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Deutsche Welle - AMIC
Seminar on

RADIO PROGRAMMING
IN A MULTIMEDIA AGE

COUNTRY PAPER – NEPAL

jointly organised by

Deutsche Welle Radio Training Centre
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and

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COUNTRY PAPER ON RADIO NEPAL

-Ramesh Jang Karkee

Nepal is small developing country where 75% of its land is occupied by Himalayas and Hills. Area of Nepal is 147,181 Sq. Km and more than 20 millions of peoples having more than 36 different mother tongues and Nepali language is unique or common language to communicate each other.

Although Nepal never become colony but being the land locked country it was isolated from the development and achievement of other countries in different fields as well as in broadcasting. The history of Radio Broadcasting begins after the democratic revolution in 1950. Radio Nepal was established in 1950 as a electronic media with 250 watt Short-wave transmitter and gradually it was going to world. The power of SW transmission was increased up to 310 KW by using three 100 KW transmitters and two 5 KW transmitter with three different carrier frequencies in 1950 to 1981. Similarly, MW transmission introduced in 1968 with the power of 10 KW. The expansion and development of MW transmission was done in the period of 1968 to 1990. Nowadays there are four 100 KW and two 10 KW MW transmitters in five different regional development centres. In 1995 Radio Nepal established a FM transmitter of 1 KW power. Radio Nepal is sending news to about 200,000 listener through Internet.

Broadcasting Situation in Nepal:

Radio Nepal is semi government organization and reached up to 50% of its population in MW transmission and SW transmission can hear all over the country. In 1990 the political situation of country changed and became more democratic and more transparent. After 1990 the enormous development and implementation in the field of multimedia, government also realized that information is one of the most important means of country's development. That is why
gave permission to other private broadcasts. Nowadays there are 10 FM license holder broadcaster and more than 15 new broadcaster are interested in FM transmission. Most of FM broadcasters are located in Kathmandu, Capital City and only a few of them are outside the capital. The power of these transmitters varies from 100 watt to 1 KW.

The policy of government in the field of broadcasting is changed and welcome to all kinds of broadcasters for transmission News and information to the people of the country. Hence, there is competition among the broadcasters exist or sustain which yield more and more quality and effective programmes.

Radio Nepal is only the broadcaster whose main news and other informative programme of two hours available in Internet. In the near future introducing Satellite (VSAT) communication for studio to transmitter link, which will increase the reception quality as well as the coverage area if necessary.

**State of Multimedia**

For the transformation of information there are so many media. There are more than 200 national and local newspapers in different language. About 10 of them are access in Internet for the foreign readers. Most of these newspapers are informative and based on political agenda. Government's new policy of decentralization and transparency of information has changed the function of this multimedia center. The function of multimedia center is provide any kinds of information via networked computer about all over the country as well as latest events of the world. Television, Radio, Internet and newspapers are established media of Nepal. Nepal television is semi governmental broadcaster established in 1984. There are 5 transmitter in different part of country and reaches faster than other all over country. There are more than 22 external satellite TV channel, which can easily received by cable TV. There are more
than 30 cable TV networks in different cities. Some of them are producing their own programme based on news and entertainment.

**Radio programming and expected changes**

Radio Nepal is only the broadcaster, which transmits national and regional programme. The time of national broadcasting is 13 hours and regional 2 hours everyday. There are five regional development centers. Radio Nepal has established 100 KW MW transmitter with programme production studio.

Being a semi governmental organization and effective electronic media Radio Nepal is broadcasting different types of educational programme for the people of remote area. These types of programme are helping to uneducated people in the field of health and social education. The literacy of Nepal is only 46% and there are many remote areas where the basic need of human being is not available. In those places Radio Nepal with MW and SW transmission playing vital role by providing information. The programme of Radio Nepal is very popular because it is easy to understand. Central network of Radio Nepal is broadcasting information and educative programme which are produced by ministry of education, ministry of agriculture, ministry of forest and there are so many semi governmental organization and private sector who produces their own programme and transmit from Radio Nepal by paying 'On air' charge. Regional radio programme is based on local culture and language. Radio Nepal has five regional transmitters, which produce and broadcast news and informative programme in ten different regional languages.

