



**MINUTES**

**of**

**BUILDING COMMUNICATIONS  
OPPORTUNITIES (BCO)  
ALLIANCE MEETING**

Hosted by Panos South Asia

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Hotel Himalaya, Kathmandu  
26-28 January, 2006

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### **Background**

The BCO is made up of a dynamic and creative relationship between three bilateral donor agencies and six NGOs. The former include DFID, DGIS, and SDC. NGO partners are the Association for Progressive Communication (APC), Bellanet, HIVOS, International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD), OneWorld and Panos. The purpose of the BCO Alliance is to investigate, mobilize and support key ICT4D opportunities that impact on poverty.

The BCO Alliance meets every six months to learn and share knowledge on how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be used as a strategic tool for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The Kathmandu meeting was allotted as BCO Business Day on the first day and took place at The Meeting Room, Hotel Himalaya. The second day, allotted as Impact Study Session, took place at Media Center, Panos South Asia Kathmandu office. The final day was allotted as Learning Day Session and took place at The Chavlet, Hotel Himalaya.

A three-day Building Communications Opportunities (BCO) Alliance Meeting was held in Kathmandu from 26-28 January, 2006.

The main objectives of BCO Alliance Kathmandu meeting were: for BCO partners to report and share progress on key activities undertaken within the BCO programme based on the agreed template; pinpoint activities and mechanisms to deepen learning and strengthen collaboration between the partners; discuss and agree next steps in taking forward the BCO programme; create a base for BCO partners to agree on the broad outlines of the impact study (purpose and audience, research question, methodology and timeframe, partner contributions and responsibilities); and consolidate the process and plan for the BCO Impact Study. The other objectives were also to see how ICTs/Media has been mainstreamed in MDGs in Nepal from various multi-stakeholder sectors, facilitate networking and information exchange with government and regional partners on programmes and initiatives related to the learning issue, and map existing and potential MDG and ICT/Media relevant interventions of BCO partners including identifying needs and opportunities for advocacy and support.

Around 20 participants representing all the BCO Alliance partners attended the Kathmandu meeting. Representatives of other NGOs as well as media organizations were invited for the Learning Day.

Panos South Asia Kathmandu/Nepal Office hosted the meeting for two days at Hotel Himalaya and for one day at its Media Center.

## **Day Three: 28 January 2006 (Saturday), Hotel Himalaya**

### **Session 11: BCO Learning Day**

Present: Patrick Kalas (SDC), Jac Stienen (IICD), Kitty Warnock (Panos London), Murali Shanmugavelan (Panos London), Shama Shrestha (Care International), Anriette Esterhysen (APC), Chat Ramilo (APC), Loe Schout (HIVOS), Dr. Zbigniew Mikolajuk (ICIMOD), Sudip Pokharel (GTZ), Amar Gurung (Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya), Astaman Maharjan (Environment Cycle Radio/ ECR), Gopal Guragain (Communication Corner), Mohan Bista (Radio Sagarmatha), Sujata Pradhan (CIDA), Tara Gurung (Australian Aid), Steve Buckley (AMARC), Suman Basnet (AMARC), Raghu Mainali (AMARC), Satish Jung Shahi (Panos South Asia), Gerolf Weigel (SDC), Kishor Pradhan (Panos South Asia), Basheerhamed Shardach (One World South Asia), Geeta Malhotra (One World South Asia), Mamta Pradhan (One World South Asia), Allen Ballochan Tuladhar (FIT Nepal), and Kunda Dixit (Nepali Times).

Kishor Pradhan welcomed all the participants. He apologized for a slight change in today's presentations as mentioned in the original programme schedule due to unavoidable circumstances.

The participants introduced themselves.

Gerolf gave an overview of the BCO Alliance. He said the ICT society currently is still a closed society and the presence of people from different backgrounds at the learning session indeed shows the impact is increasing and the useful use of ICT is increasing. He said many efforts have been technology focused and supply driven and that the ambitious Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be achieved by ignoring ICT. The BCO first started as BDO (Building Digital Opportunities) and has ventured out to reach more and more in the development community. The current bilateral partners are SDC and DFID including APC, HIVOS, Panos, Oneworld, IICD, and Bellanet. The Canadian CIDA will be present at the next BCO meeting.

