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Communication Development, Media And Research In Nepal

By

Gokul P Pokhrel
Country Paper

Communication Development, Media and Research In Nepal

Prepared by Gokul P. Pokhrel
on behalf of Nepal Press Institute,

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Communication Development, Media and Research in Nepal

1. **Background**

Research in communication all over the world has made immense progress during the last four decades of the post-second world war era. In this period, the world has witnessed spectacular growth of mass media industry and information sciences. The impact of information in the lives of people has been total and all pervasive. In the west, communication industry has reached a stage of saturation. The communication revolution in impact has replaced the tumult of the industrial revolution experienced in Europe in early 19th century.

In Asian context, many developing countries have yet to apply the enormous potential of modern communications in creating awareness among the people for change and better life. It is where the intervention of research in guiding the programmes for better results assumes greater significance.

The Asian nations are also characterized by great diversities in the level of economic development and the application of communication technologies to this effect. From what was considered a purely marketing approach, application of research findings to the improvement of development messages and their delivery systems made their debut in Asia by as late as the sixties. The initial efforts lacked not only proper research orientation but also trained man-power and a conducive atmosphere. In fact, increased interaction and exchange with western institutions have greatly influenced the induction of research in strengthening development support communication. The application of new techniques followed by suitable research back-ups to enhance their effectiveness have been more pronounced in such sectors as family planning, health, agriculture, education and rural development and this is more common in most of the developing nations of Asia.

The end of the last decade has witnessed epochal changes in power politics all over the world. It has resulted in the dramatic dismantling of the monolithic authoritarian forms of government and their replacement with liberal multi-party democracies. Starting from Eastern Europe, the impact of the wave and its repercussions among emerging societies of Asian Region should not be missed while discussing on the role of communications. Right now, many
Asian countries, Nepal being the latest example, have switched over to multi-party democracies or in the process of doing away with the last vestiges of authoritarianism. The restoration of human rights and freedom is bound to have tremendous impact on the mass media structures and their functioning in the developing nations. Irrespective of the level of social and economic development of nations concerned, the pluralism of ideas, debates and voluntary submission as against coercion are to form important ingredients of new information culture that is still at a evolving stage. These sweeping developments have also necessitated the urgency to reassess and up-date the contents of the much debated UNESCO document on New World Information and Communication Order which led to serious division among Western and Eastern societies regarding the role of information in national development. It is desirable that these emerging trends should be taken into cognizance while discussing new approaches to communication research in Asian context.

2. **Historical Development**

Nepal belongs to the fold of least developed nations having a per capita income of 160 US dollars. Situated between two great neighbours, China on the north and India bordering on three sides, land-locked Nepal's population now stands at 180 million. Its area is 147,180sq.km. Out of this, three fourth of the land-mass is mountainous and only 13 percent of the land is arable. Population pressure per hectare of cultivable land is one of the highest in the world although modern improved agricultural methods has so far enabled it to maintain self-sufficiency in food. The national literacy rate is officially estimated at 35 percent and fifty percent of the people are below poverty line. Female literacy is far lower and the women in rural areas are subjected to social disparities and atrocities reminiscent of the medieval times.
The inception of modern communication media dates back to 1901 A.D. with the publication of Gorkhapatra, the first weekly newspaper in Nepal by the government. Under the autocratic rule of a feudal clan, no other newspapers grew during the period of next 50 years. The popular revolution of 1950 and the advent of democracy removed all the barriers that existed in the growth of mass media.

The installation of partyless system of government in 1960 marked a new phase in the history of mass communications in Nepal. Since political parties were banned, freedom of the Press was curtailed by law. During the 30 years of partyless Panchayat system, the prevalent laws allowed to criticize government performance but not the tenets of the system and in favour of other political ideologies propagating multi-party system. These incumbrances notwithstanding, the media systems continued to grow with changing times. In 1962, a national news agency, The Rastriya Samachar Samiti was established as an autonomous corporation in the state sector. This was followed by the establishment of Press Council in 1970 and the implementation of New Communication Plan in 1971. The implementation of the three year plan provided for the restructuring of state-owned communication organisations into the newly constituted Ministry of Communications.

After the national referendum of 1980, the existing press laws were liberalized removing restrictions on registration of publications. But the restriction against propagation of materials in favour of political parties were continued. In the wake of unrest and perceived desire for change manifested by the Press, a Royal Commission was constituted in 1981 to study the problems faced by Nepalese journalists in the media profession.
In the process of streamlining the communication systems in Nepal, the Government issued a National Communication Policy document in 1968. But the document limits itself to defining the role, functions and structure of state-owned media institutions and communication agencies only, excluding the press out of its purview. It merely states that the Government has yet to formulate a broad-based national information policy covering the press and electronic media.

Multi-Party Democracy and after

The restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal in April 1990, is having tremendous impact on the communications sector. The press is now free from all fetters in the exercise of human rights and freedom. In order to strengthen the government's role in communicating its messages to the people, spokesmen have been appointed at all the ministries. In addition, the government has taken initiatives in introducing drastic amendments in the prevailing press laws. On the request of the Government the Press Council and Nepal Press Institute both have submitted their recommendations to it proposing major amendments in the laws.

Some of the recommendations have called for privatization of the ownership of the state-controlled publication organisations, termination of monopoly enjoyed by the national news agency in the distribution and gathering of news; granting autonomy to the state-owned electronic media; creation of an audit bureau of circulation and providing financial assistance to the press for their institutional development. Very important, any citizen can now apply for registering a new publication as a matter of right without furnishing any bank guarantee as was the case earlier. The sweeping political changes have also opened up unlimited possibilities for the development of mass media institutions in the country as well as new challenges too.

