rare, and local artists saw music not only as a means of self expression, but as a way to question taboos and educate others about Aboriginal history, culture, and tradition. In an area like Broome, which has strong European and Asian cultural influences, it was particularly important to have indigenous voices heard.

When the community came together to try to form a station, one of their major obstacles was money. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation was known for supporting the indigenous people in the Kimberly region. "ABC were instrumental in supporting the indigenous people in the Kimberly area," says West. "Prior to Goolarri getting up, they had helped to kick-start Warani and Karani Wankgi and Fitzroy Crossing, and also there was the whole Craig Mob. So Broome was the logical step. We had ABC prepared to take us on their airways and us producing a program." [Radio Goolarri also received funds from the state government to train people and to set up their own studio.]

With this they were able to launch their first broadcast from ABC studios in August of 1991, running

just one hour a week. In only four months, airtime was increased to meet the demands from the community, and they were finally licensed in 1998.

Today, Radio Goolarri has grown into a 24-hour-a-day radio station. It has become the bridge between the indigenous and nonindigenous community in the Kimberly region by including a larger variety of programs, from different music genres to country affairs to a kids program, which is produced by children from the area. These programs have been developed based on the needs of the community. The Goolarri Prison Request Show, which airs every Monday night, was developed to bring family and friends of prisoners together to work on breaking communication barriers between prisoners and their friends and family.

With these programs, Radio Goolarri is another element in Broome that provides tourists and nonindigenous people with an opportunity to understand what it means to be indigenous, especially through music. Though his songs are more contemporary, singer and songwriter Mervyn Mulardy uses a traditional instrument, the boomerang, and sings in both English and his native language, Karajarri. By playing both traditional and modern songs of local artists, Radio Goolarri has helped to reinforce local tradition, language, and creativity, and inspire younger generations to keep their culture alive.

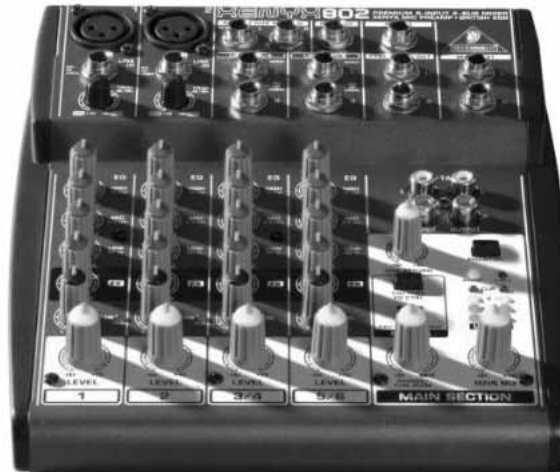
With its success, Radio Goolarri is able to provide employment opportunities for the community. In 2003, the station qualified as a registered training organization and now hosts hands-on training programs for local indigenous people.

Twenty years ago, indigenous music was rarely heard on mainstream radio. Today, indigenous singers are being heard all over Australia and even winning the title of Australian Idol. Radio Goolarri is just one station of many indigenous radio stations that worked as vehicle for launching Aboriginal artists of all kinds into mainstream media all over Australia, giving indigenous peoples a voice nationwide.

The station has become more than just a hub for indigenous music, though. By adapting to the needs of a multicultural community, Radio Goolarri continued to develop new programs that would keep both the indigenous and nonindigenous people of the community engaged and provide them with the opportunity to express other social and political thoughts. Despite the inclusion of talk radio and news broadcasts, Radio Goolarri emphasizes creativity by providing resources, support, and training opportunities for local artists and members of the community. As the station proudly states, "Radio Goolarri provides an avenue whereby social, cultural, and political ideas and concerns can be expressed. It is also an area where traditional language, music, and culture can be fostered along with the more contemporary forms of artistic expression. It's a place where indigenous people can tell their stories in their own way. It's also a place where indigenous people can come together."

How to Set Up Your Own Community Radio Station

A small mixing board like this one works well for community radio stations, and the other equipment is also simple.



The First Thing a Radio Station Needs for Success is People

- The radio station needs people to talk on air and provide the community with important information
- The radio station also needs volunteers to help advertise and let people know the benefits of community radio.
- For community radio to be successful it is important that the people involved be able to provide an economic base for the programs, electrical bills, and continued maintenance of the station equipment.
- If the radio station includes a diversity of volunteers from the community it will be a service to more people.
- For community radio to provide a service, it needs community organizations and participants that will benefit from the radio. Examples of community organization are health clinics, the fire department, or local police.

Necessary Equipment:

(Note: this is a list of the most basic equipment needs and some suggested specific models and places to find them. Other similar kinds of equipment will also work well [the suggestions below would be most appropriate for communities in the Western Hemisphere], and if you have more resources, you can certainly expand the list.)

- A microphone (cheapest and most accessible would be Shure SM58—about \$100 from Amazon.com)
- Playback system: for example, a CD player/Tape player to broadcast music (Sony makes a DCS998 for about \$50.)
- A transmitter (A Yamaha DC791 is available from BestBuy.com for about \$395)
- A Tower (Ultratower GSB2297 is available from Community-Radio-R-Us for \$400)
- Surge Protector: (Amazon.com: Belkin 6 Outlet Home/Office Surge Protector \$6.99-\$35.00)
- Mixing Board: (Amazon.com: Behringer 802 8-Input Mixer \$60.00-\$80.00)

(Note: You may need an electrician to help you set up and use the equipment properly)



One of the advantages of community radio is that almost anyone can afford to buy a radio.

Content:

- Volunteers can play music from the CD or tape player or local musicians can perform in the studio
- Local News: community announcements, events, gatherings etc.
- Cultural Programming: programs that promote local culture.
- News from the capital city
- Advertisements for local businesses/organizations
- Guest Speakers from the community who can talk about community issues/concerns
- Health programs
- Farming, hunting, fishing, or herding information
- Political information

Tips:

- It is important to be sure no one else has the same frequency. Even if you cannot hear anybody else broadcasting from your frequency, they might be. To avoid any conflict with other radio stations, listen to your frequency from the very edge of your signal and make sure there is no conflict. If you decide to get a bigger transmitter, you need to increase your signal test accordingly.
- Ally yourself with other community radio stations in the area. This will increase content and diversify radio programming.
- Cultural Survival recommends a low-power FM frequency. Avoid AM frequency if possible as it requires a larger tower and thus increases equipment costs.
- Remember that the most important thing is to make sure that your community radio benefits the community. If a radio volunteer is interested in the station for personal gain, this will be counterproductive to the community. Make sure the radio volunteers are well trained, organized, and are made familiar with the rules of the station.