The floor was open for any questions or additions regarding BCO.

Anriette (APC) added that any society is to do with power and resources and that it has a huge impact on the society. Part of the philosophy of BCO is that an event is prepared like this (Learning Day) to learn from each other on environmental change. As our role as actors, we have achieved just that but it is also important that we hear from you during today's session.

Sudip (GTZ) asked clarification on the goals of the BCO Alliance mentioned in number one among the objectives and the need to subsidize the cost of ICT implementation among the development community. He also asked what activities have been undertaken in sensitizing development community regarding just that.

Weigel answered that one aspect that is working is to demonstrate more clearly the impact ICTs have on development. As members, we do it regionally in our own fields of expertise. In SDC, we are happy with the mainstreaming process and partner offices asked for more and more work in their respective countries. Each partner has some ICT enhanced component. It is the bottom-up movement. However, it needs a lot of information as a lot of people have different ideas on mainstreaming. Just having computer in villages is not mainstreaming, as it also has to reach the people and not just technology.

Esterhysen said there are some donors that are receptive to the idea and usually may realize the importance of media and communications who made transition earlier but another generation jumped into ICT leapfrogging bandwagon. This has generated a sound transition on gender, development and so on. The key is not to locate out information and communications but what it involves to create this magical bandwagon.

Jac said one of the first things is to create awareness. As BCO we compliment each other as we have organizations that are better on communications side and that it has been a learning process.

Basheerhamed said NGOs play a small role in ICT depending upon countries and it has been helpful to implement experiences of one country to the other.

### **Presentation 1:**

Presentation by Raghu Mainali (AMARC) on Independent Radio Movement and Development in Nepal.

(Full Presentation (PPT) on Appendix 5 Independent Radio Movement and Development in Nepal)

### **Floor Discussion**

Sudip Pokharel asked from the earlier days of perception of radio movement, the conflict has heightened and how the community radios have been perceived in terms of the conflict.

Mainali replied that from the community prospective, the listeners have supported the movement for press freedom. This has made it easier for us to legitimize our movement.

Chat asked given the situation, how much freedom does the local developmental radio stations have and how much pressure the Maoists and the government are giving?

Raghu replied the Maoists have captured radio stations. Threats also came when the radio stations were forcefully asked to broadcast the news glorifying the 100 days of the royal government in Nepal.

Murali asked what the situation in the print media is and if enough support is being coming for developmental writing.

Kunda said journalists to come to the rescue of radio have used the relative freedom TV and print media have. We have protested. Print has been especially very useful as Kathmandu based print media has relatively more freedom. Community radio stations have started broadcasting news but they have been more careful of what they are to broadcast. Important news has been buried in the second or third less important slots. All along, the independent radio movement has been saying it is only not radio freedom but also freedom to the right to information. He recalled an incident that happened two days walk away from Jumla when a Maoist commander told them to tell a brand new FM station in Jumla to play less music and more news.

Jac asked how radios have been building their contact with NGOs and how giving information can be used to increase the security.

Raghu said we jointly establish contacts and have been producing programmes for farmers, gender and so on. Programmes are even co-produced or even free airtime is provided for NGOs to broadcast their own programmes.

Aniriette asked what the licensing procedure is and if there has been any silencing of community radio to be used for pro-government propaganda.

Raghu replied that the licensing criteria always depend upon the mood of the communications minister.

Gopal replied that many radio stations received pressure or manipulation to use it as propaganda by both the government as well as the Maoists.

Patrick asked if radio stations have any experience of listeners club and if the listeners are involved in content creation.