3. The Mass Media

Newspapers: It is estimated that there are 460 newspapers registered all over the kingdom. The figure includes 61 dailies, one bi-weekly, 351 weeklies, 47 fortnightlies. Out of this 268 (nearly 60 percent) newspapers are concentrated in Kathmandu valley only.

The language-wise distribution of newspapers are as followed:
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<th>Fortnightlies</th>
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<td>52</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>427</td>
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<td>2. English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>3. Newari</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5. Maithili</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>6. Hindi</td>
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Press Council Report, 1988

The circulation figures are not available as it is kept a trade secret by the newspapers. However, the two official dailies, the Gorkhapatra in Nepali (circulation 35,000) and The Rising Nepal (cir. 10,000) are the largest newspapers. In the private sector, some of the weeklies are claiming their circulation reaching over 20,000.

**Rastriyo Samachar Samiti**

It is the only national news agency of Nepal set up by a special Act of law in 1962 (operation started from Feb. 1961). It enjoys monopoly in the gathering and distribution of news all over the kingdom. RSS receives news from all the major international wire services and offers leased teleprinter circuits to customers including newspaper organisations. The Agency has its correspondents in all the districts and zonal headquarters of the kingdom.

**Broadcasting**

*Radio broadcasting:* It has been the cheapest and widest mass communication medium in Nepal. The national broadcasting station Radio Nepal was established by the Government in April 1951, soon after the advent of democracy. In 1984, the then Department of Broadcasting was converted into Radio Broadcasting Service as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Communications.
At present, it maintains two medium wave stations, one in Kathmandu and the other in Pokhara in addition to 300 kilowatt capacity short wave transmitters. Short wave transmission is heard throughout Nepal while medium wave transmission covers only 55 percent of the population. During the coming five years, it has plans to set up three more relay stations ensuring disturbance free listening for the entire population of the kingdom.

Latest studies have revealed the number of radio listening sets at 1.2 million and the number of listeners at 7 million (about 40 percent of the total population of 18 million).

**Television/Video**

Video made debut in Nepal by early 1980s through commercial outlets. Nepal television started transmitting its services from December 1985. It broadcasts services for four hours a day (morning and evening). By now, its programmes can be viewed in 30 districts covering 13 percent of the total population. It has plans to expand its coverage all over the kingdom in phases during the next five years.

**Printing Presses**

The first modern manually operated printing device was brought to Nepal by former Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana while returning home from Great Britain in 1850 A.D. (1907 B.S.) By 1914 A.D., with the commissioning of a hydro-power plant in Kathmandu, electric power driven printing press were introduced.

There are now over 800 printing presses in operation all over the kingdom but their largest concentration (460 presses) is confined within the three districts of Kathmandu valley. Most of the printing presses are using the obsolete letter press technology and hand composition. The printing devices are manual or automatic treadles and flat-bed machines. However, there are over 20 printing enterprises using modern off-set machines and computerized word processors.

Jor Ganesh Press, a private sector printing company, was the first to introduce off-set printing technology in Nepal by the late sixties. All the state-owned publishing enterprises are using off-set and letter press devices but in the mass media sector, the state-owned
Gorkhapatra Corporation was the first to introduce web offset printing and photo type setting by early 1980s. There is now growing interest among private entrepreneurs for new technology. In Kathmandu valley at least, some of them have started using micro-computers with laser printers, desk-top publishing and off-set printing devices replacing the old obsolete system. But it will take some more years before the new technology gets widespread.

Quality colour printing is mostly done outside Nepal. As yet, all colour separation work is done in other countries, mostly in India, due to the absence of a single electronic scanner.

**Telecommunication Services**

Manually operated magneto telephone was first introduced in Nepal in 1914. Its expansion all over the country took place only with the advent of democracy in 1950.

The state-sector Nepal Telecommunication Corporation was established in 1975. The corporation maintains an elaborate network of 38 telephone exchanges, most of them automatic, providing 74,000 lines and micro-wave links covering the major destinations of the Kingdom. VHF wireless facilities are used for the remote inaccessible mountain areas. The installation of an Earth satellite receiving station in Kathmandu in 1982 has revolutionized the country's communication with the outside world. Incorporation of TV capability in the system has now made possible to bring major international events like Olympics live to the drawing rooms of the viewers. Transmission of messages through Telex, Fax, Data Lease Lines, etc have been put to increasing use for international telecom services.  

4. **Development Support Communication**

The application of modern communication methods to expedite socio-economic changes was introduced in Nepal by 1954 as part of rural development programme, launched with financial and technical assistance of the United States Government. The U.S. assistance included training of Nepalese personnel in community extension and communication methods at Third country institutions and the mainland United States.

At later stages, Information Education and Communication (IEC) component was made an integral part of most of the major foreign funded development projects. Communication support played substantial role in reaching the messages of family planning, child welfare, public health, education, agriculture and farming, forestry and sanitation, resource conservation, environmental protection and women development programmes to the people of rural areas.

Depending on the pattern of funding, these communication support programmes are directly implemented through the ministries of the sectors concerned with the Ministry of Communications playing no role at all either in forging co-ordination of efforts or pooling of resources at disposal or strengthening the programmes through appropriate training and research activities.

