

Community Radio as a Peace Builder in Nepal

Author 1 name: Sudhamshu Dahal

Author 1 institution: Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai

Email id: sudhamshu.dahal@yahoo.com

Author 2 name: Dr. I. Arul Aram

Author 2 institution: Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai

Email id: arulram@yahoo.com

Authors Bio:

Sudhamshu Dahal is a PhD research scholar in the Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai. Mr. Dahal has been media practitioner and researcher from past 15 years in Nepal. He has experience working with a network of community radios in Nepal.

Dr. I. Arul Aram is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai. Dr. Aram is a Post Doctoral Fellow from London School of Economics specialising in 'Conflict & Media'.

Introduction

Radio has long been seen as an important tool in the social, economic and political mobilization of the developing countries. There have been volumes (Fardon & Furniss 2000; Manoff 1998; Hyden, Leslie & Ogundimu 2002) written about social development and the utility of radio in addition to how radio might be used in post-conflict and nation building scenarios. But there has been little, if any, examination of a more holistic approach of how both these bodies of work might be melded together providing some insight into how the media, and more specifically radio, might be used as a peace-builder (Betz 2004).

Among the radio also the new generation of Community Radio Stations (community radios) can be pivotal in social development approaches based on peacebuilding in the transition or emerging economies. The community radio nomenclature derives the radio for the community, by the community and in the community. So it cannot just confine itself to development aspects without taking issues brought to the fore by the conflict. Community radio initiatives and its programming necessarily have to take conflict-based issues as well.

Normally community radios put up a facet that they are promoting development and that is their main agenda, peacebuilding does not come under its purview or rather peacebuilding is not the thrust area of community radio stations. This notion is also largely understood by the other actors/players in the development field such as NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

Since the community radios are mandated to operate with society's need, aspiration and desire, it cannot afford to be silent on the issue of community peacebuilding. Open public debate and the free flow of information are essential to any long-term solutions to the problems of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Conflict transformation is a precarious opportunity for peacebuilding. Conflict is a characteristic of a vibrant and active society, when conflict cannot be transformed peacefully with proper definitions and process it seeks a violent resolution. Thus conflict can be divided into three parts:

- a) Direct Conflict as exacerbated through violence.
- b) Cultural Conflict as demonstrated through gender and caste discriminations.
- c) Structural Conflict as demonstrated through the practices of ritualistic and feudal society in accepting cultural conflict.

Direct conflict is visible and is also manifested in different forms through the media but the root causes (of cultural and structural conflicts) are seen absent in media reporting and discourses. This is obvious with mainstream as well as community media practices.

Nepal is moving in a direction of sustainable peace in a fragile path of greater political understanding and high expectations as emancipated after the April 2006 *Jana-Andolan II*. The comprehensive peace agreement between the Government of Nepal and the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) to end 11 years old armed conflict in Nepal opened the way to formulate interim constitution for conducting Constitution Assembly elections on November 22 this year. The delicate and heavily debated political process has created a highly controversial yet conducive environment for the Maoists to join the interim government to carry out the Constitutional Assembly election to craft a new constitution for building 'New Nepal'. The peacebuilding

process in Nepal demands a cautionary yet pro-active role of community media. The whole of Nepal is in the process of new nation-building on the basis of peace transformation. In this context, role of the community radios, which are nearly 100 in numbers, stands not only extremely important but also highly crucial. Community radios can play different constructive roles including:

- Involving community radio workers in the process of sustainable peace by galvanising them in effective peacebuilding measures.
- Encouraging conflict affected population to take part in the process of peacebuilding
- Making and broadcasting programmes directly related to strengthen the ongoing peacebuilding as a process of nation-building
- Promoting possible outreach activities such as community radio workers as peace volunteers, peace monitors to extend expert services.

One simple yet overarching role is to disseminate correct information and maintain impartiality. Professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news. But it is often through good reporting that conflict is reduced (Howard 2004).