Mohan replied it all depends upon the station and some radios have been using listener clubs to identify their needs. Different models are being used and Radio Sagarmatha is run by a group of journalists who go to the community to ask their needs. He said, for example, farmers come to radio station in Palung and talk about their work. In Radio Madan Pokhara, similar techniques have been used for woman's groups as well as students to share their schooling experience. However, this is not taking place in the city area.

Gopal added a study conducted by him last year for MS Nepal showed that in Radio Lumbini and Radio Madan Pokhara, both have a participation of listeners in their board that has some influence in the radio stations.

Sudip commented that one of the strategies to keep the community radio alive is for the donor communities to support in programme production to keep the finances coming in. It is, however, tough for donors to keep a neutral side in the times of conflict. He said it is necessary for even community radio to be seen as impartial side so that the business of the donors isn't going to get jeopardized. For example in Jumla (Kunda Dixit's earlier example), the Maoists may have demanded more news but more news could be impartial that could hamper the support of the donors.

Raghu replied community radio stations have a clear mission to uplift the communities and empower the disadvantaged. That is why community radios are not impartial. Their sole mission is to empower the common people and raise their voices. That is why we aren't impartial as we are the media to raise their issues to the so-called core-centered people. We must be judicious, yes as we are already impartial.

Sudip asked impartial in his sense meant not supporting any side of the conflicting parties.

Raghu replied, on conflicting side, we always address the third party – the people. We never produce or broadcast any programmes saying Maoists or army killed so many people but the main area to involve will be the issue such as food security

after the conflict. We cater to the people who want to stay alive. We have even devised our own more neutral words in newscasts. For example, when we call "Maoists looted banks" we get calls from Maoists saying they only captured people's property. That is why we have started using "Maoists went off with a certain amount of money".

Shama asked how could development agencies and the media work together on development.

Raghu replied that such support is taking place mostly in the mainstream media and not community media. The government media bureaucratize their programmes and the commercial media commercialize the media. The community media is to fill the gap in between to create an environment to help the society. There are over 90 languages in Nepal and the government imposed Nepali as national language. We are trying to provide an outlet to diffuse such conflict and create social harmony in between. We are not independent but inter-dependant and we need to create a good society for journalists. We are in the same boat as people as we are not mainstream media to cater elite interest.

Anriette asked if it is being approached in a multi-platform way to collaborate the media and donor communities.

Kisor Pradhan replied Panos South Asia is collaborating with Communications Corner and details could be discussed when we discuss MDGs and the media.

Chat said people are between the conflict and peace building is an important issue. She asked how many radio stations are actually in the conflict area.

Kunda answered the whole country is in the conflict area and has spread very rapidly. It is everywhere and peace-building role is nationwide. But in specific areas where the conflict started, there are radio stations broadcasting in the Maoist base areas. The listeners include army, Maoists and local people. The raw facts aren't coming from the state media and they are important for the people. Community radio has been giving that information.

Gopal added there are some organizations working in peace building such as the ones trying to convince peace zone areas in educational institutions and most radio stations are supporting that movement. A programme is being produced with Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) to promote just that move that will be broadcasted all over Nepal.

Kitty asked how could donors work together with radio station despite their own agendas.

Steve commented AMARC and its members in the region and worldwide have been promoting radios that speak out for the poorest people. Our colleagues in Nepal have been working in difficult situation. Democracy has disappeared but media is still there. We are working with 13 other monitoring groups here in Nepal. It is important to express our solidarity.

## **Presentation 2:**

Presentation by Kunda Dixit (Nepali Times) on "MDGs and Media in Nepal".

Dixit said it is appropriate we are talking about media freedom this week as it is going to be a year of the Royal takeover. The first week after February 1 marked army soldiers looking over our shoulders and censorship-taking place that was not even experienced in Soviet Union. TV was shut down. Colleagues in radio suffered much with no news for over three months. The directive was only music over radio as nowhere over the world news was broadcasted. Hence, radio broadcasters started singing the news and took the newsroom to their village squares. Local and international pressure forced the government to give in but again the government still kept on jamming BBC news broadcasts. So far, it has been a story of defiance.

