



The Community Press in Nepal

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BACKGROUND

Brief History of the Nepalese Press:

IT IS A historical paradox that Jung Bahadur Rana, the first Prime minister who establish a century-long rule of hereditary premiers since 1843 was also the one who introduced the first modern printing press in Nepal.

On his return from an official visit to England in 1851, Rana also brought home a hand press, ushering in the age of mechanical printing in Nepal. Fifty years later in 1901, his nephew Prime Minister Dev Shumsher issued a special decree authorizing the publication and management of Gorkhapatra, the first newspaper in Nepal. Born a weekly paper, it became a daily 60 years later, one of Nepal's largest today. The Rana autocratic rule ended when democracy took root in 1951 and heralded the birth of newspapers in the private sector. Awaj, edited by Siddhi Chandra Shrestha, was the first private sector daily newspaper published in 1951 from the capital city of Kathmandu. Two years hence, a number of weekly, fortnightly and monthly papers were launched from outside Kathmandu, marking the beginning of community newspapers in the country.

There are four phases in the history of the Nepalese press:

- 1) Before 1950, no private press existed except for a few Nepali language monthly publications. Some literary and political magazines published from India were also aimed at the Nepali readers.
- 2) In the 1960s, when the country enjoyed multiparty democracy for a short 10-years period, the number of registered newspapers and magazines reached 221.
- 3) From 1961 to 1990, when the king ruled directly in the name of Panchayat System, all political parties were banned and press laws and policies were restrictive. A referendum in 1981 led to slightly liberalized press policies that allowed newspapers to publish alternative political views in the next 10 years.
- 4) Since 1990, after the multiparty democratic system was restored, the press has enjoyed unprecedented freedom. Within 10 years, over 1,600 newspapers were registered across the nation and big business companies started to invest in print and electronic media.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE PRESS:

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, promulgated in 1990 after the multiparty democratic system was restored, upholds the freedom of the press and the people's right to information. A national Communication Policy formulated in 1992 aims to nurture a well-informed society. The Press and Publication Act and Regulation were revised to suit the tenets of multiparty system.

(For detail please see the Tables 2, 3 and 4)

Although the number of registered newspapers seems large, the actual number of newspapers in circulation is quite low. The Annual Report of the Press Council Nepal for 2000-2001 reveals that out of 1,620 registered newspapers only 419 (25.86%) are publishing, and only 192 newspapers are publishing regularly. No magazines or newspapers of any kind are registered in 19 of the 75 districts, Nepal's administrative units.

The imbalance in media presence between the Kathmandu Valley and rest of the country is quite pronounced. The Kathmandu Valley, which comprises three districts and the capital city and a population of less than 1.5 million, is home to over half the newspapers registered in the kingdom of 24 million people. Out of regular 192 papers, 87 are published from the Valley. Not one of the newspapers published from outside the valley has a circulation above 10,000 copies. All the 10 broadsheets – six in Nepali and four in English – come out of Kathmandu. All but one publication of "A" category listed by the Press Council originates from Kathmandu.

DETERMINING FACTORS OF COMMUNITY PRESS IN NEPAL

Like an oasis in the desert, the development of the capital of Kathmandu and Kathmandu Valley has been an artificial process. More than just a political capital, the valley is also the center of education, health commerce and media. Across Nepal, however, the picture that prevails is one of poverty and underdevelopment.

The latest official census shows that less than 15 percent of the 24 million population lives in urban areas. In other words, more than 20 million of the people do not have access to Nepali media that largely caters to an urban, elite audience.

Media concentration in the urban centers does not augur well for strengthening democracy and enhancing development. Until mass media could play a vital role in changing the life of the people, they become a waste of time, energy and precious resources.

Hope lies, however, in the small press functioning in district headquarters and in the rural and remote areas of the country. They can increase awareness and deliver relevant information and knowledge to the masses. To assure the viability of the community press in a country like Nepal, it seems

most important to define target audience, ownership, control, management and certainly, content.