Community radios began in Nepal a decade ago as an alternative to the monopoly over state media on news and information. From the beginning, community radios are different not only in reach but in ownership also. *Radio Sagarmatha* established by a group of Nepali environment journalists (NEFEEJ) became South Asia's first independent community radio in 1996. The radio thus came into the hands of common people in a semi-traditional feudal Nepali society in that year with broad base and collective ownership.

Radio approach also turned 360 degrees with completely new dimensions in radio programming. What was simply unthinkable during the last 50 years to the Nepali radio audiences were the very basic in programme menu of people's radio. Commencement of community radio offered critical news reporting (although 'the news' over the community radios was of high sensitivity during past one decade under different governments) and field-based, well-investigated journalistic reports over traditional press conferences/releases based speech-oriented protocol-

sensitive news reporting. A major thrust was seen on the creativity in terms of news production. Both the senders and receivers took part in news production in community communication (Mainali 2007) breaking the traditional relation between news creators and receivers.

Radio for social development and change

One of the longest standing examples of the use of radio as a tool for social development is that of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Since the 1960s FAO has been using radio as a means of assisting those in rural areas of developing countries. The goal of the radio was to assist rural workers so they could come up with concrete solutions to the shared problems they faced together. Indeed, this has now become a model for much of community radios in which it is used as an agent for social change; perhaps it can even be examined in the context of nation-building or political development.

There are other examples of radio's ability to convey ideas and messages in basic education. The media were seen as crucial in the UNESCO/UNICEF "Education for All" initiative taken at the Jomtien conference in 1990. UNICEF used the media effectively for social mobilization in health and other basic education in a number of developing countries including Nepal. One of the success stories of effective radio use is a weekly radio show for Nepali teenagers supported by UNICEF called 'Saathi sanga maan ka kura', which talks with its audience on youth and adolescence issues and advises young people to overcome complex emotional problems through the use of life skills.

Radio was particularly effective in areas of conflict or former conflict where health and educational infrastructure had broken down, and where radio was one of the few sources of education as well as information. As a result, this would suggest that the broadcaster is a development agent just as Querre suggests (*A Thousand and One Worlds* 1992) in Myers in Fardon p. 95). But Querre stresses that it is up to the producers to "create the right environment for broadcasting and a way of thinking familiar to rural life. Dialogue will be genuine and real. Concrete solutions to concrete problems can be discovered together... They will preserve the cultural identity of their audience and hand back to them their right to be heard."

Radio is one of the powerful processes of community media activities that give life to the knowledge, wisdom and skills to be transferred from one generation to another, and to opinions and emotions that are generated from the social relation of human beings. Community communication has an important role in the whole process of socialization. Community media makes the social discourse easy and extensive in such a way making community communication as one of the rights of the people. The best experiences of the past are the source of knowledge to the present generation and the experiences of the present are to the future generation. Social discourse should be made easy for the continuation of these sources of knowledge and information. Hence pro-people media (community radio) has an important role in different stages of social change and development.

Evolvement of free and independent radio in Nepal

In Nepal, the airwaves opened up gradually after the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 1990. The new constitution promulgated in 1990 in the changed political environment explicitly guaranteed the fundamental rights of the people including freedom of expression. As in the countries with systems of democratic governance, the Nepali Constitution (1990) accepted the right to information as a directive principle of the state policy. It also guaranteed freedom of print and publication, which are believed to be necessary for human development. Although the constitutional rights did not explicitly mentioned about the right to broadcast but was inherent in the line of media and press freedom as set forth in the constitution.

Formulation of the National Communication Policy and enactment of National Broadcasting Act in 1993 in the spirit of the Constitution paved a favourable way for possible involvement of private sector in establishing free and independent radio in Nepal. More so, the Supreme Court of Nepal interpreted that unrestricted and guaranteed Rights to Information was essential for a democratic system (Mainali 2007).

The overall political environment was favourable to the growth of independent Nepali broadcast media and so was the popular and cheap FM technology for radio broadcast. It became readily

available to prospective private radio operators in Nepal. Progress has been slow and somewhat difficult for community radio as well as for democracy. But wherever it was established, it has become clear that community broadcasting can play a specific and crucial role in encouraging public participation, strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity and giving voice to the poor and otherwise marginalized groups.

