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Report

By

Narendra Aggarwal
CAF-GMDC-AMIC

WORKSHOP ON MANAGEMENT OF SMALL NEWSPAPERS

in cooperation with

Nepal Press Institute

March 1-6, 1987, Kathmandu, Nepal

REPORT

Twenty editor-publishers of small newspapers in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal participated in the Workshop, which was the first ever effort to provide newspaper management skills to the nearly 400 small newspapers in the Nepalese capital.

The programme for the Workshop was designed keeping in view the conditions and needs of the enormously large number of publications in Kathmandu valley. It is essential to remember that in the Nepalese context, when we are talking about small newspapers, we are really talking about very, very small newspapers with circulation ranging from a few hundred to five thousand.

It was repeatedly pointed out during the Workshop by the participants that hardly any management principles and practices were being employed by the editor-publishers of the small newspapers in their country. Most newspapers come out on an ad-hoc basis every week, even though they may have been publishing for years.
The importance attached to the Workshop was evident from the fact that the Nepalese Minister for Communications, Mr Hari Bahadur Basnet, accepted the invitation to inaugurate the programme. Similarly, the Secretary, Ministry of Communications, Mr Bishnu Pratap Shah, accepted the invitation to be present at the opening session.

In his inaugural address, the Communication Minister called on the private press in Nepal to play an active role along with His Majesty's Government for the development of an efficient, competitive and effective press in the country.

The Minister said that the press should play a dynamic role in building necessary public opinion to move the country along the path of economic and social prosperity by meeting the basic needs of the people.

Nepal Press Institute Chairman, Gopal Das Shrestha, speaking from the chair, said that professionalism in the field of journalism had not developed even after three and a half decades of democracy in the country.

NPI Member-Secretary, Gokul Prasad Pokhrel, AMIC Senior Programme Specialist, Narendra Aggarwal and AMIC Representative in Nepal, Narendra Raj Panday, also addressed the opening session.
Among the participants were two women editor-publishers of prominent weeklies from Kathmandu valley. In response to eleven invitations sent out by the Nepal Press Institute to editor-publishers of small newspapers around the country, three participants came from distant towns. Gorakhapatra Sansthan, publisher of the largest circulated English and Nepali dailies in the country and the only newspaper publishing house in the country, sent an observer to the Workshop.

The training faculty consisted of Mr Tong van der Kolk, graphics and printing expert from GMDC of the Netherlands, Mr Ashoke Dutta, a newspaper management expert from India who had earlier assisted AMIC in a similar workshop held in Bangladesh in December 1985, Mr E Fernandes, management expert from India, Mr Bharat Koirala and Mr Lal Deosa Rai of the Nepal Press Institute, and AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist, Mr Narendra Aggarwal, who also coordinated the programme.

As the Nepalese journalists are not fluent in English, a multi-lingual approach was adopted at the Workshop, with proceedings taking place in English, Nepali and Hindi.

As the newspapers in Nepal are very, very small (some participants felt that their publications should be termed "micro" newspapers), and usually have the same person or persons performing the editorial and publishing functions, little attention has been paid to management aspects so far. Consequently, the participants found the management concepts introduced at the Workshop were relatively new and took some time to absorb them.
Two inter-related aspects need to be highlighted. As has been our experience with previous workshops, very often a participant at the Workshop represents 50%, sometimes even 100%, manpower of his newspaper. Consequently, their publications had to miss a few issues or two as they attended the training programme. Participants to this Workshop also gently made it known to the Resource Persons that with them attending the Workshop, that either their publications were getting delayed or issues were being missed. However, they valued the learning processes of the Workshop and hoped that the inputs gained would more than make up for the losses.

The business sessions of the Workshop were started with focusing on the micro aspects of the importance of management in small newspapers in the Nepalese context, with a talk by Mr Bharat Koirala, Executive Director of the Nepal Press Institute. The macro aspects of the importance of management in a small newspaper were dealt by Mr Ashoke Dutta, which set the broad framework for the Workshop.

In the post-lunch session of the opening day, the principles and practices of sound management were focused on, followed by general principles of marketing.

On day two, revenue earning strategies in a small newspaper through improving circulation and advertising collections were dealt with.
As the small Nepalese newspapers are generally poor in design and layout and do not seem to be following any principles of graphics, the afternoon of day two was devoted to newspaper design and layout, headlines and illustrations.

It was continuously stressed to the participants of the Workshop that their newspapers, besides carrying journalistic messages, were also business enterprises. They have to manage a newspaper as a viable business proposition making profits. To improve their revenue generation, they had to stress on achieving a wider circulation by more effective distribution as also attracting new advertisement by adopting novel methods. Participants were encouraged to discuss their approaches, experiences, as also problems.

Mid-way through the Workshop, the participants were taken for a visit to a local newspaper "Inap", which prints five thousand copies and is considered a success, with the object of discussing with the participants on how they could improve their newspapers and production facilities. On the following day, the GMDC expert explained about the new technological possibilities for small newspapers in a country like Nepal.

Mr Ernest Fernandes, the second Resource Person from India, focused on how a newspaper could ideally be organised for more efficient management. This was followed by a talk on target setting and incentive schemes.
Based on the two slide series and accompanied talk by the GMDC expert on grid systems, an exercise in page make-up was undertaken on Thursday morning. Recent issues of five different newspapers were cut up and participants worked in small groups to come up with entirely new page make-ups, keeping in mind the principles of graphics and design, earlier introduced to them.

Newspaper management and the personnel function, production and inventory management, styles of leadership and in-house training, were some of the other subjects discussed.

On Friday, the participants evaluated the Workshop by filling up AMIC's questionnaire. This was followed by an open forum on the importance of management in a small newspaper, at which the participants critically discussed the relevance of the inputs provided to them at the Workshop.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal, Ministry of Communications, Secretary, Mr Bishnu Pratap Shah, joined the participants at lunch on the closing day. He later distributed certificates to the participants and delivered the concluding address.

NARENDRA AGGARWAL
Senior Programme Specialist

Singapore, 11 March 1987