Apart from local newspapers published in various district headquarters, various experiments and practices are now underway in the field of community media. These include small media initiatives such as handwritten or printed wall newspapers, community audio towers (broadcast through loudspeakers mounted on a pole, a tower or the roof of a house), rural newspapers, and even street drama or people's theater. Altogether, they are sometimes called the alternative media. They proclaim a precise role in raising people's problems, creating awareness about relevant subjects and giving a voice to the people. Sometimes, they join in advocacies for social change.

These community media initiatives are spread out in many parts of the country. International development organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and Plan International are cooperating with elected local government agencies and national and local development organizations. External development organizations are extending supports of hardware, technology and skills training. In some cases they help carry the cost of operation and production, while some organizations subscribe in bulk for their target groups or organizations. Most of these groups have proved quite effective in delivering relevant messages and increasing the level of awareness of the targets groups. Yet because of their limited reach, these community media initiatives are quite insignificant in reaching out to the vast majority of Nepal's media-marginalized people.

Most of the regional and district level newspapers, which have wide readership, claim to be national newspapers. This is because of false sense of pride that comes from being a national paper. In some cases, it is also possibly because of the advertisement policy and regulation, which allow big tender notices and bids to be printed only in the national newspapers. For this reason regional and district newspapers hesitate to be called community newspapers. Their importance and their role in serving the local community should be recognized and promoted. The importance of regional and district newspapers registered as mainstream journalism should be given due importance.

In assessing the role of the community press in the Nepali context, all these important factors should be considered. They could also help clarify the distinction between the community press and the national press under three main topics: Target Audience, Ownership/Control, and Content.

It may be useful at this point to further consolidate the criteria for defining the community newspaper in Nepal:

- Based outside the Kathmandu Valley
- Circulation less than 10,000 copies
- Having no national chain of distribution
- Frequency: daily, bi-weekly, weekly and fortnightly
- Size: Tabloid or magazine size

- Investment of local people or institutions/ organization
- Having more than 75 percent local staff in editorial section
- Majority of revenue from local advertisement and sale/subscription
- More than 50 percent of the editorial content on local issues
- Raising local issues and problems regularly
- Dedicated to raising the living standards of the local people by providing them relevant and essential information and knowledge
- Giving voice to the voiceless people
- Advocating development of infrastructure that promotes socio-economic development in the community.

A good example of a community/rural newspaper is Gaunle Deurali. Literally it means a meeting place in the villages. Launched with the support of Nepal Press Institute and the Asia Foundation in 1993, it is a weekly rural newspaper published by a local organization called Rural Development Palpa (RDP). It is based in Palpa district, 310 km west of Kathmandu. RDP's professional staff working together with community-based contributors, mostly barefoot journalists, produces the newspaper. It is distributed in more than 35 districts of the country.

Gaunle Deurali is produced for and by the rural people of the Middle Hills of Nepal, a unique geographical area sharing many common problems and challenges but also a rich cultural tradition and ethnic diversity. A special focal point for Deurali is the literate adult readers living in remote rural areas who have attended non-formal education classes. They often have no access to reading material.

RDP's experience demonstrates that voiceless, rural people could be empowered when their problems and feelings are expressed in the media. They realize that they have a place in their own community and in the decision-making process. Their sense of self-confidence is enhanced. Even better results unfold when rural people are given a chance to produce their own newspapers articles, respond to each other's views, and participate in the production of their newspapers. RDP is doing this by conducting writing and basic journalism skills seminars for the grassroots people under a program known as Barefoot Journalism Training.

RDP saw a need to develop a new breed of journalists based in rural areas, dedicated to changing the fate of rural people and giving voice to the underprivileged, and could write about the people's problems and aspiration. To address this need, RDP has focused its journalism-training program on development workers, teachers, students, farmers, health workers, housewives, and members and staff of Village Development Committees. They now compose a corps of barefoot journalists.

Following the Gaunle Deurali model, another rural weekly paper, Gaunghar was started in Dang, a remote valley about 500 km west of Kathmandu with the support of the Asia Foundation and the Nepal Press Institute. Both newspapers now have their own offset printing press and desktop publishing unit.