The role of media in a country like Nepal is that it used to be more worried about peace and development but now the priority is to survive.

Regarding MDGs, the word is now more often used in development and media circles. The media is now happy with the acronym. Even in Nepal, the trend is to go by the flavour of the month. Unless there is a booster dose to the media, it is not going to get covered much and new tricks are required. First, the media needs to know what the problem is. Even in his media teaching experience, Dixit said he asks questions such as what is Nepal's mortality rate; female literacy rate and the students go blank. Even when such issues aren't addressed to the basics, nothing much can happen. We might be overestimating the power of the media but we have to make a distinction between mass media and journalism. Even if the jingles are sending the wrong message there is not much journalism can even do to help. Even if journalism is gotten right, what type should be clear as it has op-ed pages, sports and entertainment pages looking after different issues on the papers? The channel might be different as there are certain people who read only certain pages. It is difficult to identify impartiality in the world's second oldest profession that is media. We do not aim more for objectivity as fairness. We do not squander our image by waving a flag but the key issue is to be fair. That debate continues in Nepal as the basic needs are being challenged. It is a huge debate how much active should media become. There are some who are on the streets and others are in the newsrooms doing their own jobs.

The critical issue is how to cover politics when the entire model of democracy is being threatened. There are ways you can be more effective without going on the streets, except in some exceptional cases. The criteria are to not squander with your credibility. We are not only speaking to people who agree with you. If you want to convince people who do not agree with you, you have to use a different style. It is a trick used by editorials and commentaries around the world and in Nepal too.

At the moment, radio journalists in Nepal are facing intolerant sides on both sides. At the moment, it feels more threatened from the army side. Here in Nepal, development is democracy. One has to cover decentralization to have development. There are theories saying we need dictatorship, as democracy hasn't worked. We've had dictatorship for three decades and it didn't work. At least for democracy, there are answers. For autocracy, they need violence to stay in power and outside of power.

The euphoria quickly evaporated in Nepal as it happens in most democracy. But probably, the media promoted cynicism. We need to do some soul searching, as it is also the reason why people aren't on the streets when the political parties are protesting. However, in Nepal, the part of democracy that was working best was the democracy at the grassroots. The process was working and we were seeing it moving. After 1996, the spread of Maoist insurgencies, many elected representatives were chased out though they may have been good. Not only have they chased out local elected representatives but also physically destroyed the infrastructure. The ruling side on the other side is also intolerant.

It is necessary to get the journalists interested in their own countries to get the real stuff.

Community radio stations can run by themselves. The best thing about radio is that there is no paper. All you need is the capital cost, which can be funded by local businessmen and so on.

### **Floor Discussion**

Murali asked we just got the impression that democracy is important. He asked if there is an assumption that development isn't political. He added that the civil society is also apolitical but what is the situation here in the media.

Dixit replied that media sees vaccination, water as apolitical but it will not stay on unless you treat it as a political question. There was a time when media gave the benefit of the doubt to the one-man, even King, but most here, including me, feel it is not working at all.

Jac Stienen asked how are things moving on in government journalism schools.

Dixit replied there is a structural problem in our education system in the country. We have government and non-government journalism schools and even those that are now working as factories. But the priority is to bring media training at the top. The Katmandu University is starting a four-year bachelors Mass Communications course. Danish support is also there for Nepal Press Institute. However, there is also more need for radio training and maybe even develop a trainer in their own radio stations who can train their own staff.

Gerolf asked where the voices of the poor are being raised in media apart from community media. He asked if the media is being more market driven.

Dixit replied that we have to keep the space open for community radios, as they have done a lot. There is a need to keep a network to keep them working. There is a role also for state media despite being under government control as they have more powerful transmitters and despite the boom in FM they are still being listened too. At least till the next five years we should use the Short Wave time on Radio Nepal to promote development. For print media, it has gone much better in covering poor and the marginalized. One impact of training journalists is of having a threshold of different journalists covering development. A lot of lives have been saved by media coverage. But TV is going to get more and more importance. The first electrical equipment people buy after having electricity is an electric bulb and then a TV set.

