

Finding the Local Community in Community Media: Some Stories from Nepal

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“We work in the field of information and communication so we also support the movement (toward a democratic republic) by providing the information to the people because now the media and radio are playing a very important and supportive role in the success of the movement” (Rupa. April 2006).

The role of community media in Nepal is emerging as one of the key factors in the country's transition to a Democratic Republicⁱ. The country's current period of political and institutional transition is a crucial time to raise questions concerning peoples' participation at the local or community level. Within the broader political discussion of Nepal's changing democratic structures emerge questions about the roles that local media might playⁱⁱ. As Rupa describes in the above quote, it is not easy to separate the wider political context from the way information about the community, society and nation are administered and understood. Indeed Nepal has a comprehensive history of community media and its relationship with national politics has become increasingly complex during the country's recent period of conflictⁱⁱⁱ. Nepal's community media is often premised on social organisations which are supported by larger national and international groups. If we accept that civil society by definition is premised on voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions [that] form the basis of a functioning society^{iv} then we need to question the nature and function of these organisations in the community and ask how community media operates in and for the community.

One important part of the discussion concerning democracy and the notion of civil society is that real democracy means freedom for public discussion and exercise of public reason (Sen: 2000, 2005). In this argument freedom is central to the process of development, substantive freedoms like the liberty of political participation, the opportunity to receive basic education, health care, social security, are among the constituent components of development that contributes directly to the quality of life and to its flourishing (Sen: 2000). The process of 'development as freedom' as described by Sen, highlight important questions such as: Do the marginalised have a voice? Do the marginalised have access to appropriate mediums through which they can tell their stories and ultimately have their needs met? How do the marginalised receive appropriate information?

This paper takes a community-based approach in an effort to address these important social questions. The four case studies included here highlight the variety of roles that local media currently plays within their communities. What emerges is a complex social narrative of media in rural Nepal. Through these stories we see how local media acts as a social educator, a facilitator of important social discussions, a negotiator and informer of technological change in village communities and an outlet for local voices to be heard and community values reinforced or challenged. At the same time the stories highlight the significant challenges that media encounters in its quest to support and respond to the demands and needs of the local community. How does local media provide opportunities for social participation and who is or should be involved in

community media? How does a local organisation deal with such issues as technical maintenance and the cost of their upkeep and the other array of expenses that need to be met in order for local media to continue functioning and offer a valued social service? If mainstream media is accused of favoring the affluent, minority community media aims to ensure the 'community' remains in community media^v. The following section looks at these issues in detail in the hope of understanding more about the opportunities for disadvantaged, poor or marginalised individuals to participate in the wider community through community media.

'Finding a Voice' in Nepal

The research ideas, themes and methodologies contained in this paper have emerged as part of an international research project concerned with exploring the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for poverty reduction. Finding a Voice (FaV) is an Australian Research Council^{vi} collaborative research project involving Queensland University of Technology, University of Adelaide, UNDP (Indonesia) and UNESCO (South Asia). The project spans five countries: Australia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The project began in March 2006 and there are currently twelve local ethnographic action researchers spread across India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka.^{vii}

The focus of FaV is the relationship between poverty reduction, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and local communities. The project investigates how these issues intersect and asks how technologies of communication can be implemented for the benefit of local people. The project focuses on the relationship between the social reality of poverty in specific contexts and the characteristics and potential of new (and traditional) media technologies. ICT initiatives can potentially provide or facilitate social and economic opportunities for local communities. However if they are able to be effective in 'real' terms for local people then they must be introduced in ways that recognise and operate with local social networks and cultural contexts (see Nair, Jennaway and Skuse: 2006). Given this potential the project provides an opportunity to investigate how ICTs can be integrated in ways that prioritise local content creation (at the community level) and seeks to answer the question; can they be used to enable people to find their own voice and, importantly, to be heard?

The project uses Ethnographic Action Research (Slater, Tacchi and Hearn: 2003). Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) combines three research approaches: ethnography, participatory techniques and action research. Ethnography is a qualitative research approach that uses a range of methods and has traditionally been used to understand different cultures in detail over time. Participatory techniques are used to help both researchers and participants understand complex issues in an inclusive and participatory manner. Action

research is a research approach that is used to develop new knowledge and new activities through new understandings of situations. Ethnography and participatory techniques are used to guide the research process while action research is used to link the research back in to the initiative through the development and planning of new activities in ongoing cycles. The twelve EAR researchers have been trained and supported in conducting EAR by Australian researchers. The idea is to build the capacity of local ICT initiatives by giving them the skills to conduct ongoing action research that will help them to become more effective in facilitating access, among other things.

Local researchers in India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka use EAR to explore poverty in their community. Each researcher is based in one or two local ICT sites in the community where they live/work. There are four EAR researchers in Nepal and they share their thoughts and research ideas in this paper. Deepak Koirala conducts Ethnographic Action research at the Community Multi-Media Centre (CMC) in Manigram.^{viii} The CMC is attached to Radio Lumbini, a local radio station located in Manigram. He also works in the Community Learning Centre (CLC) in the nearby village of Madhawiliya. Rupa Pandey works as an EAR researcher in the Buddha Nagar CMC approximately twenty two kilometers from Manigram in Lumbini. This CMC was set up in 2005, with the support of UNESCO as a 'satellite' CMC of the main CMC in Manigram. Rupa makes radio programmes in Lumbini and broadcasts from them from the Radio Station in Manigram. Sita Adhikari works as a local researcher in both Jhuwani and

Agyauli community libraries. Govinda Prasad Acharya works in Tansen CMC and Madanpokhara CMC. In each of these stories the local researcher identifies and describes key social issues in their community and discusses how these issues are played out in one way or other through the local community media that they work with.