Nepali is the language of choice of newspapers. Out of 419 newspapers under publication 387 are published in Nepali. The number of newspapers published in other languages follows: English 16, Newari 4, Hindi 3, Bhojpuri, Marwari, Maithili, Tharu, Tibetan, Nepali-Hindi, Newari-English, Nepali-Kirati and Nepali-English- Hindi one each. Some newspapers occasionally insert some pages in the local dialects and languages.

Many journalists have contributed to promoting the community press in Nepal. Bharat Dutta Koirala, Gokul Pokhrel, Aditya Man Shrestha, Hem Bahadur Bista, Vinaya Kasajoo have played and are still playing important roles in this effort. The editors who are actively involved in the community press in five Development Regions of the country are Nakul Silwal, Dilli Ram Nirbhik Gobind Chandra Chhetri, Bhawani Baral and Harsha Subba in the Eastern DR; Jagadish Sharma, Satrughna Nepal, Deepak Shrestha, Hiranya Lal Shrestha, Dharma Raj Aryal and Bishnu Chhimeki in the Central DR; Mehgh Raj Sharma, Karna Bahadur Karki, Bal Krishna Chapagain, Arjun Gyawali, Madan Paudel, DR Ghimire, Binod Pahadi ,Bharat Pokhrel, Madhab Nepal, Lekh Nath Gyawali, Surya Lal, Narayan Sapkota, Narayan Karki, Krishna Prasad Bastola, Badri Binod Pratik, Kusum Kesab Parajuli, Punya Paudel and Madhab Sharma in the Western DR; Narayan Prasad Sharma, Amar Giri, Sushil Gautam, Pratap Regmi, Panna Lal Gupta, Purna Lal Chuke, Hemanta Karmacharya and Shiva Dotel in Mid-western DR and Khem Bhandari, Karunakar Pandey, Ram Lal Shaha and Karna Dev Bhatta in the Far- western DR

TODEY'S COMMUNITY PRESS

Size, paper, printing quality and the content distinguish the community press from the national press. While the national dailies are commonly broadsheets, the community dailies are tabloid in format but certainly not in content and tone. Most community papers are printed on cheap paper and print quality is not good. Although the community press carries local and people- related stories, their story mix is not as varied as the national papers. Most community papers lack professional skills, do not seem to have clear marketing plans, and are mostly not financially healthy.

A Press Council report locates the regularly published community newspapers in the different regions of Nepal:

Development Regions	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Eastern DR	12	0	21	2	35
Central DR (Excluding Kathmandu Valley)	4	0	44	1	49
Western DR	4	0	8	3	15
Mid-western DR	0	0	6	0	6
Far-western DR	1	0	1	0	2

Total 21 0 80 6 107

(Source: 26th Annual Report of Press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

• DR stands for Development Region

Out of 107 newspapers, about two dozen newspapers have wide circulation and influence in the community. They include 5 in the Eastern DR, 6 in the Central Dr, 10 in the Western DR and two each in mid-Western and Far-western DRs. The community press has not been able to play an influential role in the political and socio-economic fields at the national level. In the regions and the communities, however, they enjoy both authority and respect.

STATUS OF COMMUNITY PRESS IN EACH DEVELOPMENT REGION

Eastern Development Region:

A total of 248 newspapers of various categories are registered in the Eastern DR. Of this. 77 papers are under publication and only 35 papers are regular.

Bibechana Daily, Purbanchal Daily (Both from Jhapa district), Blast Times Daily and Morning Post Daily (Both from Sunsari) are prominent papers, with good influence and wide readership in many districts.

Regional edition of two Kathmandu- based broadsheet dailies are printed and distributed in this region. This is the largest media market outside Kathmandu Valley. All the national dailies and weeklies are accessible by plane or bus within a few hours.

Nepal Press Institute's Regional Media Resource Center based in Morang, Biratnagar has been working here to help the region's community media. The Center has specific plans and programs to train journalists and promote a free media environment in the region.