Many of the IEC units of development agencies operate their own in-house training for their personnel including the outreach workers. The methods employed for the delivery of messages to the target groups include interpersonal communication, use of audio-visuals like films, slides etc. and use of national mass media outlets. The major organisations operate their own radio programmes over Radio Nepal. Many of the programmes are included within the national air time which involves paying at concessional rates while others are required to pay at commercial rates. In the absence of a separate air channel devoted to dissemination of development information, the present capacity of broadcasting hours appears not enough to cope with the demand.

5. **Training, Research and Man-power Development**

In Nepal, despite substantial achievements made in the creation of communication infrastructure, virtual absence of a systematic research and training environment has been one of the weakest links impeding the development effort of the country. While existing training facilities have not been adequate to meet the shortage of skilled man-power as required to sustain technological innovations, research approach geared up to enhance the effectiveness of development support communication or mass media services is almost non-existent.

In the absence of any institutional support base also there have been some notable studies conducted in the mass communication sector. The publication of Nepal Ko Chhapakhana Ra Patra-Patrika Ko Itihas
In the support communication sector, the Radio Listening survey by Taylor and Hamal in 1969 and Non-formal Education through Radio by New ERA in 1974 were some of the major studies.

Since 1973, the Press Council is publishing annual reports that presents analysis of the media situation in the country. The Royal Press Commission constituted in 1981, pointed out the lacuna of training and research inputs in the development of media sector and suggested measures to improve the situation.

In the eighties, some more evaluation studies were conducted on the impact of development support communication in the promotion of family planning, agriculture and distance education over radio.

In general, most of the journalists do not have any formal training. They have learnt the art of the trade by experience. The state-owned media organisations namely, the Gorkhapatra Corporation, Rastriya Samachar Samiti, Nepal Television, Radio Broadcasting Service Committee (Radio Nepal), Royal Nepal Film Corporation are the largest employer of career professionals who are recruited from the graduate level upwards.

In the private sector Press, editors of the younger age group are mostly graduates but do not have access to proficiency training opportunities. To be an editor, the existing press regulation has prescribed minimum qualification of graduation or five years experience on the job and training in journalism from a government recognised institution. In recent years, a number of professional institutions have come into existance providing training on journalism and mass communications.

The following is a brief description of the organisations currently involved in training and research activities in communications in the country.
a. **Department of Journalism, Tribhuwan University**

Subsequently, Tribhuwan University started courses on journalism at proficiency certificate level (Intermediate level) from 1976 at one of its campuses in Kathmandu. Diploma level courses (B.A.) were introduced from 1981. Students enrolled in the campus can take journalism as one of the combination subjects for both the levels comprising a four year period. Grant assistance provided by UNESCO in successive phases, helped the department of journalism of Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus to construct its own annexe and procure audio-visual instructional aids that included photo-lab facilities, TV screen and VCR etc. In addition to full time teachers, journalists working in newspapers organisations are also employed on part-time basis.

Beginning from 1987, the Peoples Campus, privately managed and affiliated to Tribhuwan University, has offered two year journalism course at certificate level.

b. **Nepal Press Institute**

The Institute was founded in Sept. 1984 in the private sector at the initiative of senior media professionals of the country. Its Managing Board comprises representatives of the Private sector press and the state-owned corporate sector. It aims at promoting the institutional development of the Press in Nepal through training, research, publications and consultancies on matters of professional interest.

Since 1984, it is conducting a journalism proficiency course of 10 months duration to those who cannot join the university sponsored course. The trainees include people working in various newspaper organisations, employees of corporate sector undertakings and others interested in taking up journalism as a vocation. So far, most of its trained people are being absorbed in various media-related services or have been able to generate jobs themselves.

NPI does not receive any assistance from the Government. It supports itself by dispensing services to various agencies and implementing projects under contract.
In addition to the 10-month training course which it supports itself, NPI organises short-term workshops to help build up proficiency among mid-career working journalists. In this series, it has organised several workshops on small newspaper management, rural reporting, reporting on population and development issues, news reporting and editing and photo journalism.

It also sponsors and administers fellowships on investigative reporting, rural development and environmental conservation in collaboration with several regional and international organisations.

Research: Research on diverse aspects of information and communication has been a major function of NPI. It has been identified by recent studies that research and evaluation has been one of the weakest links between the expansion of media services and their expected impact among the beneficiary groups. This lacuna is more glaring in the communication sector.

In the past NPI has undertaken a number of studies and provided consultancy services to national institutions. Some of the studies conducted so far are: Legal Aspects of the Working condition of Journalists in Nepal; Impact of communication services of Family Planning Association of Nepal; Study on Measures Towards Self-reliance of Rastriya Samachar Samiti, Distribution Pattern Newspapers and status of Printing Technology in Nepal.

Other research studies in the stage of completion is a Monograph on Press and Law in Nepal in collaboration with AMIC, Singapore.

Publications: There is a great dearth of information materials bearing the message of innovation and change that could be utilized by the neo-literates and literates of the rural areas where newspapers either are not available or their contents appear too sophisticated to the readers. To answer this challenge, NPI in collaboration with Agricultural Development Bank and UNICEF Nepal started the publication of "Gaon Ghar" a wall newspaper from 1986. ADB undertakes the responsibility of its distribution in the small farmers programme villages of 25 districts of the country while

UNICEF provides the necessary funds. Encouraged by the success and impact of the pilot scheme, the three organisations are entering into collaboration for the publication and expansion of the area of coverage of "Gaon Ghar" in the coming years.

Other publications include: "Sanchar Jagat" (The Media World) in Nepali and annual Press Digest in English.

c. **Worldview International Foundation/Nepal**

WIF/Nepal was established in 1981 following agreement with His Majesty’s Government. Its aim is at using video technology to support development activities in Nepal. WIF is an international non-profit non-governmental organisation specializing in development communications.