As international development agencies accept that the most effective approaches to poverty reduction are community-driven and empowerment-oriented, the role and potential of community media has also begun to enter mainstream thinking. The UNDP and the World Bank have both recognized the vital importance of community media.

Despite constraints, community broadcasting has grown to become a global movement reaching out to many of the poorest communities in even the most remote rural areas. “In Asia, we are reaching a critical mass of support and interest. Nepal and the Philippines are established community radio countries. We have seen legal reform in the last two years in India, Indonesia and Thailand that promises to open the airwaves to community broadcasting. Progress is not as fast as we would like, but it is heading in the right direction with grassroots civil society campaigns for community broadcasting” (Buckley 2004).

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) in its eighth world conference in Kathmandu in 2003 recognized the growing interest in community broadcasting in Asia and agreed to establish a regional section with a coordinating office in Kathmandu. The priorities were straightforward: to raise awareness of the idea that citizens should have the right to own and operate their own community-based media; to lobby for political and legislative recognition of community broadcasting; and to build community media skills and capacity among local civil society groups and networks. AMARC believes that regardless of the national media situation within countries, it is indisputable that there is intense competition between the view that media and culture are commodities, the domain of private companies and market forces, and the idea that media and culture are matters of public interest about which citizens should be rightly concerned.

Enlightened governments should recognize that it is in their national interest to move beyond the instrumentalist view of the media that dates from the age of monopoly and instead embrace a vision of communication in the public interest with a diversity of public service broadcasting including community media.

Although establishment of *Radio Sagarmatha* in 1996 was the first community radio in South Asia, Nepal did not really mark the transfer of control over broadcasting from the government to the people. The radio was based in Kathmandu, where the people had access to many alternatives for education, information and entertainment. But the independent radio was not available to the communication needs of the larger part of Nepali population living outside the capital city Kathmandu. But gradually, independent radios were expanded outside the capital. Within one year of broadcast of *Radio Sagarmatha*, *Radio Lumbini* in the southern Terai district of Rupendehi and *Radio Madanpokhara* in western mid-hill district of Palpa were started as the first two community radios outside the capital city. According to the Ministry of Information website (www.moic.gov.np) as of March 2007 there are 27 community radios in operation and 58 new community organisation have received radio operating licences totalling the number of licensed community radio stations at 85. The total number of private radio stations is 205 and FM radio is existent in all but one district (Baitadi) in Nepal.

Community radio during armed conflict

Independent and private radio was caught between two guns, one belonging to the Maoists and another to the government in Nepal's conflict. After the government began involving the Royal Nepal Army (now known as Nepal Army) to sustain armed conflict, guns became regular tool to influence independent media by both warring parties. The first peace talks between the government headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Maoists collapsed when the Maoists withdraw and attack police and army posts in 42 districts in November 23, 2001. The monarchy then declared a nationwide state of emergency and employed the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) against the Maoists. The first action taken by the RNA to curb insurgency was to control the free flow of news and information. The effect was more severe in the rural radios than other district level media. The Maoists on the other hand were also threatening radio stations blaming them in

failing the duty to serve the people, as the stations couldn't broadcast the news due to the government directives not to do so. Maoist threat also translated into action when about 35 armed Maoist cadres marched into *Radio Ghodaghodi* in far-western district of Kailai at around 11pm on May 18, 2005, and took away radio's equipment, a motorcycle and bicycle belonging to the radio, the total value of the Maoist raid was estimated at one million rupees by the radio authority. *Radio Ghodaghodi* was thus forced to shut down after the plunder.

Similarly, the zonal administrator (this was extra constitutional post created during the King's direct rule in Nepal from February 1, 2006 to April 24, 2006) of Karnali zone again in far-western mountainous district of Jumla forced Radio Karnali to broadcast a programme lauding the "achievements" of the royal government in 100 days after the royal takeover. Within minutes of the programme being aired, the Maoists contacted the station and threatened to blow it up. Similarly, in central Terai town Birganj, RNA soldiers marched into the *Radio Birganj* around noon on March 4, 2005 and forced it to shut down the transmitter and took it away without any explanation for their action.