Teaching by Radio

Deepak Koirala

Radio Lumbini is located in the village of Manigram, Rupandehi district in the Western development region of Nepal. Manigram is approximately 300 km by road from Kathmandu and about forty five minutes by plane. Radio Lumbini was established in 1998 and started its test transmission in February 2000 at the frequency FM 96.8. It was the first community radio station outside Kathmandu and is totally managed by a local cooperative. I began working at Radio Lumbini in 2000. When I joined Radio Lumbini I was a marketing officer, then in 2006 I began working as an EAR researcher for the *Finding a Voice* (FaV) project. It is interesting for me to work with members of the community who are illiterate or just beginning their studies. I am a researcher in the Manigram Community Multimedia Centre (CMC). UNESCO supported the establishment of the CMC in 2004 by adding a Telecentre facility to Radio Lumbini. The cooperative identified community multimedia, the combination of existing radio and new ICT applications, as a way to expand local access to information resources, to

mediate global knowledge networks for local listeners, and lay the foundation of ICT skills among local youth.

One of my tasks is to conduct research about the radio programmes and give feedback to the producers for the purpose of content development. The programme producers go to the field (villages and towns) and record the voices people in the community. Some of them announce on the radio where they will visit so the community members can come and take part in the programme. The community reporters record the voices of the community members and send them to the radio for broadcasting. Some of the issues that they have raised in the past include child marriage, the dowry system, health, citizenship, good government, women's empowerment, agriculture and others. Most of the topics are chosen by the community members and are based on their feedback to the programme.

I wanted to work at the radio station because radio is a relatively new technology in this area and I wanted to learn more about the technology of radio. I also thought I might be offered the opportunity to speak on the radio which would help my career opportunities. Through my role as researcher for the FaV project my work at the station has changed and now includes social work in the local community.

During the last ten months I have asked local men and women what they feel are the main issues that underpin poverty in their community. I came to learn that local people identify the following as issues:

- citizenship,
- lack of rights,
- health,
- education,
- gender

I will explore the issue of education because most of the people I spoke to in the community gave priority to education. For the people I spoke with education for the people is key to all aspects of their life. They told me they feel they cannot have a say over their own life if they cannot read the words on the forms they sign. They said that people often try to cheat them because they know they cannot read and write.

Education and literacy are issues that face all sectors of the community and education and learning is experienced in both formal and informal ways. The CLC is a community place established by the community to assist in community development as defined by the local people themselves. People come along to the centre to take part in informal literacy classes. The classes are made up of twelve participants aged 15 years or above. At this time all the participants are women. The women told me that they missed out on getting an education

because of a Nepalese cultural tradition whereby women were not sent to school. Based on my work at the CLC and in the wider community I see that there is still a gender dimension in how education happens and who is educated in the community.

Radio Lumbini decided to create an educational radio programme aimed at helping school students. In association with National Teachers Association Nepal, Rupandehi Community Radio Lumbini started a new youth educational radio programme called 'Teaching by Radio'. Twelve teachers volunteer their time and skills by coming to the radio station to produce the programme. The teachers focus the radio programme around the class ten curriculum which includes English, Mathematics and Science.

Teaching by Radio is aimed at class ten students from government schools who do not have access to good education facilities. The government offers free education up to class five and then students have to pay Rs 500-600 per year for each year they stay in school. The students who are enrolled in private schools can pay Rs 500-600 per month for their tuition. In the government schools it is common to have more than eighty students in a class with a single teacher. It is easy for students to fall behind the government academic levels and passing their SLC exams is almost impossible without extra tuition. Private tuition is costly and most of the students who attend the public schools are from poor families who do not have the money to pay for private tuition. By contrast the expensive private schools are better resourced and generally have smaller classes. As a

result higher numbers of students from private schools pass the SLC. The main objective of the distant education radio programme is to provide a relaxed accessible form of teaching to marginalised and poor students and ultimately increase the pass percentage of SLC students in rural areas.

The 'Teaching by Radio' programme first went to air in February 2006 for three months before the start of the national SLC (School Leaving Certificate) examination. The programme soon became popular among students all over Rupandehi and neighboring districts. The producers received a large number of letters and phone calls from students and parents requesting that Radio Lumbini continue running the education programme throughout the whole year. On the first day of continuing the programme Radio Lumbini received numerous phone calls thanking them. The calls came from the District Education Office, government schools and other members of the public. Radio Lumbini airs the programme during prime time just before the popular radio news programme BBC Nepali service, the idea being that the students can benefit from listening to both programmes. The Teacher Association of Nepal Rupandehi also helps improve the content of the programme. CMC Lumbini plans to provide basic internet training to the teachers involved in the programme which will assist them to find other learning tips from the internet which could mean the programme will be of an even higher quality. Thus the programme also aids in the continuing education of school teachers themselves.