WIF/Nepal has produced a number of video films featuring development activities in such sectors as primary health, sanitation, nutrition, population, family planning, community development, agriculture, forestry, women in development, etc. It maintains a production cum training unit and conducts training on communication skills and TV programme production on request for various international and local organisations.

In recent years, WIF/Nepal implemented three major development support communication projects. These included communication support to Rural Women Project, project aimed at strengthening the communication unit of Agricultural Development Bank and a communication campaign for oral rehydration and child survival project in collaboration with UNICEF.

d. **Nepal Television**

Nepal Television Corporation arranges periodic proficiency in-house training on various aspects of Video/TV programme production in collaboration with international organisations.

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e. **Radio Nepal**

Radio Nepal also organises training workshops occasionally on programme production and broadcasting in collaboration with external professional institutions including AIBD, Malaysia. It conducted the first ever comprehensive national Listeners Survey in 1989.

f. **The Press Council**

The council has been set up in 1970 with a view to assist the Government in the promotion of standards of journalism, to promote good will among the Press and the Government and to help maintain the dignity of the press.

It monitors the activities of the press media on a year-round basis and publishes its findings in the form of an annual report. It also maintains a research unit that conducts snap surveys to assess the circulation of various newspapers but so far, the findings have not been published. There have been no authentic records yet made available on the circulation of newspapers and journals. The annual report also points out irregularities and discrepancies observed in the publication of newspapers, government regulations and analyses the problems apparent in the Press sector. The council reports do not cover the domain of development support communications.

g. **National Telecommunications Corporation**

NTC maintains computerized service links with overseas countries, internal digital exchanges and micro-wave links. Most of the lower and medium level technical man-power are trained at the Telecommunications Training Centre. Officer grade man-power are recruited from persons having university degrees in engineering. Many of them are sent abroad for higher specialization and proficiency trainings. NTC also publishes a telecom journal.

h. **National Computer Centre**

Established in 1974 as a data processing centre for the national census, NCC now provides its service to the government and government owned corporations. It also maintains a well trained staff. It operates periodic training programmes of various grades on computer programming to the interested public and corporate employees.
1. **Private Companies**

A host of private micro-computer dealers having links with international suppliers have their bureaux in Kathmandu. It is estimated that Nepal imports about 100 sets of micro-computers and their accessories annually. The private companies are taking quite a large chunk of business in the market. Their service include: supply of the hardware, its installation, after sales maintenance and training for the personnel.

Agencies like Data Systems International, Beltronics, Innovative Computers provide regular courses in computer programmes.

j. **School of Printing**

Nepal does not yet have a national institution for training in printing. In earlier times, locally trained mechanics who learnt their skills while on the job used to operate the electric powered flat-bed printing machines.

With the advent of off-set technology and photo-type setting era, and in view of its expanding scope for the future, establishment of a national training school should be deemed a matter of high priority.

However, to fill in the gap, the suppliers of the hardwares undertake the responsibility of training at the initial phase. For major repair works, technicians have to be hired from India on short-term contract basis. Nepal Press Institute and Nepal Printers Association are contemplating about plans for the establishment of a training school in printing. As a pace-setter a high level seminar participated by leading press enterpreneurs and media professionals is planned to be held in Kathmandu this year.

course at UCEP:

The underprivileged childrens is learnt to have expanded its course to include training of mechanics in printing. Funded by DANIDA, UCEP us a trade school in which underprivileged children of Nepal are given long-term training in various vocations up to 10th grade. The usefulness and comprehensiveness of such training course offered at the school is yet to be assessed in terms with the requirements of fast expanding printing industry in Nepal.
k. **University Institutions:**

The Tribhuvan University operates a number of research centres specializing in various disciplines. In addition to taking up a number of research projects at their own initiative or in collaboration with national and international organisations, the centres also organise training workshops and seminars on topics related to their research areas.

The research centres are: Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology (RECAST), Centre for Educational Research and Innovation Development (CERID).

1. **Administrative Staff College Programme:**

Set up in 1983, with assistance from British Government, the college has a faculty in communications. It provides training to govt. personnel on the art of communication and its application to community extension services and public information. It maintains a reasonably trained teaching staff capable of taking up research studies.

m. **Private Research cum Consultancy Agencies:**

Over the years, a number of research cum consultancy professional agencies providing services in development communication have come into operation. Most of these organisations are registered with the Department of Industry as service industry or at the Department of Commerce as a vocational organisation.

Some of these agencies have specialized in providing services in advertising consumer products over Radio, Television and print media. A few of them have emerged as competent research and consultancy firms. To name some of them: New Education Research Associates (New ERA); Research Inputs and Development Associates (RIDA); Integrated Development Systems (IDS); Development and Communication Research Group (DECORE); Development Research and Communication Group (DRCG), etc.
Science Popularization and RONAST:

The Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (RONAST) in collaboration with International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada launched an intensive pilot Science Popularization Project from 1985. It was a research project aimed at ascertaining the effectiveness of the existing media channels—the radio and print media in particular, in the dissemination of simple science and technology information to the target receivers.

The implementation of the project enabled RONAST to launch the publication of the first science feature service “Vigyan Lekhmala” in Nepali language from 1986 and launching of a systematic science information campaign over Radio Nepal. The project also organised training workshops for science writers, journalists, broadcasters and literary writers.

An evaluation of the project for the period between 1986-87 revealed the use of science features by the print media comprised of about 20 percent of the total number of features in the case of national newspapers and about 30 percent in the case of others.