In another horrendous act, Maoist and RNA soldiers by turns captured Solu FM, a community radio in the Mount Everest district of Solukhumbu. Maoist and RNA soldiers clashed near the community radio in Solukhumbu on February 27, 2005. After the fight was over, armed Maoist cadres entered the radio station and held the manager for some time. After the Maoists left with harassing and interrogating the station manager, it was now the turn of RNA soldiers. Soldiers began entering the station at their own will and checked files in radio's computers. The soldiers charged the station of allowing the Maoists to use the computers. On the other hand, the Maoists told radio workers that there was no point having a radio if it was to broadcast nothing but music. The Maoists have used the same threat words to community radios, namely Radio Palung in Makawanpur, Radio Swargadwari in Dang, Radio Lumbini in Rupendehi and Radio Saipal in Bajhang. RNA soldiers went even a step ahead in their terrorizing effort, the staff of community radio in Nawalparasi, Bijaya FM, were threatened by saying they would "put them away forever" if they did not comply with their orders. The station manager had been required to report to the barrack several times. The severity of threat multiplied as with soldiers surrounding the station posing it to become a potential Maoist target (Paudel et al 2007).

Nepal's independent radio stations had to face life and death situations especially after the King's bloodless coup on February 1, 2005. The coup's first target was the media and independent radios were at number one in the King's 'control list'. It had to face four challenges – “crisis of rationality”, “economic crisis”, “motivational crisis” and “crisis of legitimacy” (Paudel et al 2007).

The issue of rationality or rather irrationality was that radios were barred from doing what the law said they should do and the government propaganda machinery floated that FM radios were not allowed to broadcast news anywhere in the world. It was clear that the government took away all the rights the independent radio stations had acquired through their licence, while still enforcing the obligation for the stations to pay royalties and fees.

The network of community radios joined hands with commercial broadcasters, the Secretariat of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Asia Pacific and promoters of radios to forge an alliance of Save Independent Radio Movement (SIRM) to forward the movement of civil rights and human rights in Nepal during the King's direct rule. SIRM launched extensive street protests for freedom of expression and right to information during the difficult times of the King's tyranny when even political parties and their sister organizations were silent observers of the deteriorating political crisis and gross human rights violations.

Community radio in peace transformations

Community peacebuilding has, and will continue to be, critical to resolving the conflict in Nepal. But community peacebuilding has been hindered by the absence of a holistic perspective and comprehensive approach to the country's core issues. Interviews with individuals working in peacebuilding identified many ideas, concerns and hopes related to a root cause of the conflict in Nepal – social exclusion. Many members of marginalized populations – the poor, ethnic minorities and women – were attracted to the Maoist agenda with the hope of finding more equity and access to resources. Respondents expressed their belief that the existing hierarchical

structure in Nepal is no longer acceptable and their apprehension that failure to respond to the demand for real social inclusion could further lengthen the conflict.

The very thought of peacebuilding initiatives has to focus on grassroots, enhance the role of women, proper channelization of young people's potential, need of more linkages and networking (both vertical and horizontal), and, moreover, peacebuilding requires a longer term vision and investment with an agreed (by all stakeholders) national plan for guidance. Community media, particularly those of radio, can and does play a major role in this, particularly with respect to social inclusiveness. Focus on social inclusiveness is a major peacebuilding venture.

In a background paper prepared for UNESCO, Price (2000) says both NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and IGOs (international governmental organizations) need to be factored into political development, although historically they have acted independent of one another. He further suggests that there are primarily two approaches taken when facing a post-conflict media task. The first involves those who believe that to counter war and hate propaganda in many post-conflict situations, the IGOs had to create alternative media outlets that were, at least initially, under IGO control. The second approach "fostered and encouraged more by NGOs than IGOs, appears less controlling. It focuses on strengthening local, indigenous media outlets, particularly those that strike a new voice, in the hopes of building a public sphere, a civil society, and the long-term machinery for peace and reconstruction."