Radio Nepal uses a wide ranges of formats including features; documentaries, dramas, talk sectors, interviews, music shows, like commentaries etc. Recognizing the citizen's right to be informed under a multi-party democracy; Radio Nepal attempts to provide
Informative; educational as well as entertainment programmes. The major programme highlights include.

**Educational**

Programmes on religion, literature, science and technology, agriculture, women health and sanitation, public health children and youth.

**Entertainment**

i. Music, Nepali songs, western music, Hindi songs and Gazals
ii. Songs in the different national language.
iii. Radio dramas and comedy programmes.

**Information**

i. News and current affairs.
ii. Phone-in for parliamentarians.
iii. Radio Reports.
v. Developmental programmes.

Programmes on information and education constitute 40% of the total programmes and entertainment covers the remaining 60% which also include commercials.

Except Radio Nepal there are other broadcasters too, which are broadcasting their programme by using FM transmission, most of them are producing commercial programme and few of them are producing environmental programme. Daily national newspapers like Kathmandu post and Himalayan Times have established FM transmitters. Their programmes are focus on entertainment and information.

Radio Nepal seeks to function an instrument of popular empowerment by providing access to a wide range of information
and ideas, views and opinions on the economic, social, political, religious and culture life of the citizens of Nepal. Radio Nepal since its inspection, has been shining to fulfill this mandate, which has been reinforced by the right of every citizen to be informed guaranteed by the constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal. The national communication policy 1992, the broadcasting Act 1993 and the broadcasting regulations 1995 serve as the legal guidelines for Radio Nepal's programming within the framework and parameters of these legal documents, Radio Nepal enjoys sufficient freedom of expression to inform and educate its listeners about vital issues concerning them.

In this sense, Radio Nepal serves as a valuable platform for debate and discussions in the interest of the people of Nepal. In some of its programme Radio Nepal invites elected political representatives (who are directly accountable to the people) to answer questions posed by the listeners. Likewise notices and public service messages on issues such as health; environment, nutrition, literacy, immunization campaigns, family planning, drug abuse, earthquake safety, fire safety etc are broadcast at regular intervals. FM Kathmandu, the FM wing of Radio Nepal broadcasts such messages as a mandatory provision although private operators do the entire programming. Similarly, notices on missing children, adults and mentally retarded persons are also broadcast as public service messages. Radio Nepal now covers the entire country through Short wave and about 80% through Medium-wave transmission, which already I mentioned.

Although Radio Nepal has strengthened its institutional capacity and diversified itself in terms of programme formats, technical efficiency and nationwide coverage, sustenance as a public service broadcaster would depend on several factors:

i) Change in attitude of law and policy makers and politicians alike through a careful examination of existing policies and legislation in the changed broadcasting environment.
ii) Formatting programmes into an entertainment package with news, information and educational components make platable yet effective;

iii) Getting creative and talented people to create entertaining programmes so as to ensure information in entertainment.

iv) Conduct extensive audience surveys to determine what listeners want;

v) Make optimal use of technologies available for saving time and money.

vi) Since public service broadcasting is programming transmitted in the interest of public, corporate sponsors and NGO's must be convinced of their and moral obligations also.

vii) Installation of fill-in stations and upgrading the existing technical facilities to accommodate programming through a second channel.

Problems foreseen and response

The National communications Policy 1992 specifies that the objective of radio Nepal is "to broadcast programmes of news, information, education and entertainment in order to enlighten the general public about the important national and international events". The mandate to broadcast programmes that help conserve and promote economic, social, cultural, literacy, religious and artistic facts of the country is by no means a commercial dimension.