Likewise, the weekly 15-minute science and technology radio programme was considered to be of high communication value in terms of awareness creation among the younger age group of people.

An Audience Survey Report conducted by RIDA on behalf Radio Broadcasting Service stated Science and Technology Programme as one among the top three highly popular development programmes following Agriculture and Women Programmes. The Science Programme drew largest number of audience participation in the form of over 300 letters from listeners a month. An analysis of the listeners pattern and distribution revealed that the Central Development Region has the largest concentration while all the remote mountain districts of Far Western and Mid Western Regions have very poor number.

One of the main reasons of the popularity of S&T programme was that it was specialist tailored and processing of second rate propaganda stuff did not find any place in it.

1. An Evaluation of Science Popularization Project, RONAST, 1987
In addition to the media-based information approach, SPP also launched an innovative scheme of organising on-the-spot quizzes among high school students. It was an inter-personal close range communication approach that drew wider audience participation in the programme. During the project duration a total of 200 schools covering 40 districts took part in it. At present, the Science Education Development Centre (CEDEC), HMG through its nation-wide network, has taken over this programme and continuing it on a regular basis.

Encouraged by the results of the pilot project, IDRC is making funds available for the implementation of the second phase. This project involves intensive use of multiple channels of communication in a specified rural area in addition to the dissemination of development messages over national media channels. The outcomes of this communication research model is expected to throw more light on the strength and weaknesses of such endeavour supporting national development programmes.

5. Conclusion

In Asia-Pacific Region, to the exception of a few advanced industrial nations, most of the countries are developing and share identical problems. Low per capita income, high rate of illiteracy, malnutrition, rampant poverty, environmental degradation are the problems common to all, although there are variations in their extent and magnitude. In view of the enormity of problems and the urge of the time to close the gap persisting among the developed North and underdeveloped South, it is desirable that the potentials of modern communication systems should be fully geared up to meet the challenge of underdevelopment.

In this era of Information Revolution, the potentials of modern systems have remained under-utilized in transforming the societies from the abyss of socio-economic backwardness. In spite of their great power, mass media have been largely used as tools of state propaganda or entertainment and less as agents of change and

1. Annual reports, SPP, 1988, 1989
progress. The mass media, on the contrary, are accused of falsely raising the expectation of peoples to utopian heights, much above the realistic levels of attainment. The media impact has also led to imitation of western values and perversities and resulted in the exodus of people from villages to cities giving rise to great schisms in the social structure.

In fact, in many developing country situations, mass media institutions have proliferated without a strong development perspective while development actions are implemented in isolation of the support of mass media. Being one of the least development nations, Nepal is no exception to such dichotomous situation. What are the causes that have led to such an anomalous situation? How the disruption of social structures in Asian countries can be averted? How a proper balance between peoples aspirations and the pace of national development can be evolved and what role communication programmes are expected to play in it?

Indeed, adoption of systematic communication research programmes can be of immense help in identifying the inherent problems and suggesting appropriate remedial measures. If must be admitted in this context that many Asian countries like India have already well developed research base and know-how while many others are still very far below the line. While the inputs of research appears a must in strengthening the capacities of communication channels in the Asian context, the urgency is equally felt that the domain of communication research is broadened enough to cover other vital sectors of national development so far as these efforts have a bearing on the promotion of societal well-being.

In many countries, Nepal may be cited as an example governments see investment on communication research and training as less productive and funds are not reading available. The problem of basic data, documentation and lack of trained researchers also discourage communication research activities.

In the light of the above mentioned problems, the following suggestions may be considered for follow-up action.
a. The governments, policy planners and institutions of developing nations should be persuaded to recognize the value of communication research in sustaining national development and to help generate an environment conducive to such activities.

b. An elaborate system of monitoring research activities, their impact on national development and sharing of experiences among nations should be developed at national, sub-regional and regional levels. This can be effected by setting of regional focal points and national nodes and by promoting steady interaction within these points through competent professional institutions.

c. Countries having more advanced media systems, research and training institutions should be encouraged to assist the institutions of lesser developed nations in building up their capacities in improving their media systems through research and training. Regional institutions and multi-lateral agencies can be very helpful in assisting such endeavours and in evolving a pattern of resource sharing, transfer of expertise, availing of training facilities and exchange of research findings that can be replicated in other country situations.

d. Countries where communication research consciousness is not yet manifest, they should be encouraged to implement at least some research programmes a year in areas of mass communications, development support communications, culture and national policy implications.

Suggestions for Nepal Press Institute

a. Nepal Press Institute should compile a directory of national media research institutions, their research activities done so far and the types of training programmes offered.

b. It should organise some national workshops offering training on media systems research, the methodology and institutional capability building, etc.
c. A national level seminar of leading media institutions, development communication organisations, research and consultancy agencies should be considered to focus attention on giving research orientation to programme formulation and impact monitoring of development programmes having bearing on creation of awareness among the people of grass-root level.
1. Proposal for Research

Title: Development Communication Network

1. The Background:

With the development efforts of over four decades, Nepal has now a relatively developed Mass Communication infrastructure. The existence of a nation-wide network of telecommunications and its increased capacities in handling speedy transmission of messages within the country and with the outside world has been a positive factor influencing the future course of communications development in Nepal.

Notwithstanding its smallness in size and population, Nepal is a land of immense diversities. Just as the topography with all its rugged terrain poses physical barriers to development, a large cross-section of the society is still separated from the development mainstream and leads a life-style of the medieval era. About 93% of the total population being rural-based and illiteracy rate still very high at 65 percent, awareness to change and improvement in the quality of living is a major problem.