What is interesting to note here is the traditional mandate of NGOs has been apolitical and geared towards social, not political, development, yet at the same time peace and reconstruction can be construed as political terms. Even if not intentional, there is clearly an overlap – a mandate that becomes social *and* political.

In addition to the actors involved in political development there needs to be further examination into the role the media play in conflict resolution. Robert Manoff, the director of the Center for War, Peace and the News Media at New York University, suggests that "approaches that can loosely be grouped together under the rubric of 'conflict resolution' typically share a greater

interest in the potential contributions of non-state actors and might therefore be expected to provide a body of theory and practice more congenial to the development of media interventions” (Manoff 1998). Manoff further suggests numerous potential roles the media can play in the prevention and management of conflict including channelling communication between parties, educating, confidence building, providing an emotional outlet, and framing and defining the conflict – all elements of the conflict resolution process and traditionally the role of diplomats.

Media and conflict experts around the world met at a 1998 conference in Geneva to examine the legitimacy of intervention for peace by foreign media in a country in conflict. They concluded media intervention during an open conflict situation should meet certain criteria. These criteria included “receiving a mandate from the international community to legitimize the intervention and ensure that it occurs with other forms of assistance. Local staff need to be involved in regular content reviews to make certain that information broadcast is both accurately and effectively portrayed to its audience. Strict impartiality is also crucial, as is complete transparency” (Heiber 1998).

In addition to criteria legitimizing media intervention, there are also different types of intervention. Howard (2002) suggests a model in which there are five types of media intervention varying largely on the stage of the conflict itself. Most pertinent to the case at hand are types four and five. Type four is described as being distinct from conventional journalism and is rather a “pro-active media-based intervention, usually designed for a highly specific audience and purpose”. This type of intervention is often the product of an outside actor such as a peacekeeping force or NGO and is often used in a conflict or post-conflict situation. Type five involves programming that is specifically intent upon transforming attitudes, promoting reconciliation and reducing conflict and is usually conducted by non-governmental organizations. The content of the programming in this case is determined by its appropriateness to fostering peace.

But simply having access to information that explains can have a profound psychological effect in situations where uncertainty and fear reign. Heiber believes that providing them with listener-

friendly information about their current environment can facilitate giving people a sense of control over their destiny. This, she suggests, is a crucial step in helping defuse the tension and chaos, which often characterize countries at war. But Heiber further suggests that timing of this intervention can be as crucial as the content. She suggests that such interventions can be most effective once active conflict has ended. “By making available space or airtime for the expression of grievances, the media are encouraging an essential part of the healing process.”

During the period of reconciliation and rehabilitation, the media can also serve to empower groups which had previously been voiceless. In discussing community radio and rural communities, Olorunnisola (1997) suggests community radio should play a role not simply in “communal self-help and other developmental efforts” but that “there should be room for the sustenance of national unity through programmatic integration.” It shows the intersection of social and political development – crucial for analyzing post-conflict and peacebuilding scenarios.

Historically, the disciplines of social development and conflict resolution (a part of political development theory) were largely viewed independent of one another and most often had a clear beginning and end in and of themselves.

As a model to analyse radio as peacebuilder, Betz (2004) suggests “there is a need for a holistic analysis, the need to examine nation-building and conflict resolution in the rubric of both social *and* political development – and to suggest that one should exist without the other is simply short-sighted and does a disservice to both practitioners and academicians. As a result, there is a need to blend the theoretical areas of social development and conflict resolution by combining sociology.

As suggested by Jacobsen (2003) in his “Toolkit for peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Nepal”, peace cannot be imposed or decreed from above. Even after violence has ended, the underlying dynamics and structures – the root causes – which gave rise to the violence in the first place, and the visible and invisible effects of that violence on the community, may still remain. The impacts of the war and violence upon the marginalized, the poor, women, children, rural

communities, the elderly and workers – including social, political, economic, psychological, health and other repercussions – are frequently overlooked and neglected as political leaders and elites come together with fine sounding words for peace.