Publication Trend in Eastern Development Region:

	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Registered	52	3	165	28	248
In publication	18	1	54	4	77
Regular	12	0	21	2	35

(Source: 26th Annual Report of Press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

Central Development Region:

Katmandu Valley is situated in this development region. The capital city is already media-saturated. A total of 1,120 newspapers of different categories are registered in this region, including 273 papers under publication and 134 regular papers. But when Kathmandu Valley is excluded, the number of regular papers goes down to 49 only.

Pratik Daily (Birgunj), Prayas Weekly and Kurakani Weekly (Both from Makwanpur), Kabhre Times Weekly (Kabhre) and Pardarshi Daily and Chitwan Post Daily (Both from Chitwan) have wide readership in their districts. Since Kathmandu is situated in this region, all the Kathmandu-based newspapers are marketed here quite easily.

About half a dozen communities are operating Community Audio Towers and numerous wall newspapers in this region.

Trend of publication in Center Development Region:

	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Registered	138	2	803	177	1120
In publication	33	0	210	30	273
Regular	14	0	112	8	134
Regular (Outside Kathmandu Valley)	4	0	44	1	49

(Source: 26th Annual Report of press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

Western Development Region:

A total of 145 newspapers of different categories are registered in this region, including 36 papers under publication and only 6 regular papers.

Jana Sangharsha Daily, Lumbini Daily, Mechi Mahakali Daily (all from Rupandehi/ Butwal), Gaunle Deurali (Palpa) Janamat Daily, Adarsha Samaj Daily and Pokhara Hotline Daily (all from Kaski/Pokhara) are influential and widely distributed papers. Gaunle Deurali Weekly has readers in 35 districts. Almost all the district headquarters and urban centers of this region have access to Kathmandu-based Newspapers.

A private news service has been registered in Butwal/Rupandehi, but has not started operation.

About half a dozen communities are operating community newspapers, and handwritten wall newspapers are published in various communities.

Trend of publication in Western Development Region:

	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Registered	26	1	100	18	145
In publication	10	0	23	3	36
Regular	4	0	8	3	15

(Source: 26th Annual Report of Press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

Mid-western Development Region:

A total of 70 newspapers of different categories are registered in this region, including 24 papers under publication and only 6 regular papers.

Naya Yugbodh Daily, Gaunghar Weekly (both from Dang) and Nepalgunj Express Daily (Banke) have wide readership outside their district. Only a few district headquarters and urban centers have access to Kathmandu-based Newspapers.

In the rural areas, many communities produce hand-written wall newspapers.

The Regional Media Resource Center of the Nepal Press Institute based in Nepalgunj has been playing important role in modernizing and promoting the community press in Mid-western and far-western regions through training programs, production facilities, feature services, etc.

Trend of publication Mid-western Development Region:

	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Registered	7	4	58	1	70
In publication	2	2	20	0	24
Regular	0	0	6	0	6

(Source: 26th Annual Report of Press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

Far-western Development Region:

This is this most underdeveloped region of the country. A total of 37 newspapers of different categories are registered in this region, including 9 papers under publication and only 2 regular papers.

Three dailies of Mahendra Nagar – Far West, Abhiyan and Nayamuluk – have circulation of about 1,000 copies. Limited copies of Kathmandu-based newspapers reach the district headquarters and urban areas of Terai day after publication. This is Nepal's poorest region in terms of access to media.

The Regional Media Resource Center of the Nepal Press institute based in Nepalgunj conducts various programs for journalists of this region.

Trend of publication in Far-western Development Region:

	Dailies	Bi-weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Total
Registered	7	3	27	0	37
In publication	4	2	3	0	9
Regular	1	0	1	0	2

(Source: 26th Annual Report of Press Council Nepal FY 2000-2001)

Compared with broadsheet national newspapers and the state- owned and widely received electronic media, the community press has limited influence. Very few community newspapers have generated special readership. The number of the subscribers of national newspapers in a particular community exceeds the total number of readers of the community newspaper in the area. This is not a favorable situation for any community paper. The lack of

in-depth and analytical reporting of local issues, covering official news of reports of formal programs and sensationalized reporting also afflict a number of community newspapers.