Most of the mass media outlets suffer from various limitations in extending their reach among the hard-to-reach strata of the society. Newspapers and television are mostly confined to urban centres. Radio, though a universal and less costly medium has yet to have its effectiveness felt in the rural areas. Out of a population of 18 million, the ownership of radio listening sets is estimated to be only 1.2 million. Newspapers, despite the impressive figure of 460 in number, suffer from their poor quality of printing, unattractive presentation and lack of worth-reading information materials. The print media are themselves a captive of barriers to good communication.

In the course of a seminar meeting attended by newspaper publishers and editors of the Eastern Development Region organised by NPI, it was found that the increase in literacy and economic activities was of little advantage to newspaper publishers. The reasons were very simple and obvious. The newspapers had almost no access to information materials of
contemporary interest and value, and second, the product marketing effort was lacking. In the absence of access to well tailored information materials newspapers are prone to fill their pages with all sorts of rumours, gossips and second rate stereotype stuff which do not appeal to the readers.

The proposal is designed to bring about improvement in the situation by generating the flow of information materials of development interest to users and through them help reach the message of awareness down to the beneficiary groups at the grass-root level in general and of the rural areas in particular.

2. Justification

Nepal Press Institute, in recent years, has taken initiative in building up the much desired professionalism in the media sector in two ways: (1) By conducting training programmes for human resource development, (2) by providing development information materials to the Press media on a pilot experiment basis:

As a modest venture in this direction, NPI entered into collaboration with Inter Press Service based in Rome which enabled it to receive news and features processed by the agency through its world-wide network. Since 1987, when the project started, the features are translated into Nepali, well-edited and photo-copied and mailed to all major newspapers and electronic media of the country including those outside Kathmandu valley. The flow of development information of contemporary interest very soon filled up the newspaper space which were not properly utilized before for want of interesting materials. The pick-up rate of the features has been quite encouraging.

Based on the success of this effort, NPI has concluded another arrangement with PANOS Features, London in May 1990 for receiving and distributing its features in the country in Nepali language.
In addition, NPI commissions young journalists to visit various development projects or problem areas and write feature articles based on their findings. Suitable materials are used in IPS wire service and also find place in the columns of local newspapers.

Innovative and useful as these measures are, it is strongly felt that there is a need to consolidate them by developing investigative journalism, which provides for systematic interpretation of facts and events, from an unbiased angle.

The advent of multi-party democracy has also opened up tremendous scope for freedom of expression and its consequent application to the growth of public opinion guiding national development efforts which is essential for the sustenance of an emerging democratic society.

The project is also expected to counter the backlash suffered in sustaining the impact of literacy programmes by augmenting the reach of print media and through them disseminating development information among the wider strata of the society.

**Project period:** Three years.

3. **Objectives:**

1. To promote investigative journalism by producing features on issues of contemporary development concern in Nepal.

2. To promote exchange of development information between national mass media of Nepal and regional and international organisations and help focus national attention on issues of global and inter-regional concern.

3. To assist the mass media in the qualitative improvement of their information contents by increasing their access materials and sources of information.

4. To provide consultancies and organise training workshops for the benefit of media organisations including those in the districts.
4. **Methodology**

1. **The operational framework**: Nepal Press Institute will set up a separate board of media professionals to supervise the implementation of this project. It will make available space for office and provide administrative support as required.

2. **Pre-project consultative meeting**: A consultative meeting of senior representatives of leading media organisations will be organised in Kathmandu to seek their suggestions on methods of implementing the project and on the problems to be encountered in this respect. It will also be useful in identifying users' interest.

3. **Compilation of users' directory**: A users' directory having the names, addresses and professional status of all the Media institutions will be made as part of the project activities.

4. **Selection of topics for coverage**: The Board will meet from time to time to finalise issues of public concern and assign media writers and scholars as to write features on them. This apart, writers will be commissioned to investigate and write on topics of development concern.

5. **Reference section**: A reference section will be set up to assist the writers with background information materials as far as possible.

6. **Language of the features**: The features are mostly produced in Nepali language for use by the national media. Features in English may be processed for use by external agencies only on request or under contractual obligations.

7. **Distribution**: The features will be distributed to media organisations showing evidence of wide reach among the clientele groups. Initially, it will be distributed free of cost for a period of one year.
8. Periodic evaluation and follow-up: At the end of every project year users survey will be taken to ascertain the pick-up rate, the usefulness of the services and need for modification. The evaluation will include questionnaire method, direct interviews and group discussion.

9. Payable charges: From the second year, the regular users will be encouraged to pay a nominal charge of Rs 100.00 a year which would meet the cost of paper and mailing charges. During the third year, the payable charges will be doubled to Rs. 200.00 a year.

**Subject Areas to be covered:**

Write-ups on contemporary national issues; economic affairs, trade, industry and banking; culture and arts; agro-forestry, environmental protection and resource conservation; sports, education; science and technology; communications; women’s development, tourism and transport, wild-life and nature conservation.

**The Regional Perspective**

Articles bearing analysis of events from regional perspective shall be given preference to encourage regional cooperation and ethnic harmony. For this, a panel of eminent writers from various countries of South Asia will be constituted and activated.

**Description of the project**

The project will have three major components:

a. Regular publication of features

b. Training

c. Information dissemination in pilot rural areas
a. **Regular publication of features:**

i. **Frequency of Publication:** The features bulletin will be issued every fortnight. The package in one issue will contain articles of development issues originating from within the country, articles supplied by external feature agencies and duly edited by the desk, brief information tips of general knowledge, cartoons and photographs illustrating the contents when necessary.

