Chapter 2:
The Strengthening of Being (Jun Winaq) through Community Radio of the Mayab in Iximulew

(Excerpt from Part One: The Educational Potential of Community Media)

Amalia Jiménez Gallan’s chapter (2) on the background and experience of community radio in post-conflict Guatemala represents a strong current in the Latin American experience of community media — namely, the role of communication (in this case, community radio stations broadcasting in local languages) in linking post-colonial, often post-conflict realities to traditional cultural and spiritual guides and revaluing indigenous world views, what Jiménez calls the cosmovision. She emphasises the importance of communication that is rooted in culture, a theme that comes up again in Rezaul Haque’s chapter (5) on traditional cultural forms and, indeed, through the stories that follow in Part Two.

More information: [www.col.org/LearningWithCM](http://www.col.org/LearningWithCM)

COL’s Healthy Communities programme: [www.col.org/HealthyCommunities](http://www.col.org/HealthyCommunities)
The territories of Iximulew (the Mayan name for Guatemala) have been involved in a peace process for almost 15 years. Adding to this the 36 years of civil war in Guatemala and considering the almost 500 years of invasion and successive extermination policies, one can easily reach the conclusion that the survival of Mayan values and spiritual and cultural practices is a miraculous achievement of the original people of the Mayan territory.

The survival of indigenous practices and values has been possible thanks to the contribution of spiritual guides: women and men who have orally transmitted their knowledge from generation to generation. Building on the importance of oral traditions and the transmission of ancestral knowledge, community radios in their time have played a key role in cultural preservation by keeping the people informed — in their own languages and within their own cosmovision,³ their own view of the world.

The Guatemalan radio stations affiliated with the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) have emerged from the need for expression and information of ethno-linguistic and geographical communities suffering from severe social exclusion and often lacking even the most basic social services. Most of these radio stations survive because of the voluntary contributions of people from within their own communities — from the people who use the radio’s creative and innovative capacity to overcome economic deficiencies and the monopolisation of media by private companies, even as state regulations promote equitable access to radio and television.

The dominant social imagery promoted by the commercial media does not include Mayan languages or culture. The broadcasters themselves are people who do not dress or identify themselves in any way with the ethno-cultural groups that originally lived in Iximulew (Guatemala).

³ Cosmovision is a specific way of feeling, behaving, measuring and thinking according to the culture of a people’s heritage.
Community radio in Guatemala is helping preserve Mayan tradition and develop intercultural relationships.
By contrast, community broadcasters associated with AMARC transmit both in the predominant languages of the ethno-linguistic region where they are located and in Spanish. In addition, they reinforce local identities, speaking from the perspective of their own Mayan cosmovision.

It has been nearly 15 years since the peace process established the need for changes to the laws governing broadcasting, specifically to make radio frequencies available to indigenous communities. However, no government has actually followed through, despite promise after promise. Community radio stations have nevertheless kept on broadcasting although they face the threat of legal prosecution.

A legal initiative now before the National Congress was elaborated by representatives of community radio stations over the course of five years. Initiative 4087 was enriched through the contributions of dozens of organisations, institutions and social movements. It integrates international human rights standards and is a good solution for the people’s needs, yet it has languished for the past four years.

“The Kastajinel radio station, for example,” says Mr. Cándido Rodríguez Guaján, director of the station and national representative of AMARC Guatemala, “was created because we realised that no other mass medium spoke in Kakchikel language. And this situation continues; thus, our language was at risk of being lost and, with it, our culture. For this reason we took advantage of the Peace Accord on Identity and Rights of the Indigenous People that says that the state must grant media frequencies to indigenous communities, which is very important for us: it is how we keep speaking in our language and from the point of view of our culture.”

It is for this reason that training, exchange and other support activities developed in the AMARC network have been directed towards the:

- empowerment of the communities and their right to communicate; and
- improvement of the capacities needed for the integral management of the people’s spiritual, political, cultural, organisational, communicative and economic dimensions.