Jana Sangharsha Daily (Butwal) and Blast Times (Dharan) are the only newspapers, which claim to have circulation of over 10,000 copies. About two dozen papers produce around 5,000 copies regularly. The other papers run 1,500 to 2,500 copies. Indeed, the readership and influence of the community press remain limited to the locality where they are being produced. Almost all the papers are printed in Nepali language, although some with limited circulation allot separate pages for articles in the local language/ dialect.

In addition to these adverse situations, the community newspapers, particularly weeklies and fortnightlies, always lag behind the broadsheet dailies published from Katmandu which are glamorous, attractively printed and offer variety quantity and quality in their content.

The sad, bitter realities of limited circulation, small geographical areas covered, inadequate investment and market, poor content and quality, unhealthy competition for advertisement, low-paid and untrained staff members – all these have diminished the role the community press plays in Nepal's decision-making circles. Instead of assuming its honored place as watchdog and voice of the community, the community press in Nepal is struggling for its own survival.

The Constitution of Nepal is considered one of the most liberal anywhere in the world when it comes to upholding freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Nepal's Constitution stipulates that no newspapers or printing press can be closed down, and prohibits prior censorship. Although the publication and press Laws and Regulations clearly define what can and cannot be printed, many laws may have to be passed to fully realize the intent of the Constitution to promote the people's right to information and privacy. There are libel laws that need updating, too.

Every year, newspapers are sued for libel not only by political elders and government officials but also by common people. The Press Council handles complaints as well. There are a few cases of journalists cited for contempt of court and rare cases of journalists being imprisoned for the same. The imprisonment does not last more than a week and financial redress does not exceed Rs.500. Civil society groups have proposed to draft strict and effective libel laws to make the press more credible and responsible.

OWNERSHIP

A remarkable shift of ownership of community newspapers is unfolding. Business companies and cooperatives are replacing persons or families as newspaper owners. Purbanchal Daily and Bibechna Daily in the Eastern Development Region, Lumbini Daily, and Janasangharsha Daily in the Western Development Region are examples of such initiatives.

Another noticeable trend regarding ownership is the establishment of media cooperatives. In the Nepalese context, cooperatives are neither totally motivated by profit nor solely by public service. Cooperatives have been formed not only for FM radio stations but also for publication of newspapers. Pokhara Hotline Daily, Mechi Kali Daily, Radio Lumbini in the Western Development Region are owned and run by cooperatives of journalists and businessmen.

Nonprofit, non-government organizations have also started to enter the print and broadcast sectors. Gaunle Deurali Weekly and Gaunghar Weekly are owned, published, and operated by NGOs and Radio Madanpokhara is owned by elected local government (Village Development Committee). Still, a considerable number of personally owned and managed community newspapers exist in the country.

In some cases journalists working in a group have split and started two or more papers but there are few examples of mergers of two or more papers.

Some well-known editors and publishers like, Nakul Kaji (Jhapa), Krishna Prasad Bastola (Pokhara), Bal Krishna Chapagain (Butwal), Karna Bahadur Karki (Butwal), Vinaya Kasajoo (Palpa), Narayan Sharma (Dang) and Jagadish Sharma (Birgunj), who have published their own newspapers for more than a decade, have now formed business companies, cooperatives and NGOs to facilitate the publication of community newspapers.

FACILITIES

Out of 419 newspapers under publication in the country, 314 papers employ offset press facilities and only 105 papers are printed by treadle or letterpress machine. All the community papers, which use offset technology, are printed on sheet fed-offset press. No community papers are printed on web offset press. Quite a few of the community papers are using metal type, hand composing and treadle press using electricity motor. (For details, please see Table 6 in the Appendix)

The Nepal Press Institute (NPI), through the Regional Media Resource Centers, conducts training on computer assisted journalism desktop publishing, designing, and management of small newspapers regularly. Media Development Fund (MDF) provides subsidies for loans to establish offset printing press, desktop publishing unit and training on the management of printing business. They are playing crucial role in popularizing computer in editorial work and modernizing printing technology of the community papers and improving their look.