The real task of peacebuilding lies in empowering people and communities to deal with the issues and challenges facing them in a constructive way, to meet the real needs of their own communities, and to overcome and heal from the violence and traumas of the past, while at the same time transforming deep structures and deep cultures of violence.

This mammoth task can be put on the agenda of community radios since the number and reach of community radio stations in Nepal is now wide, covering almost all the districts of the country. Community radios – through dialogue, participation and inclusive nature, democratic processes from the bottom-up -- decide, steer and implement the social, economic, political, and other steps including restructuring and reculturing. This is necessary to overcome violence at all levels and build more just and sustainable peace in Nepal.

Plurality in media ownership is good but the professionalism of journalism concretized in terms of accuracy, fairness, impartiality and reliability should not be given up. Multiple voices should not lead to ethnocentrism and sensationalism. Adherence to truth and cultural relativity should not be ignored by community radio as well.

Community radio stations often put up a facet they are exclusively promoting development and peacebuilding does not come under its purview or rather peacebuilding is not the thrust area of community radio stations. This mindset should change. Media workers trained in conflict resolution skills can help develop the basis for post-conflict civil society. An independent, lively and widely accessible media, particularly at the grassroots, is a key part of longer term peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Surely, community radios can be expected to live up to this expectation in Nepal.

References

Basnet, S., Mainali R. (2003). *Samudaik Radio Shanti Ko Batoma*. Community Radio Support Centre, Kathmandu.

Betz M. (2004). "Radio as Peacebuilder: a Case Study of Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *The Great Lakes Research Journal* Vol. 1 December 2004, 39-50.

Buckley, Steve. (2004) AMARC President, *Nepali Times*, Issue #201 (18 to 24 May 2004).

Cholmondeley, H. (2004). Former staffer UNDP, UNOMIL and UNESCO.
Personal communication.

Fardon R. & Furniss, G. (Eds.), (2000). *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Head, S.W. (1974). *Broadcasting in Africa: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hyden G., Leslie, M. & Ogundimu, F.F. (Eds.), (2002). *Media and Democracy in Africa*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.

Hieber, L. (1998). "Media as Intervention: A Report from the Field." *Track Two*, 7(4).

Howard, R. (2002). *An Operational Framework for Media and Peacebuilding*. Vancouver: Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society.

Howard, R., Rolt, F., van de Veen, H. & Verhoeven, J. (Eds.). (2003). *The Power of the Media: A Handbook for Peacebuilders*. Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention.

Howard, R (2004). *Conflict Sensitive Journalism*. Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo.

Hyden G., Leslie, M. & Ogundimu, F.F. (Eds.), (2002). *Media and Democracy in Africa*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.

Jacobsen K. (2003). *A Toolkit for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation in Nepal*.

Mainali, R. (2007 Unpublished report). *Community Radio in Nepal – A Choice of Different Future (Community Radio Country Study)*. World Bank Institute, Washington D.C.

Manoff, R. (1998). "Role Plays: Potential Media Roles in Conflict Prevention and Management." *Track Two*, 7(4). Merrill, J.C. (Ed.), (1995). *Global Journalism: Survey of International Communication*, 3rd ed.

Myers, M. (2000). "Community Radio and Development: Issues and Examples from Francophone West Africa." In R. Fardon & G. Furniss (Eds.). *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Olorunnisola, A.A. (1997). Radio and Africa rural communities: Structural strategies for social mobilization. *Journal of Radio Studies*, 4, 242-257.

Paudyal, B., Mainali R., Bhattarai B. (Eds), (2007). *News in Crisis (A Study of the State of the Nepali Press during the King's Rule)*. Centre for Investigative Journalism by Himal Books, Nepal.

Subba B., Mainali R., (2061). *Samudaik Radio Rananitik Yojana Tarjuma Nirdeshika (Community Radio A Strategic Planning Manual)*. Community Radio Support Centre, Kathmandu.

Price, M. (Ed.) (2000). *Restructuring the Media in Post-Conflict Societies: Four Perspectives: The Experience of Intergovernmental and Non-governmental Organizations*. A background Paper for the UNESCO World Press Day Conference in Geneva, May 2000.