Teaching By Radio and the Community

Local people continually tell me how important it is to have an education and how without it they feel they are denied a choice, their voice, various opportunities and their rights. Just as women go to the CLC to learn to read and write, students listen to the radio to help them pass their SLC exams. I wanted to understand whether or not the students themselves felt that it makes any difference to their lives. I devised a short survey and asked the local students their thoughts. One student told me they feel they really benefit:

“We are quite far from our school so we do not get our related subject teachers near our home but on the radio the teachers tell us the answers in a very simple way so it is very useful. English, mathematics and science are the harder subjects for us, so whatever we have not understood in class we are able to understand from the radio and also it is revision for us for the exam. We get some important questions from the point of view of the teachers so it is also very useful for us”.

One teacher who I spoke to told me “some of [the students] hesitate to ask questions in the class room but do not hesitate to send letters to the radio and listen to it.... ask the teachers by telephone, also they can listen in the home sitting alone and paying full attention to it”. The students continually mentioned to me how they enjoyed the interactive nature of the programme. They like the opportunity to ask questions and that the teachers always answer them.

When approaching local students for their comments I came across students who told me they do not have a radio and therefore cannot listen to the programme. It seems that those students who are very poor and have no ability to access the radio simply cannot be helped by the radio's free tuition. It is more

likely to be these students who will fail the SLC exams. Most of the students who fail sit their exams two or three times. In the more distressing cases some of the kids attempt suicide when they fail and these cases are reported in the media. If they failed the SLC exam then it is almost impossible for them to get a good job so this adds to the pressure.

However, if they fail their exams they still have a chance to enroll in a technical school. This is in effect a kind of apprenticeship scheme where they learn on the job and at the end of their course they are qualified in their trade that generally equates to SLC level. Those enrolled in these courses can earn money while they study and this provides an incentive. Opportunities to enroll in these courses exist in the local rural area that makes them accessible for young people and for some it becomes a practical and financially attractive alternative to school. But due to the cost of equipment these courses are more expensive than other schools.

The other reality in our community is that many young people of school age are not able to go to school because their families need them to work and supplement the family income. For those who are not able to go to school, or who have failed the SLC and cannot afford a trade school they usually end up in low paid labor-based employment. This may include carrying heavy loads for paying customers, working long hours on construction sites and collecting fares

on local bus rides. These roles are usually physically demanding, low paid and based on long hours.

Community Multimedia Centre Buddha Nagar

Lumbini World Heritage Site

Rupa Pandey

Since August 2006 I have been employed as a local researcher within the FaV project. I am based at the Buddha Nagar local community multimedia centre (CMC). Lumbini is the birth place of Lord Buddha and has been a World Heritage listed Site (WHS) since 1997. The area where I have been conducting my research is in the remote area of Rupandehi district. This district is located in eastern Nepal approximately 300 km's from Kathmandu and 40 km's from the Community Radio Station Radio Lumbini. The CMC was established here in August 2005 with the support of UNESCO. The aim of the CMC is to provide ICT access to rural and marginalised community with the aim of reducing poverty.

The CMC is affiliated with Radio Lumbini. The local issues in the community are raised and can be made into radio programmes that are aired on a weekly basis. My role at the CMC includes researching important key social issues and helping produce a local radio programme. From carrying out research I came to realise that there is a clear lack of local participation in social activities. Yet at the same time people from the wider society say they want to be more involved. Based on

the comments and needs of the community we have tried to encourage more community participation in the CMC and aimed to get more local voices heard on the radio.

CMC & ICT

Despite being world heritage listed and an area known to national and international visitors alike, prior to August 2005 there was no public access to computer, internet or email facilities in this area. The nearest internet facility was twenty two kilometers away. Through the CMC facilities the local community gained access to computers, email/internet facilities and an ICT-based training centre.

In 2006 the CMC began offering scholarship-based training courses to poor and marginalised people in the community. Before then the CMC was just a training centre where only boys and people from higher class and caste had the chance to use the facilities. Management was particularly interested to encourage more girls and lower caste people to take part in the computer training courses because in this area girls rarely have the chance to be involved in social activities and lower caste people are socially restricted from using such facilities.

From my research I have learned that parents seldom invest money in the education and skills development of girls. The CMC provided computer training courses at or below market rates. Private companies charge Rs 2400 to Rs 3000

for the basic computer course. At the CMC local people can take part in the course for only Rs 1200. For the girls and marginalised people it costs only Rs 400 to Rs 500. Those people who are listed in the below poverty group (and who have been issued with the Government Village Development Program green card) can take part in the training course for free. Some of the people who took part in the training courses have gained the chance to work in hotels and others have been offered paid work in schools. Through participating in the CMC they have had the chance to interact with different people and gradually they are becoming involved in the multimedia part of the CMC and radio programme production.

Through my work in the community, at the CMC and Radio Lumbini I have seen how local media can act as a medium through which local people's thoughts, opinions and views can be expressed. Below is a case study of a programme that I have been involved with over the past few months.