Community newspapers, which are printed on letterpress, have their own printing press while less than half have their own offset press. Most community newspapers, which are printed on offset press, have their own computer terminals. Fax and telephone are most used means for reporting.

Very few community newspapers use email or Internet. The telecommunication infrastructure in the regions outside Kathmandu Valley is

quite poor. Out of 15 Internet service providers based in Kathmandu, only two ISPs are providing services in less than a dozen urban centers of the country. The service is costly outside Kathmandu. Two of the community newspapers had started online (Internet) publications but could not sustain it.

There is no separate government policy, law or regulation for community press. The government provides facilities to the regular papers in the form of either social service advertisement or subsidy in newsprint. The recipients of facility are categorized by Press Council Nepal, which also functions as the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC). But it has no separate system or criteria for categorizing the community papers. Due to the absence of independent ABC and separate rules and regulations, regular community newspapers are not identified properly and their needs undermined. In the meantime, some papers, which never reach any reader or newsstand, are enjoying the government facilities as regular papers.

It seems that the government's only policy is to subdue the political voice of the national papers based in Kathmandu. The government does not seem to fully appreciate the role and importance of the community press in disseminating relevant information of development and public importance and provide a forum for the neglected, voiceless majority of the Nepalese people.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISTS

It is estimated that about 2500 people are involved in the community press but quite a few of them have acquired academic education in journalism and mass communication. Very few too, have received short-term training on basic journalism skills.

The Nepal Press Institute has two Regional Media Resource Center in the Eastern and Mid-western Development Regions. These centers conduct training for working and aspiring journalists in the local areas. Very few journalists can afford the time and money needed to get training or formal journalism education in colleges based in Kathmandu. Some of them have to be satisfied with the 10-month training provided by the Nepal Press Institute in Kathmandu. Due to the increasing demand for journalism education programs in their colleges some of the colleges outside Kathmandu have started journalism classes. Rural Development Palpa, which publishes rural weekly newspaper Gaunle Deurali, has been conducting Barefoot Journalism training in villages for about 10 years now. Within this period it has delivered basic writing and reporting skills to more than 700 people, mostly student, housewives, farmers, school teachers elected representative of local bodies and development workers based in the villages.

Journalism as a career was not as popular a few years back. The young generation seems to be attracted to this profession because of the glamour, fame, power and money associated with it. At the community level, too, the number of young persons aspiring to work as journalists is increasing. But

they do not get opportunity to develop this career outside Kathmandu. They learn journalism on the job. Most of them work voluntarily, without any remuneration. Some of them get part-time jobs and in the process get some kind of short-term training, e.g. one-month basic journalism training or one – week training in writing.

Bibechana Daily (Jhapa), Blast Times Daily (Dharan) and Jana Sangharsha Daily (Butwal) are the only papers employing more than 20 editorial staff members. Most of the papers have less than 10 full-time staff members. The reporters and stringers outside the district work part –time and are paid according to their output of stories.

The number of woman working as journalists is negligible. NPI/MDF and RDP have set aside certain seats, about 25 percent, while conducting training. But very few women continue to work as journalists. The total number of women journalists working in community papers is estimated to be less than 100. NPI, with the cooperation of various INGO's has conducted training on gender-balanced reporting and mainstreaming gender in media.

Since 1957, the Press Commission, Press Council, Nepal and Association of Nepalese Journalists (now, Federation of Nepalese Journalists) have formulated code of conducts for journalists. The latest code was implemented in 1997. The press Council Nepal handles press complaints but does not have judicial power. Ethics issues and codes of conduct for journalists are discussed frequently but not followed strictly.

COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

Before the emergence of democracy, publishing newspapers was not considered a profitable business. It was undertaken either as a political venture or as a social service project dedicated to democracy and uplift of the people. A considerable number of journalists, mostly editors, went to prison during the Panchayat system. Serving the country was their only motive. Making profit from journalism was considered unethical. This "mission journalism" inspired the conduct of most journalists 10 or 20 years ago. Papers were known by the name of publishers and editors, who happened to be a single person in most of the cases. It was just like a one-man show. Most present-day community papers were born with this missionary spirit, and many still live by it. The situation has not changed much in the community papers. Still, no market plan or readership survey informs most decisions to launch community newspapers.