The work done around these two priorities helped to identify the need for strengthening the knowledge and practice of the Mayan cosmovision among the partners of the radio stations. The community radio groups themselves have always worked alongside the aj’q’ij’ab, spiritual guides of the Mayan tradition who lead collective work inside the communities. Year after year, the association of radio stations has celebrated ceremonies around the sacred fire to thank Ajaw⁴ for the life and opportunities received and to harmonise their being in relation with the cosmos.

⁴ Ajaw is the light that joins everything together, the Great Spirit, Creator and Shaper of everything.
Some of the radio stations aired programmes concerning the Mayan cosmovision. These programmes were prepared and broadcast by elders in the community — for example, the honourable Mr. Diego at La Compañera radio station, in the Kiché territory. Others, like Sinakán in Kakchikel territory, or La Libertad in Petén, used to broadcast the celebration of Mayan ceremonies around the sacred fire on some special dates in the Mayan calendar.

Since 2010, training work has gone deeper, enabling a recognition among people in the radio association of their nawals and learning of the basic use of the Mayan calendars (including Cholq’ijn, the sacred one that is based on the rotation of the Moon around the Earth; and Aab, the agricultural calendar that is based on the rotation of the Earth around the Sun). At training workshops, people have learned from different traditional authorities and actors about epigraphy, the architecture of cities and sacred temples, Mayan prophecies and other aspects of Mayan knowledge and wisdom.

The approach to training and the methods of programme development were designed with spiritual leaders, a process which itself has reinforced the need to spread cultural values through the radio stations and to recognise the role of traditional actors and authorities in the context of Mayan socio-politics and culture.

With the training processes undertaken since 2010, the stations have deepening their skills and knowledge, both of radio production and the importance of Mayan values (for example, in relation to Mother Earth). Stations are in a better position to design and produce radio programmes, although they still need to prepare themselves to engage more deeply with their audiences. In order to assist radio stations that still do not have their own local cultural programmes, AMARC has initiated a collaborative project to produce a series of radio programmes shared among all stations in the network and at the same time to identify more spiritual guides with whom to work more closely across all the communities. With materials gathered from the interviews with elders, spiritual guides and traditional authorities, the association will create a collective production, the first of its kind as a network.

Through this training process, the community radio stations have reaffirmed that their radio programmes are essential for rescuing Mayan culture, developing intercultural relationships and promoting a national and global community solidarity.

We are more conscious of the collective rights that we have as indigenous peoples, of how we can organise our collective work and of how we can

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5 Nawal is the word for spirit or guardian. The meaning refers to your own identity, including one’s energies, the spiritual guides of the invisible world, the protective animals, and the features of one’s being in this and past lives.
better take care of the health, peace and life of the people and nature in an integral way. We now have legitimate radio broadcasters, committed to serving the rights of indigenous peoples, human rights and the Peace Accords. As an association, we are facilitating intercultural relationships among our partners as well as among our peoples. We believe in the power of bringing knowledge together. We work to better enable the radio stations to express our cosmovision and the identity of our peoples.

These are only the first steps, but they are significant ones: working through the communication platforms enabled by community radio broadcasters to rescue and to restore value in transcendental knowledge — not only for the survival of our culture, but for all humanity.

Amalia Jiménez Gallan graduated in Information Science at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Her interests lie in a combination of communication, literature, meditation and traditional Chinese medicine. She has been supporting the strengthening of community radios of the indigenous Iximulew peoples for the past 13 years. In Amalia’s words, “My first birth was in Cardeñosa, Ávila, España, in February 1971. The second happened when I went to the land of Mayas in 1998 and was sheltered and cared for by the ancestral wisdom of these wonderful peoples.” Email: amaliajimenez@yahoo.com

Guatemala’s Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters [AMARC]) is a network of 13 members, 11 of which are community radio stations in different parts of the country. AMARC Guatemala emerged during the peace process and was registered in 2000. Its objectives include defending freedom of speech, renewing the value of indigenous peoples’ cosmovision, promoting the empowerment of women, contributing to the improvement of community living conditions, and strengthening the reach of community radio. Among the achievements of the women’s network of AMARC Guatemala has been to introduce feminist political training alongside theoretical and practical training in radio production.

For further reference, see:

- www.amarc.org
- www.amarcguatemala.blogspot.com
- www.facebook.com/amarc.guatemala