The package of about 16 pages in average will be distributed to media organisations by hand delivery in Kathmandu and by mail to other destinations. Each package will contain in average two locally contributed articles and the rest will include articles received from abroad.

ii. **Remuneration to contributors:** Depending on the length and analysis of issues involved, the following remuneration rates are proposed:

- a. Articles (upto 1,000 words) Rs. 500.00 to 1000.00
- b. Articles in English Language Rs. 50% extra.

b. **Training (Skill Development)**

The focus of this programme will be on development of necessary skills among the publishers and editors of provincial newspapers where the need is most felt.

The training inputs will be directly related to NPI’s field-based programme launched in the pilot areas (Areas shown on the map). It will include consultancy in the marketing of products, investigative reporting, editing and improvement in printing.

c. **Information Dissemination in Pilot Rural Areas:**

Encouraged with the response received by the Wall Newspaper “Gown Ghar” among the people of rural areas, NPI is designing a project for publishing development newspaper targetted specifically at pilot rural areas.
As target coverage area, NPI has proposed Palpa district, about 300 kilometers west of Kathmandu and Ilam district, 500 kilometers to the east of Kathmandu, much of which borders India. While logistic support for the publication in Palpa will be extended from the central office in Kathmandu, it plans to set up a model service centre at Biratnagar, one of the bustling business centres of eastern Nepal.

Biratnagar is the headquarters of eastern region and is well connected by daily air flights, teleprinter and telex lines and is connected with important road links. There are about 30 newspapers, mostly weeklies, published from this centre but due to poor professionalism and quality of output, the readership is very small notwithstanding the fact that the adjoining rural areas have a large percentage of literate people.

As a measure to improve the service quality of the provincial newspapers, NPI will set up a service-cum-liaison centre at Biratnagar. The centre will install a teleprinter, telex and Fax receiving facilities.

Development features published by the central office, political, economic and commercial information received from the wire service will be edited and distributed to the local users.

The local newspaper publishers will be encouraged to form a collective bureau on cost-sharing basis to promote investigative reporting and to develop distribution outlets aimed at the rural population. They will also be persuaded to voluntarily devote some space in their publications for discussion of development issues that are of interest to the rural population.

In addition, NPI will publish a fortnightly journal especially targeted at the rural masses of Ilam district. The publication will be transported by bus to the pilot area and distributed among the local people.

**Evaluation and Monitoring**

The implementation of the project will be closely monitored every four months, thrice a year. The evaluation of the change
effect and the problems encountered in the programmes will be made as per the prescribed format.

The evaluation of various programme components will be made as follows:

1. Users rate of and response to Devcom Features in general by the national media.

2. Capacity augmentation in terms of readership increase of the provincial newspapers originating from Biratnagar.

3. Increased reach of newspaper materials in the hinterland rural areas of Biratnagar as potential post-literacy materials.

4. Increase in development awareness in terms of improvement in the quality of living of the people of the pilot area of Ilam.

**Future Prospects:**

On the basis of the results of the project, NPI in collaboration with various regional and international agencies, shall explore the possibility of and participate in a programme for commissioning a South Asian Features Syndicate extending its service to all the countries of the Region.

**Project Benefits**

1. The implementation of the Project will promote investigative journalism and promote active debate on major issues of development concern through the media. It will also arouse interest among young media people in attaining greater professionalism in development reporting.

2. It will help increase the readability of newspapers by ensuring the regular flow of development information and ensure the widening of circulation base among the literate masses of the sub-urban and rural areas.
3. The periodic coverage of issues of development concern will promote increased interaction between the development agencies and media professionals.
Research Proposal (II)

Title: Trend Watch

1. Background:

Most of the developing countries of Asia and Pacific Region are still passing through a phase of transition. During the last four decades of the post World War era though the nations have attained their freedom from colonial oppression or feudal rules, they are still struggling hard to attain societal equilibrium. Many nations which inherited democratic form of government from the old colonial era are straining to consolidate the gains against severe odds. High rate of illiteracy, the widening gap between the rich and poor, ethnocentrism, communal strifes, and parochial nationalism pose serious challenges to societal stability and economic progress of many nations.

Classified as a least developed small nation Nepal is also passing through a phase of societal transition as experienced elsewhere. Despite the fact that the country attained freedom from the century-old rule of a feudal regime, it has experienced tremendous upheavals in the past. The experiments with a parliamentary form of government based on multi-party system after 1951 lasted only for a decade until it was replaced by a partyless form of government. The country passed through a gruesome phase of authoritarian regime for 30 years until it was replaced by a popular revolt in April, 1990.

We are now starting afresh in building a new social order based on modern democratic principles, freedom and human rights.
Given the high rate of illiteracy, extreme economic and social backwardness coupled with poor quality of human resource, the task of consolidating the recently established liberal democratic system is full of challenges. It is very likely that failure to deliver benefits to the society might anticipate backlashes and instabilities or even return to authoritarianism.

To sustain a liberal democratic social structure against possible setbacks, the emergence of an atmosphere providing for healthy public debate, freeplay of dissentions and decision by consensus assume great importance. The growth of a strong, free and responsible Press does help build-up the kind of public opinion as necessary to guide an emergent society against inherent draw-backs and weaknesses in the government. But such an ideal setting cannot be expected as long as the media systems suffer from a number of deficiencies ranging from poor quality of man-power to weak institutional base and very limited service delivery capacities. In fact, a number of other institutional measures that lead to generation of healthy public opinion on issues having bearing on people’s welfare and contributing thereby to the functioning of media systems, can be contemplated.