Hamro Lumbini

In the process of my research I came to learn that the expansion of the World Heritage Site (WHS) in Lumbini is a controversial topic and many people feel they have been excluded from the social development process. Local people told me that they have been displaced as a result of the expansion of the WHS. I discussed these findings with other interested parties and with the partners of the CMC. We talked about how we could provide a forum for these local voices to be

heard and how we could encourage discussion around this issue. What emerged from the discussions was the idea to explore the issue of how the local society was changing as a result of this development. Combining my research and CMC roles (supported by UNESCO and FaV) with the help of radio colleagues we began to make a local radio programme about “the impact of the WHS expansion on the lives and experiences of local people”. This became the subject matter for a local radio programme called *Hamro Lumbini* (Our Lumbini).

One of the responses I got when I asked local people about how their lives have been influenced by the WHS expansion was: “Expansion of the world heritage site has made people poor we have lost our land and home, instead of getting compensation, the WHS concerned bodies have neglected us. One woman who lost her home and land told us, We lost our home, land and have not got anything.... we have no advantage from the WHS. Why should we be involved in the activities of the WHS?”

In contrast to this view the president of the sustainable tourism development committee Ram Nanayan said “Of course we have received benefits from the expansion of the WHS, but it needs to be told to the community that we are getting many opportunity and we will get the benefits if we put in some effort”.

It is unclear whether local people have ultimately gained or lost from the expansion of the WHS. The answer of course depends on who we ask. I found that if I asked the people from the marginalised class including women, they knew less about the potential benefits in their community. They did not see any positive impact on their immediate life at all. I came to ask whether this was in fact the result of them not being actively involved in the social development process. By contrast I noticed that the people from the so-called higher class would often express to me how they have many opportunities as a result of the expansion of WHS. At the same time they are reluctant to admit this because they feel if they do then they won't receive the foreign and local government support like the other poor or disadvantaged people in the community. From my work in the community I realised that in Lumbini the money received from tourists together with the financial/material aid from NGOs and INGOs has shaped the way local people think about their situation and 'poverty'. In particular people believe that if they show they are doing well and benefiting from the development of WHS they will miss out on the financial benefits that other poorer members of their community receive. They think that if they show their weakness they will get support.

While some people say 'we have become poor because they took our land and home when they took the land they didn't give anything back to us' others say that the social development has brought about job opportunities, recognition and an increase in foreign aid. After the first phase of the research we got to know

that it was important that local media try to address people's problem and to help people express their opinions, talk about their experience and be more involved in their own community and feel more confident in their own society.

From my experience usually large media companies and newspaper houses give larger space and consideration to those people who have wider social networks, connections, power and ultimately a strong position in society. In terms of the debate about the WHS expansion it became clear that there had not been any attempt to bring both parties together to discuss the topic, share their views and debate these points with the idea of moving toward a more positive outcome for the whole community. No media sector had previously focused on the issue nor asked local people to talk about their views and the accompanying life changes of the expansion of the WHS.

As a result of the research findings we started to produce *Hamro Lumbini* in the CMC. The purpose of the programme was to act as a kind of social mediator between the local parties and the WHS parties in the hope of minimising the conflict and maximising the strengths of both parties. The overall aim was that through such open discussion and listening to each other's points of views both sides could learn more about the development. The programme encourages local people to express their opinion, as well as analyse the factors affecting to the development of community.

Through combining the local radio (Radio Lumbini) with CMC and my research work, I have found that it is possible to include the voices of the local people in our community media. The content that is produced from the CMC is different from other radio programmes because it offers local people the chance to express their views and opinion about their lives. *Hamro Lumbini* has the potential to describe the impact of the WHS expansion on the lives of the local people and at the same time explore the impact of NGO's and INGOs on the lives of the community's poor. The programme is produced by non-professional local people, who were recently trained in the CMC. At this time we lack the resources for audio programme production, which differentiates us from the large scale programme production houses and radio houses in the urban area and in Kathmandu. By contrast our centre is situated in a rural area and has large community participation in all stages of the programme production. We use one computer and one recorder for producing the programme. First we go to the local community and record the voices of the local community people. We then use the Cool Edit software package to edit the voice over and do the final mix at the CMC. After finalising the programme we save the programme by burning it onto CD and then we broadcast the programme from the radio station in Manigram. We utilise all available technology in the CMC and we have plans in the future to use more new media.

In the programme, we raised the issues that relate to the social, economical, cultural, and environmental impact of the expansion on the life of the people.

Gradually both parties are being heard and have started to give feedback about our programme. WHS official parties are now prepared to tell local people about the WHS and its importance and also how the conservation of the WHS can help local people in terms of income generation. This they hope will encourage a sense of local ownership and involvement in the social change that is taking place at WHS.

At the end of the sixteenth episode they did an audience survey about the impact of the programme and one of the main outcomes was that people want the programme to be presented in *Bhojpuri* language as well. A large number of our audience members only speak the local *Bhojpuri* language and the programme is presented in the Nepali (national) language. The problem is that we do not have sufficient resources (hours/staff) to produce the Radio programme in a second language. We are gradually getting more local people involved in the production of the programme but this is essentially a long-term goal. This has been a challenge for community feedback responses as when we go to the community and ask them about their problems and the challenges they expect us to provide them with the solution within a short time period.