During the autocratic Panchayat period, the average investment in paper did not exceed Rs. one million. Ten-years back, a big publishing company emerged in the capital city with a sizeable investment and market plan. With the introduction of offset printing technology, particularly after the emergence of private radio stations during the last six years, investment in community media has increased immensely. New media companies have started to come up with detailed business plans.

At present, less than dozen newspapers earn enough to support production and editorial expenses through advertisement and sale. Most of the newspapers that have their own printing facilities are sustaining themselves using income generated from other printing jobs. Very few staff members are fully paid. For many editors it is an honorary work. They work full or part time with some other organization.

Poor circulation has directly affected advertising revenues. Big business companies, products and industries depend either on national papers or Kathmandu-based electronic media for advertisements. Community papers get seasonal advertisements during national festivals, national days, etc. The practice of seasonal advertisement has given birth to several seasonal newspapers, creating unprofessional and unethical competition. Because of government rules on the publication of government notices, big tenders and quotations only in national newspapers, the small newspapers are deprived of a good revenue source.

After the beginning of the regional publications of the two national dailies from Eastern Development Region, local advertisers were drawn towards those media, in the process creating unhealthy competition for advertisements.

There is tough and unhealthy, sometimes even unethical, competition to snatch advertisement, which is so scarce for community papers. There is no definite rate for advertisements. It depends on the urgency and need of the advertisers and the paper.

At present, computer training institutes, educational institutions, health clinics, radio repair centers, cold drinks produced by multinational companies, motorcycles, real estate business, and restaurants, notices of local governments are the most common and regular items of advertisement.

In addition to the regular advertisers, which are the biggest source of revenues, annual subscription is reliable and regular source of income. The rate of full-page advertisement ranges from Rs.5,000 to Rs.10,000 (about-70-130US dollars). All the papers are printed in single color.

The average community newspaper costs Rs.2 (Rs.78=1\$). But some of the papers like Gaunle Deurali sells for Rs.5. They are marketed through news stalls and hawkers. Postal service is the cheapest mode of distributing the papers, particularly to the villages. Postal charge for delivering within the country is Rs.0.10 per copy. This rate has been constant for about ten years, but, unfortunately, the postal charge for foreign countries, including India, is Rs10 per copy. Consequently, small newspapers like Gaunle Deurali, which had a considerable number of regular Nepalese subscribers in India and a few other countries, have to lose subscribers outside Nepal.

Printing is the biggest operational expense of community newspapers. Staff salaries and newsprint constitute the biggest expenses for papers with large circulation; otherwise expenses on rent and logistics come before newsprint.

EDITORIAL CONTENT

In comparison to the broadsheet national papers, space in the community newspapers is quite limited. The size of the paper varies from 21cm x 27cm to 32cm x 46cm. The size of most of the papers depends on the availability of newsprint in the market. Daily papers have 4 pages while weeklies have 6 to 8 pages.

The community newspapers cover varieties of topics such as local events, issues and problems, campus events, culture activities, sports, local political and matters of local interest. They cover the national news, too. But since readers get national news from other media sooner than the local papers they do not give priority to them. Some papers give much coverage on ethnic issues and news of insurgency. Health, sanitation, nutrition, environment, human rights, child and woman rights are usual topics. Some papers publish cartoon strips and picture regularly. Tabloid papers sell more than sober papers.

About two dozen newspapers publish special reading materials, particularly literary works, in the weekend. Some papers publish special pages for children on Sundays or Fridays. Tabloids/sensational papers publish entertainment material containing fashion, film/ cinema and picture of a model woman on the back page regularly.

Conflicts and calamities in the neighboring countries get coverage, but other foreign news does not get much importance. Readers prefer light, entertaining and sensational news to serious and analytical materials.