In the above-mentioned background this proposal has been designed for commissioning a new information dissemination effort having the project title “Trend Watch”.

2. **Justification:**

The following are the justifications in favour of undertaking the proposed project:

1) **Need of Alert system:** It has been observed that Nepalese people have expressed their desire for change at every ten year period if we scan historical records dating back
from 1940. In 1940 A.D. four people were put to death and many were jailed for peacefully demanding for political reforms. In 1950, people led a popular revolt that installed multi-party based democracy in Nepal. In 1960, the system was overthrown by military intervention and an authoritarian form of government was installed. In 1980, public resentment resulted in a national referendum followed by political reforms. In 1990, since the earlier reforms were not adequate, popular revolt helped the restoration of multi-party system of democracy.

On all these occasions, the changes have not been peaceful and have created shock-waves of dissension and apprehension in the society. The total absence of mechanism for systematic monitoring and analysis of trends in the society for change and adjustments of values may be one of the reasons for such traumatic setbacks.

2. In the absence of professional institutions providing unbiased and objective analysis of societal development trends and free discussion of issues of national concern, people are often misled to believe in false promises and official propaganda. In the past, the professional groups, media not excluded were persuaded to extoll the virtues of New Education Reform Plan until after 15 years it was realised that it did not serve the purpose. Such gaps in performance vis-a-vis people's expectations could be noticed in agriculture, energy development, economy, social welfare schemes and above all in the political system. Shortcomings and problems in these sectors were never properly analysed until these reached a bursting point.

3. The country does have some non-governmental organisations like Human Rights Association, which monitors human rights violation but it excludes other development sectors. There are lots of research
organisations which are dependent on government grants and their functions are limited to specific sectors only. The problem gets further complicated by the fact that most of the research findings are not disseminated properly and fail to generate public opinion. This is why, a NGO like Nepal Press Institute, not receiving any subsidies from the government, has reasons to come forward in commissioning a research unit "Trend Watch" to help promote impartial public opinion through dissemination of analyses of contemporary events and issues.

4. Organisation's opinion polls and surveys on contemporary issues of public concern have not come in the forefront so far. The "Trend Watch" can be a modest venture in this direction in keeping with the requirements of a new information culture conducive to the consolidation of liberal democratic values in the country.

3. **Project Period**: Three years

4. **Implementing Agency**: Nepal Press Institute in collaboration with international professional organisations.

5. **Objectives**:

   a. To promote periodic analyses of media development trends and help strengthen the development of mass media through dissemination of findings based on facts.

   b. To conduct opinion polls, surveys and documentation studies interpreting development trends in politics, social and economic fields.

   c. To train necessary man-power in the methodology of conducting such polls and surveys and data processing.
d. To publish the works through the mass media outlets and in the form of special reports.

6. Methodology:

The project will be implemented in successive phases and the procedures will be as follows:

a. Research Bureau: NPI will set up a separate high level panel of researchers to administer the project. The bureau will be headed by an Executive Director. It will be assisted by a panel of consultants specialising in various disciplines of study.

b. Reference section: Once the bureau is constituted, a reference and documentation section will be organised to facilitate research work based on documentation studies.

c. Initially, studies on micro-problem areas will be taken up and implemented until enough expertise is developed. Beginning can be made with surveys and studies in the media sector and development communications. Later, it will be extended to include analyses of political trends, effectiveness of government policies, etc. as far as practicable.

7. Manpower

In order to minimise overhead costs, NPI will maintain a small number of personnel who will be given short-term proficiency training. Other personnel will be hired on contract basis depending on the nature and duration of the project. Some of the personnel will be trained at institutions/facilities abroad and others within the country.
8. **Capability building and Resource Mobilization**

Once NPI builds up its service dispensing capability, it hopes to generate jobs and most of the resources internally by taking up consultancy assignments and research proposals from various organisations. This way, the support funds can be gradually phased out in the coming five years making the programme self-reliant and income generating venture.

Apart from raising funds from service contracts, the publication and sale of reports will also be another source of income.

9. **International Collaboration**

Since the concept of introducing opinion polls and problem related studies is new, NPI hopes to implement the project in collaboration with regional and international organisations who are willing to join it.

**Project benefits:**

a. The implementation of the project will help NPI expand its capability in implementing periodically research studies on complex issues of public concern.

b. It will help strengthen public opinion building process essential for sustaining a liberal democratic polity.

c. It will promote investigative journalism and provide a medium of expression to young talents.
Selected References


Communications In Nepal

(At a glance)

1. Area: 147,181 sq.km.

2. Population: 18 Million (estimated)

3. Per capita Income: 160 US Dollars

4. Newspapers:
   a. No. of Newspapers: 460
   b. Newspapers in the Capital: 268
   c. Largest Circ. Newspaper—Gorkhapatra (Nepali): 35,000

5. Radio/Television
   a. No. of radio receiving sets: 1,120,000
   b. Radio receivers per 1,000 population: 16
   c. No. of TV sets: 60,000
   d. No of Cinema Halls: 50
   e. No. of Seats: 37,186

6. Telecommunications:
   a. No. of telephone Exchanges: 38
   b. No. of telephone lines: 74,660
   c. Telex circuits:
      Satellite: 34
      Microwarve: 10

7. No. of Printing Presses: 792

8. Govt. Budget for communication sector:
   Total budget (1985/86): Rs. 9.80 billion
   Budget for communication Sector: Rs. 187 million
   Percentage of the communication Sector: 1.92