Therefore, the challenges ahead are enormous. The need to preserve traditional, cultural values in the face of encroachment from the skies is a major issue before us. Furthermore, Radio Nepal is not funded by the government, there is no provision of collecting fees from Radio set owners and therefore, has to generate its own funds for production, transmission, overhead expenses, equipment purchase and maintenance. This implies that maintaining an identity, as a purely public service broadcast institution will not be viable. The need strike a balance between commercial broadcasts and social service, in a manner that is appropriate to the institution as well as to
its listeners. An accountable media constitutes the conscience of a nation and hence, Radio Nepal has been trying to exercise its rights with responsibility to ensure the individual citizen's right to be informed. But to evolve an identity as a Public Service Broadcast Institution will not be unable. The need is to strike a balance between commercial broadcasts and social service, in a manner that is appropriate to the institution as well as to its listeners. An accountable media constitutes the conscience of a nation and hence, Radio Nepal has been trying to exercise the rights with responsibility to ensure the individual citizen's rights to be informed. But to evolve an identity as Public Service Broadcast Organization without generating revenue from commercials has become practically impossible. Most public service organizations are funded by the government but this is not the case in Nepal. Radio Nepal is expected to promote harmony, national unity and the idea of one country one people in a public service function, without being on the receiving end of government funds. By neglecting its public service function, it can not remain a passive observer of national development without making meaningful contributions. Therefore in order to enable institutions like Radio Nepal to fulfill their public service functions, it would be in order for the government to provide funding in the interest of and for the benefit of all the people. Financial limitations will only cripple the potential of a powerful media like Radio Nepal in a country like Nepal.

The dilemma of small stations further complicates the matter while they already experience the difficulty of finding spares for the existing analogue equipment investment for digital equipment is costly proposition. A phase wise transition can only be envisioned and the first step would be the production aspect of broadcast software digitally opposed to the transmission side of it. Although broadcasting in the digital domain facilities greater flexibility, interchangeability, high quality transmission increased service area coverage and reduced power consumption in comparison to conventional transmission, the financial implications for the immediate switch over prove to abortive.
Hence, it would be in the best interest of small broadcasters to start with the utilization of digital production equipment. Employing digital studio equipment in the production of radio programmes ensure precision and clarity of sound, random access to recording quicker editing and mixing and no loss of recording material or spool tapes in the editing process.

The nucleus of a digitized production studio is a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) which is an ordinary personal computer that permits recording, editing and mixing of audio material and convenient storage of the finished product for the sound library. Accessories to the PC or MD and other peripherals in addition to the appropriate software for the treatment of audio material.

This complete production unit also facilitates transfer and conversion from analogue to digital and vice-versa to suit the requirements of the broadcast organization. Additionally, this workstation can be linked to the Internet, which would then facilitate the transfer of sound data and information even to a foreign Radio Station for simultaneous broadcast. This means that the concept of broadcasting and the role of a broadcaster in the context of the changed scenario will have to be redefined.

At a time when energy costs are increasing, Radio Nepal is still operating valve transmitting equipment which consumes a lot of electricity and requires frequent replacement of costly spaces. The annual expenditure on electricity alone is about 40 million rupees. This means that the entire transmission work is done through conventional technology and will continue to be for some time to come.

The inevitable first step towards digital production has, however been taken. Radio Nepal has been provided three computer audio production units or Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) under the agreement with UNICEF NCO. These workstations, complete
with Compact Disc, Mini Disc, appropriate mixers and speakers are capable of handling any programme production and transfer of audio material from one format to another. Radio Nepal also has its own 24 track Digital Studio for stereophonic music recording on any format besides this, the state of the art digital equipment installed at the FM studio also demonstrates the level of preparedness to accept these change.

The eventual adoption of digital production in stages will change Nepal's broadcasting panorama: superior sound quality can, at least, be expected. The traditional broadcaster will have to true into the new methods and make readjustment for perfect acclimatization to the digital environment and this in turn, will determine the content of future broadcasts.