Vraneski, A., Richter R. May, 2002. ICAR working paper #21. *Technion IIT*.

Abstract

An estimated one-quarter to one-third of United Nations member-states are conflict-stressed states or emerging democracies and all of these are multi-ethnic states with racial and/or ethnic divisions (Cholmondely 2004). That means that these same countries are, at some point if not currently, will be going through the process of nation-building. One tool that can be used in this process is the media, and radio has proven to be particularly adept.

While all agree that fully functioning media sectors are essential for expanding and supporting democracy on global, national, and local levels alike, many claim that the media's interference, by definition, escalates conflicts. Recent studies confirm that many roles can be attributed to media coverage, including some that lead conflicts toward constructive resolutions.....through frames, the media are both influenced by and influential with regard to the conflict's dynamics. (Vraneski and Richter 2002)

New York University's Center for War, Peace and News Media, for example, sees the potential peacebuilding role for the media to:

- Counter misconceptions of the 'enemy' and help reduce the level of rumour in society.
- Build confidence among warring parties, build consensus and allow 'face saving'.
- Facilitate communication between conflicting parties and provide an outlet for emotional expression.
- Analyze the conflict and educate on the process of conflict resolution.
- Propose options and solutions to the conflict and influence the balance of power in a conflict.

Media workers trained in conflict resolution skills can help develop the basis for post-conflict civil society. An independent, lively and widely accessible media is a key part of longer term peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Independent media can place pressure upon governments by broadcasting news items and features that question the 'official line' or existing government practices. Providing civil society with information on such aspects of governance allows poor people and civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate on their own behalf in pursuit of better services, such as health and education. Pressuring governments into 'good governance' is an essential long-term function of an independent media sector. Weak judicial systems, underdeveloped regulatory frameworks for the media, and poor standards of journalism often combine to weaken the effectiveness of the media in emerging democracies.

Radio has long been seen as an important tool in the social, economic and political mobilization of developing countries. There have been volumes written about social development and the utility of radio in addition to how radio might be used in post-conflict and nation-building scenarios. But there has been little, if any, examination of a more holistic approach of how both these bodies of work might be blended together providing some insight into how media, and more specifically radio, might be used as a peacebuilder.

Among the radio also the new generation of community radios can be pivotal in social development approaches based on peacebuilding in the transition or emerging economies. The community radio nomenclature derives the radio for the community, by the community and in the community. So it cannot just confine itself to development aspects without taking issues brought to the fore by the conflict. Community radio initiatives and its programming necessarily have to take conflict-based issues as well.

Normally, community radio stations put up a facet they are promoting development and that is their main agenda, peacebuilding does not come under its purview or rather peacebuilding is not the thrust area of community radio stations. This notion is also largely understood by the other actors/players in the development field such as NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

The fact is that, in a conflict situation even the development infrastructures gets destroyed people who did normal life with economic standards get impoverished and the conflict is surely an impediment to development. Any development intervention has to encompass (take into its purview) the peace building aspects. It could be that the conflict is because of structural faults that impede development for certain sections or favour one group to the other or it could be deeply rooted in the functioning of regular activities of state and culturally taken for granted until some section of the society takes any action against it.

This paper seeks to draw elements from both social development and conflict resolution theories, bringing them together to examine how radio could be used in post-conflict and conflict resolution situations. It analyzes whether the community radio strikingly makes itself responsible in conflict resolution (based on its experience as working with the society) or it takes up such issues subtly. An examination of community radios in Nepal will serve as a case study of the role radio can play as a post-conflict or peacebuilding tool.

About the authors

Sudhamshu Dahal is a doctoral research scholar in the Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai. Earlier, he had served as a Communication Officer with UNICEF in Nepal. He had also been part of an international research team evaluating effectiveness of community radio in South Asia.

I. Arul Aram is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai. Earlier, he had served as Chief Sub-Editor with *The Hindu* newspaper, and also President of the Chennai Press Club. He specializes in Conflict and Media, with particular reference to South Asia. He is a post-doctoral fellow from the London School of Economics.