ICTs for Community Development

Govinda Prasad Acharya

I live and work in the Palpa district in Nepal and since August 2006 I have been employed as a local researcher for the Finding a Voice (FaV) project. Palpa district is located in the eastern region of Nepal approximately 300 km from the capital city Kathmandu. I am involved with the Community Multimedia Centers (CMC's) in Tansen and Madanpokhara, the CMC's are run by local community partners with the support of UNESCO. In this section I will briefly introduce the two centres and then go on to provide a case study about a local cable television programme that is produced at Tansen.

CMC Tansen^{ix}

Communication for Development Palpa (CDP) started to broadcast the Local Television Channel in Palpa in 1992. In 2003 the CMC was established in Tansen, with the support of UNESCO and started broadcasting a Local Television Channel. It broadcasts a one hour television programme every week and the programme consists of a variety of different segments including; local news, informative programmes, TV Browsing, health, entertainment and a local issue based programme. The local people are actively involved in their CMC and the volunteers make all the programmes. Through my involvement at the CMC I see that local people enjoy being involved in the different activities related to the programmes and at the same time they learn new skills. Through their involvement at the community centre they can learn about media and technology. They also have the opportunity to earn an income from making and selling music videos, producing videos of weddings and other occasions. In another part of the

CMC there is a computer training course which is offered free of charge to marginalised, ethnic and lower caste youth. In addition to the video production and the computer training courses the CMC also offers internet facilities, desktop publication and secretarial services.

CMC Madanpokhara

Community Radio Madanpokhara was established by Madanpokhara VDC (Village Development Committee). It received its' license in 1999 and first went to air in the same year. The local community people say 'It is our radio' and their involvement in the running of the radio station is one of the main reasons for its success. In 2004 the CMC Madanpokhara was established with the support of UNESCO. The aim of the CMC is to provide ICT knowledge to the local community. It has been broadcasting different programmes on topics including; agricultural, income generation, educational, cultural, social, issue based etc. Now the CMC also provides computer training to the community people. The CMC volunteers also produce a range of different radio programmes.

TV Browsing Case Study

TV Browsing is an internet based programme which goes to air once a week on the local cable television channel. TV Browsing is a combination of new and traditional media (Internet and Television). It first began in 2004 and the local channel can be accessed by anyone who pays for cable connection that at the time of writing includes approximately 3000 households. Often the community

people 'share' cable, meaning they take one cable line from the cable providers and share this between two or three homes. Those who don't have television at their home go to their neighbor's home to watch their favorite programmes.

The TV Browsing unit consists of a three person production team. In brief, the group decides on an important social issue relevant to the local community. Then they carry out web-based research on the issue. After they have gathered material from the internet the team consults with local experts about the same issue. This is seen - at least according to the feedback from local people - to validate the information gathered from the internet. The material is translated into Nepali language and screens on television once a week.

TV Browsing focuses on helping the poor and minority communities in our area who cannot pay for education or access to technology. These people often only have enough money to cover their basic needs. By screening (on television) images of the internet and showing how to use the technology the programme can directly help those people who are not able to access new technologies like computers. Therefore when we consider who in the society can/does benefit from the viewing the TV Browsing programme one answer of course is that all people who view the programme are able to learn about and have some form of exposure to the internet and ICTs in general. From my research into the programme and from the time I spend in the local CMC I would say it is mostly young people from poor communities who benefit from this exposure. They are

attracted to the idea of using computers and the internet and it seems that the youth in our local community are more interested in new technology than their parents are. In the TV Browsing programme new technologies are shown and in my view this is what attracts young people.

In understanding the social importance of the programme we also need to consider the issues that form the basis for each individual episode. The viewers respond not only to the technology used but also the specific local issue that is being discussed.

SLC Examination Help

In April 2007, coinciding with the time of the School Leaving Certificate exam the TV Browsing team organised a meeting at the CMC and gathered all the volunteers to take part in the meeting. The team decided to browse internet support documents for the upcoming examinations. These documents contain different formulas and other written documents like study guides which are useful to solve mathematical, scientific and other problems. We made the programme focusing on the SLC exam because most of the students who sit the SLC exam feel anxious about it and are not sure what to expect. Part of our aim in making the programme was to ease their fears and confusion around the exam. Students who do not have access to the internet or lack the understanding of how to search the web for such information were exposed to this information for the first time through this programme.

Following the meeting we made the script and began making the programme. This involved browsing different web pages related to the SLC exams. We also explored the question how to solve the problems of different subjects from the internet and then authenticated the data by collecting the views of the teachers of different subjects. We also researched how the District Education Office actually manages the centers for SLC exam. After all of these areas had been covered we then broadcasted the programme through the local cable television channel.

The day after we broadcasted this particular programme I was walking down the main street of Tansen and I met a student who was preparing for the SLC exam.

The student turned to me and said:

I have seen computers and the internet used by others but I haven't used a computer or internet yet. I didn't have any idea about the usefulness of the internet. I thought that it was only used to send messages. But after I saw the TV Browsing programme I came to know that the internet is the house of information. Everything is there. I like the idea of sharing information in this format.

Community Involvement

Members of the audience are invited to share their views and feedback about the different TV Browsing episodes that includes asking questions about any issue raised during a programme. Members of the audience usually make comments about the programme that focused on a specific issue of interest to them or their family. The feedback from the audience, together with the discussions during

staff meetings and the research data we collect, all influence our decision regarding which issue should become our next programme.