Zbigniew Mikolajuk of ICIMOD said he liked the comment on importance of knowledge. He added elites but how can the media bring such improvement or increase the knowledge about democracy or development should not guide people in the democratic society.

Dixit said education takes too long and our problems are just too urgent. The best thing is to bring mass media into schools. There are examples of edutainment to promote values. In Pakistan, TV dramas are the most advanced and are spreading issues such as child marriage, dowry and so on. In Nepal, the programmes with top two viewership include news and the third is a satire with politics.

Sujata Pradhan said the Canadian support also went along with the Danish to Nepal Press Institute. The purpose was to do team reporting but at the end of the project, the outcome was that there was still team reporting lacking. The donors have been very keen on working closely with the journalists and it is the media that we rely on to get the best interest of information and social issues. There is also a challenge that when it comes to security issues, everything is said to be all right. But there is also a given fact that if you bring in too many problems, donors are going to back out. But donors still rely on media for real news. CIDA has always been in support of community radio and the donors have been interested on it too.

Anriette asked if there is an assumption that development is not democracy or an integral part of it. As someone working in Africa, we talk about models of democracy, which is not at the local level and how western world perceives it to be.

Raghu said the approach taken to achieve MDGs is to share complexity. For example, Kathmandu's average age is 55 then Mugu's is 35. We try to pinpoint that is responsible for killing Mugu's people then. That is why the government feels threatened.

Allen asked now that most popular operating systems are open sources and the big media houses are romanticizing this. He asked if the media views that the Internet has a cue not only for the diasporas but also for local people to use them in the community level.

Sudip commented that the "Letter to the Editor" has a whole new meaning due to the Internet. He asked how effective is it going to be to use telecenters by the local media.

Murali asked intervention at journalist level is just not enough and how do you see that kind of level of interventions that could be helpful.

Gopal said that Internet, mobile and digital cameras are being used and most content are being created can be controlled by people who are not professional media person. He asked what impact it can have on the Nepali society.

Dixit said skills and crafts training are extremely important. Journalists come out of factories just with the use of words and looks like they should be actually writing poetry or a thick novel. Communicating development is actually difficult than crime or any other as it involves raising interest. We need to reinvent perhaps on the job as we have editors who are not trainers. The scaling programmes such as KU will probably give an immersion crash course. On using digital, the issue Raghu mentioned about health divide, mortality divide, and structural divide is important

before you leapfrog to technology. It is an irony that Internet was shut down for a while and there are a few sites still blocked that is not necessarily Maoist related sites. They are constricting the news that is reaching to the people such as the news broadcast through the radio. Telecenters is a good idea and we have to think about marrying telecenters with radio centers so that they can also generate money.

### **Presentation 3:**

Presentation by Anil Pant, Team Leader, Actionaid Nepal on "Action Aid's MDGs and Media/ICT Activities".

(Full Report on Appendix 6 Action Aids's MDGs & Media/ICT Activities)

### **Floor Discussion**

Sudip Pokharel said there has been an issue of sustainability when Anil said Action Aid builds capacity of partners to have access to e-information as his office also evolved in the same role. He said GTZ's partners are government health workers and we have provided them Internet. However, after two to three years, we find they call up and say these computers are outdated. When he did tell them that it was their job to upgrade them, they instead insist on taking it back.

Basheerhamed said Action Aid in India is organizing successful campaigns including citizen's report. He asked if there were such movements in Nepal.

Shama asked she would be more interested to know about ICT for street children.

Pant replied that in Kanchanpur, the locals can produce high quality DVD films which will be much cheaper – up to 20 percent less than in Kathmandu. He suggested that they create a basket fund with locals that can help in sustainability. He said the locals they trained in Kanchanpur even came to Kathmandu and talked on their own to start up broadband Internet with ISPs in Kathmandu. Though not sustainable, at least it generated much interest as people talked to them.