According to the Constitution, news and articles are not censored. Print and publication Act (Section 14) mention that "acts causing hatred or disrespect or ignominy or inciting malice against His Majesty or Royal family or causing harm to the dignity of His Majesty; acts impairing the integrity and sovereignty of the nation; acts causing breach of security, peace and order of the Kingdom of Nepal; acts causing enmity and communal hatred among persons belonging to various races, ethnic group, religions, areas or communities and acts adversely affecting the ethics, morals and social mores of the public cannot be published in any newspapers or book .

During the emergency period the government suspended many fundamental rights, including freedom of speech.

The number of newspapers using information and pictures from the Internet is still quite small.

READERSHIP PROFILE

The Nepali press has not been able to reach the majority of people due to low literacy rate, rampant poverty, difficult geographical terrain and cultural and linguistic diversity. The elite and urban people with political interests are

the main target readers of the press. Policy-makers and decision-makers, who live in the capital city, hardly read any community newspaper. Students, schoolteachers, government employees, businessmen and social workers who live in the district headquarter, urban centers and the periphery are the main consumers of community papers.

Community newspapers are hand delivered to local subscribers while those living in the periphery and other districts receive them through postal service. Some newspapers use hawkers while very few appear on the newsstands.

THE FUTURE

Despite its important role in the community the community press has not received due recognition and support from the government. The process and criteria used for the classification of newspapers are not favorable to the community press. There is no separate policy or rule to support community newspapers. The advertisement policy and prevailing rules put the community press at a disadvantage.

Prominent journalists working in the regional and small-scale newspapers prefer their paper to be called national paper or regional paper rather than community paper. They try to copy the Kathmandu-based broadsheets and forget their particular role and target readers.

Due to the excessive centralization of media opportunities in the capital city the growth of community newspapers has been problematic from the beginning. Over the last six years, big media houses have emerged with large investments and aggressive business policies. They sell 16-page broadsheet paper for just Rs. 4. Two of them have reduced their price to Rs. 2. Community newspapers cannot compete with them not only in the market but also in getting advertisements, as well as in offering quality and variety of content.

There is no opportunity to develop a career or academic education in journalism outside Kathmandu Valley. Movement of skilled human resources from urban centers to the capital city for better opportunity is also one of the hindrances in the development of community press.

Due to inadequate and inappropriate telecommunication infrastructure and other technical facilities, modern communication and technology cannot be fully utilized in urban centers outside Kathmandu.

Recently the government granted permission to operate a private TV broadcasting station to a publishing house which is already operating two FM stations and publishing a number of newspapers and magazines, including two broadsheet dailies. In the absence of law limiting monopoly of media ownership, smaller media businesses will continue to face unfavorable conditions and a crisis of survival in future also.

Although policymakers have realized the role and importance of the community press in strengthening democracy and promoting economic and social development, it is not getting adequate support and recognition from the government.

Because of expensive modern technology, tough competition for advertisement and market, inadequate opportunities and facilities for skill and professional development outside Kathmandu, lack of business plan and adequate investment, and inadequate infrastructure, the sustainability of the community press is in question. It has not been able to play its specific role in reducing the quantitative imbalance of information in rural and urban area, increasing the exchange of community news and articles, focusing the rural area and raising the voice of the voiceless people.

To enable the community press to fulfill the needs of the majority of the information-starved people living in the rural areas (more than 85 percent) and become an effective tool of development, the government should come forward with well-defined policies, rules and regulations. Proper environment for attracting large-scale investment, opportunities for suitable market and skill development, better communication and printing technology, are important components for the promotion and development of community press in the country.

CONCLUSION

The community press has a crucial role in strengthening democracy and enhancing development in Nepal, but this role has not yet been recognized and utilized. Not only policymakers but also journalists should realize the importance of the community press. Instead of trying to be so-called national papers or copying Kathmandu-based press the journalists working in small press outside the Kathmandu Valley should be ready to play the role of a community press. This may be the only way to justify their existence and ensure their sustainability. Once this role is internalized other things like appropriate government policies, laws and regulations, investment, human resource development, market etc. will follow. Consequently, the new era of community press will be accelerated.

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