New digital media are bringing about great change in the world not least through increasing access to new information and technologies. Through the TV Browsing programme local people can benefit in the same way. The student quoted above illustrates this when he says he learned about the internet through the TV Browsing programme. Given that most of Nepal still lacks access to the internet in their home this programme provides an opportunity to break down existing class, caste and gender barriers surrounding user-ship of the internet. The television images of browsing the internet bring the internet into the homes of people who would not otherwise see or use the computer.

Given the technological basis of the programme there are significant obstacles that need to be addressed in the production of the programme. We need more technical knowledge to produce the TV Browsing than we do for the other programmes. The internet is still a new technology in Nepal and there is a kind of localised mistrust surrounding information derived from the internet. This is fuelled by the fact that so much information contained on the internet is written in English, a foreign language that many local people do not understand. One of the main challenges we face is to localise the internet based information. It is difficult when the community people do not believe the information taken from the internet. This is the reason we legitimate the information with the help of local

experts. If we did not include this component of the programme we would risk losing the important local support that we rely on to make the programme socially relevant.

The language issue is not just a problem for the local community who are our audience but is also a challenge for the producers of the programme. In the past, one of the English language experts left the CMC, there was no other available volunteer who was fluent in English to replace them and the programme had to be temporarily stopped. In addition to language is the cost of the equipment that the programme relies on. With TV Browsing it is necessary to video record the process of internet browsing. To produce good quality video we need a high resolution camera and a proper studio. This equipment costs money and the equipment also needs to be maintained and this all adds extra expense to the already high production costs.

Digital Opportunities – The Library experience

Sita Adhikari

I have been working as an EAR researcher since August 2006 at two community libraries in Nepal. I conduct my work at Jhuwani community library, Chitwan and Agyauli community library Nawalparisi. I will first provide a brief introduction to the two libraries and introduce the partner organisations involved. I will then

proceed to discuss how the library tries to respond to major social issues in my community.

Jhuwani Community Library

Jhuwani Community Library (JCL) is located in Chitwan, the central region of Nepal. It was established by the community people with the support of READ (Rural Education and Development) Nepal. With the collaboration of READ and the community, JCL began functioning in 2001. Besides the traditional library facilities it has expanded into a community centre with telecentre facilities involving the community in the overall development of activities. The library has computer facilities that are used for basic IT literacy training, internet and multimedia data casting system. Other digital material including CDs are also used by the community. Jhuwani community library is run with active participation of the community and has devised its own income-generating schemes for meeting operating costs and securing financial sustainability. The main income generating avenues of the library are the ambulance service, a computer training course, photocopier, phone, fax, internet services and membership fees.

Agyauli Community Library

Agyauli community library was established in 1999 and is located in the Western Region of Nepal. Like Jhuwani Community Library it is supported by READ Nepal. Apart from educative and informative materials, Agyauli Community

Library acts as a resource, information and co-ordination centre and is also a social space where people can meet together and share their views. It is also raising awareness around a range of personal, medical and social issues and encourages participation from all groups of people by identifying and making use of available resources and opportunities. This library has computer facilities that are used for basic IT literacy training, providing multimedia data casting system facilities. The Agyauli community also uses other digital material like CDs. This library is self-sustainable and they meet their own operating costs. The library owns a street front complex consisting of ten stalls that it rents out and receives regular income from. In addition to the rental revenue the library receives income from membership fees and the computer training fee.

READ (Rural Education And Development) in Nepal.

READ Nepal is a non-profit, international non-governmental organisation that helps to establish, promote and strengthen community resource libraries in rural and pre-urban areas of Nepal. Established in 1991, READ Nepal has facilitated the development of a countrywide network of self-supporting community centre libraries throughout Nepal. READ Nepal has established forty community libraries in thirty-six districts of Nepal. READ formulated strategies to enhance the participation of community people with the aim to maximise the use of the community library. READ-supported libraries now have different sections for different target group such as children section with children's literature and toys;

sports material; playground; a women's section; computer section; agriculture section and many programmes interlinked with the libraries. The community libraries are growing into a locally relevant centre for the community.

Jhuwani Community Library has been publishing a wall newspaper that is different from other newspapers available on the market. It is prepared and published by volunteers of the library. First they collect the local content from the local people. Local people give content according to their own experiences in the community. Most of the content focuses on primary health, herbal medicine, farming, local organisations and other local programmes. In addition the wall newspaper provides space for community people to express their feelings and experiences on any subject. In the past these have included bee-keeping skills and difficulties while searching for the appropriate market to sell their honey. However print media is not without its challenges. Distributing knowledge through print media is always challenging. More than 50% of rural people are non-literate in Nepal. If we only rely on print media knowledge and information we cannot reach everyone. For this reason other forms of media content have the potential to be very popular for sharing local and wider knowledge.

This is a potential that READ has identified in their support of libraries through the partnership with UNESCO and the FaV project. We have started thinking and learning about digital content creation and possible distribution opportunities. During a content creation workshop held in Tansen in December 2006 our library

team learnt basic skills in DST (Digital Story Telling)^x. During the workshop our team made a digital story. The story is based on a local woman in our community. The story describes how gaining access to information impacted on the way the woman lives her life. This example helps us to understand the issue of illiteracy and the goal of literacy in rural communities in Nepal. It also tells a story about the library efforts to work with digital technology and digital stories and the idea of reaching people who are not yet literate. The story draws to a close with a summary of the obstacles that the library faces in its efforts to diversify and reach a wider local community.