He added that a similar concept of Wada Nadodo in India also exists in Nepal and is called Reflect Circle supported by Action Aid among Kamaiya, bonded labourers in Nepal. There are several others, Action Aid has also supported. On citizen's report, he said Action Aid produced global MDG report and is on the way to produce national report in Nepali. We are questioning who are getting the benefits of the MDGs. We can produce an average facility. There could be that it is not helping the rural people. Couple of reports say there needs to be more coherence, progress has to go to the people. In Nepal, for example, we have made tremendous progress after 1990 but most only in the cities have benefited. He said he could send more details via e-mail.

David said Pant mentioned of Reflect Circles in India. In India, a study was conducted to find the impact of ICT. He asked if similar studies have been held in Nepal.

Pant replied that all have reflect circles and the study on street children in Nepal was part of all that.

Anriette asked about the amount of interest generated nationally. There was so much focus on MDGs internationally but regionally in South Africa, all of that attention has disappeared.

Pant agreed and added there is a certain sectoral reporting specialization in mainstream but that is quite difficult among local media as they do not have much resources and MDG is not getting much.

Dibya Gurung of SDC said the reason in Nepal why it is not grasping enough attention is difficulty in establishing contact in the conflict areas. We probably need to devise innovative ways. Find space for development in current conflict situation in Nepal There is even no access to delivery from the district headquarters to villages. Even if the MDG report comes, it might not happen in Nepal.

Pant said maybe it is probably also the process such as of PRSP, which is interlinked with MDG. In the places he has visited, he saw some level of ownership, as it was more inclusive to what is happening here. There were community discussions, and a bottom-up approach.

Shama Shrestha wanted to know the Read Initiative with Ford International and would be happy to see it replicated in other areas. She asked if there were any constraints.

Pant replied that there have been 700 radios and the Maoists have taken away only 1 due to political constraints. He said Action Aid has limited itself to less controversial issues. He noted that the radio presenters are as good as FM presenters in Kathmandu and most of them have hardly even gone to college. It is also listened to as far as Mumbai.

Gopal said Communication Corner in Kathmandu coordinates packaging stories from Nepal and half hour programme is placed by Equal Access on satellite radio free of cost. The programme on HIV/AIDS is supported by Equal Access.

Pant said he is not claiming to have started everything but Action Aid is indeed part of a coalition.

Gopal asked if any impact study has been done in the assessment of the project?

Pant said it all means going to the people and asking them directly and it still stands as a huge challenge.

Shama Shrestha asked the cost of the satellite radio.

Pant replied it costs around Rs. 5,000 and can be carried around in a pocket and it is made in China. Gopal added the one made in India by BPL costs only \$ 70 and is distributed under the company World Space Satellite.

Anriette asked if any initiative have been taken as in Africa with World Space Foundation.

Kishor Pradhan replied it is called DBI (Digital Broadcasting Initiative) here and Panos was initially part of devising programme package on HIV/AIDS.

Basheerhamed added it is available for \$ 45 in India and earned 40,000 subscribers with one-year free subscription. It has developed very good business model.

Chat noted Kunda saying V-SAT is vulnerable in terms of shutdown.

Kishor Pradhan added it is so far the safest.

Gopal said Kunda was focused more on Communications Corner, which was taking V-SAT from Mercantile Communication. He said his office (Communications Corner) was the first victim after February 1 as they were sending out six newscasts a day. His office lobbied and gave news again after seven days. However, the government took a different move by threatening Mercantile Communications, their V-SAT service provider. That is why it has been stopped.

Sudip Pokharel said if a deal is made with international service provider, it is difficult for government to shut down. GTZ has done the same thing.

Kisor Pradhan noted Panos Kathmandu Office had to go to EU office, which had its own V-SAT. UN even offered to open a cyber café on top of Kunda's office.

Suman Basnet of AMARC offered to organize a visit to Radio Sagarmatha at 6 p.m. in the evening.

Kishor Pradhan thanked everyone on behalf of BCO Alliance and brought the proceeding of the BCO Alliance Kathmandu Meeting to an end.