Bamiya & Big Letter Books

Thirty-two year old Bamiya is an active member of Jhuwani community and a regular reader at JCL. Bamiya used to be illiterate. That changed five years ago when the government ran a literacy programme for adult people in the community. Those choosing to take part were put into different community groups and community workers were given the responsibility of teaching the literacy class. As a part of the course, the government provided one curriculum book for each student. The course ran for six months and the students met for one hour every evening. After taking part in the literacy training course, Bamiya cannot yet read thick books but she can easily read thin books with big letters. I met her a few days ago and she told me about the knowledge she has gained from a book she just finished. The book is a true story about a woman who used to eat betel nut during the day. Her small

daughter also started to eat betel nut regularly. Both the mother and daughter got mouth cancer. Bamiya also used to eat betel nut regularly. She told me that she was not aware of the harmfulness of betel nut. When she had some money she used to go to the shop and buy betel nut. After reading this book and learning about the harmfulness of these betel nuts she stopped eating them.

She shared other examples with me of how reading the books caused her to rethink and even change her behavior. One such example is how she gained more information about people with disabilities. She told me how she now shows more respect to people with disabilities.

The books she reads are short but interesting and informative. She told me that she doesn't have much time to read, she sometimes takes out a book to read while grazing the cattle. She shares her newly gained knowledge with her friends and also motivates them to read.

I felt inspired when I heard this story. I also began to realise that it must be difficult to make the transition from a non-literate to a literate person. The government only provides one book as a part of their literacy training course. The local people who are learning to read do not have the money to go and purchase these books for themselves. Therefore they are limited in the way they can 'help themselves'. After finishing the literacy courses an individual is known to be 'neo

literate'. This marks the transitional period from being a person who is illiterate to someone who is literate. It is not easy for people who are neo literate to access relevant reading material. This is an important issue in my local community and I wondered how I could be a part of raising this important social issue in the wider community. The scarcity of good reading materials and lack of follow up to the courses unfortunately means that most of the neo literate people will forget the reading and writing skills that they learned at the course. I realised that this story of Bamiya had the potential to inspire other neo-literate men and women in my community. Given that (according to national figures) 78% of females are illiterate where as only 42% of males are illiterate – I wondered whether digital stories could be a good medium for providing important information in the local community.

The adult neo literate members of the community are interested to read big letter books in local language and about practical knowledge. However providing literacy classes alone is not sufficient to ensure they become literate. It is necessary to provide the required material and provide a follow up to the programme. In the case of Bamiya, she has access to reading material from the community library. The local library has more than 1000 books about success stories, practical knowledge like farming, diseases, child care, and information about how to write application for citizenship to the district office. Although the library usually works on a membership basis neo-literate women can take the big letter books home without paying a membership fee.

JCL has a weekly video show programme for the community people. Every Saturday between 11am and 1 pm community men and women bring their children and gather in the library to see the visual programme. During the regular programme we showed the digital story of Bamiya on the television using a DVD player. More than fifty people saw the digital story and afterwards they expressed their happiness because that story was about their own villagers and it was also about a real issue. They shared the feelings that enticed them to follow the reading habit of Bamiya.

JCL was later invited to give a presentation about the progress of its content creation process at a conference organised by Open Knowledge Network (OKN) Nepal in Kathmandu. Our library team screened the digital story during that conference. Following the conference READ Nepal published it in their monthly newsletter. One well-known newspaper reporter traveled to Chitwan from Kathmandu to visit Bamiya (the woman in the story). Following the visit the story was then published in the popular national newspaper, Kantipur National Daily. At the same time it helped inspire neo literate men and women to read short and big letter books and to realise they could gain valuable knowledge through reading. Later after reading the newspaper article the message was broadcast on the radio by Radio Lumbini (Rupandehi).

Learning from this inspiring experience READ conducted subsequent training on 'Content Packaging' from May 7th - May 13th 2007. Eighteen participants from ten rural libraries across Nepal participated in the training. This type of training is new for community library and READ Nepal itself. I observed the turning point of community libraries in terms of content creation and distribution media. I started to realise the dynamic and social potential that libraries have in communities in Nepal. I was actively involved in the discussions around what kinds of social issues that we should make into content and these tended to stem from wider issues around poverty in the community. We enthusiastically discussed many issues including; children's welfare, gender and participation, social roles, property rights, domestic violence, women's health, caste discrimination, traditional thinking as social barriers, and social domination.

Observations

The above cases illustrate how local people are integral to creating, editing and producing the community media programmes. Community involvement in local media relies on continued support from community volunteers who are fundamental to the continuation of the programmes. Community involvement in media opens up a range of questions including; whose voice is heard, what is it that sustains community involvement and what are the challenges inherent in keeping community media relevant and connected to communities?

Deepak's case study of Teaching by Radio demonstrates a group of local teachers offering more than four hours a week to help young students pass their school exams. The students respond to the teachers' enthusiasm and participate by phoning in and asking questions. Through this interactive process the radio becomes an unofficial social educator.

The teachers are able to earn money through offering their skills as private tutors. Instead they are involved in the programme based on a community sense of responsibility. This volunteerism, as a premise for social involvement, is also seen in the teams who produce *Hamro Lumbini* and TV Browsing. Both of these programmes rely heavily on their volunteers and the work is time consuming. It is highly doubtful whether the programmes could function without their ongoing support.

The example of libraries moving towards digital content and distribution redefines the social role of community libraries in Nepal. The use of digital stories blurs the division between those who use the library and read books and those who feel excluded due to their illiteracy. The use of new technologies also raises challenges in rural communities. In some cases local people in the community mistrust technology. TV Browsing for example often utilises a lot of English language content, as Nepali language internet content is limited. Most local people do not read English and have difficulty relating to the internet content as a result. The internet as a new technology is itself seen as foreign due to its

content. Until local people feel more comfortable with the technology or perceive it to be relevant to their immediate lives, the local 'experts' will continue to be called on to validate the research. These are 'intermediaries' between the information available through new media and local people (James: 2004).

Language also shapes social participation in other programmes, including *Hamro Lumbini*, whereby local people wanted the programme to be translated into their local *Bhojpuri* language. Without the translation local people are still able to voice their views to the local reporters who ask them about their experience. However, when they listen to the programme they are not always able to understand what is being said and this limits their ability to respond. Without addressing the crucial issue of communication, local involvement in the programme production would dwindle and the programme would lose its sense of social validity.

Another factor that impinges on the practical application of new technology is that of supporting infrastructure and available resources. Jhuwani community library's increasing interest in the use of new (digital) media in rural communities in Nepal has to contend with the reality that more than half of the people in Nepal have no electricity. Even those rural areas that have access to electricity often experience intermittent power supplies. Some people are able to afford to run generators however this is costly and not plausible for the majority of the community.

The reliability of resources is further complicated by the cost associated with

technical services. In the example of *teaching by radio* we saw how not all students own a radio and therefore they told how they simply cannot listen to the programme. Similarly the TV Browsing programme offers the potential to bring the internet into the homes of local people who may never have seen the internet before. However, the programme goes to air on a local cable channel, which people need to pay for. Social participation in community media is influenced considerably by the affordability of access to that media.

Finding the community in community media means understanding the complexities inherent in the process of producing socially relevant programmes. This includes considering and acknowledging community voices, volunteerism, resources and sustainability issues, and the various barriers to social involvement in these processes.

ⁱ See Mainaly (2006), Pradhan (2006), The Independent (June 25, 2007) for the role of community media in Nepal during the possible transition.

ⁱⁱ Role of community media, civil society and community needs, in this paper, are seen within a fairly democratic structure; otherwise, opportunities to discuss community needs and to have them met would be “inescapably arbitrary and un-remediably despotic” (Sen, 1998).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Onta (2006) for a comprehensive discussion of this.

^{iv} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/civil_society.

^v There are some generally accepted definitions and features of ‘community media’ (see the World Associate of Community Radio Broadcasters’ website www.amarc.org; Lewis & Booth 1989; Malik 2007; Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001; Rodriguez 2001). Beyond those general principles, it emerges in South Asia as varied and largely dependent on social, cultural, economic, political and legislative environments (see Special Articles section on community radio in the Electronic and Political Weekly, Volume 38, Number 22, 2003).

^{vi} *Finding a Voice: Making Technological Change Socially Effective and Culturally Empowering*, Australian Research Council Linkage Project LP0561848. 2006-2009.

^{vii} These local EAR Researchers are supported by 3 full time Australian researchers and a Research Co-ordinator in Delhi. In addition, other research staff at the Queensland University of Technology and University of Adelaide, a project co-ordinator in Nepal, and UNESCO staff input into this research project.

^{viii} Since 2003 UNESCO has supported the creation of three CMCs in Nepal. The goal of a CMC is to combine new digital technologies with pre-existing often well established local community media. For more information see *Community Multimedia Centres around the World: a Global Directory* (2005).

^{ix} Tansen CMC was involved in an earlier research project that used EAR research – see Slater and Tacchi 2004. See Tansen website for more information about the town and surroundings www.tansenpalpa.net. [http://www.bioone.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1659%2F0276-4741\(2004\)024%5B0292%3AIMTIAI%5D2.0.CO%3B2](http://www.bioone.org/perlserv/?request=get-document&doi=10.1659%2F0276-4741(2004)024%5B0292%3AIMTIAI%5D2.0.CO%3B2)

^x Digital stories are short, 2-5 minute personal multimedia films See Hearn, Tacchi, Foth and Lennie (2008) Chapter 9 for more information on how it has been used in this project.

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Kirsty is currently employed as a research associate at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) on an international research project entitled 'Finding a Voice' (FaV). (FaV) is an Australian Research Council collaborative research project involving QUT, University of Adelaide, UNDP (Indonesia) and UNESCO (South Asia). Kirsty is the Australian-based research coordinator for the Nepal component of the project. Her broad research interests include anthropology, gender and local communities. Her previous research has included the socio-cultural meaning of local women's organisations in Indonesia and understanding the complexities of gender in diverse local communities throughout Asia.

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