Accountability, nation and society: the role of media in remaking Nepal

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Contents

Executive summary 3

Introduction The remaking of Nepal in the 21st century 5

Part 1 Media and accountability: impunity, co-option and trust 7

Part 2 Local media: serving communities or musclemen? 12

Part 3 State, nation and society: the role of media in shaping the future of Nepal 15

Part 4 The role of the international development community 19

Part 5 Conclusion 20

Appendix List of interviewees 21

Endnotes 22
Executive summary

This policy briefing provides an overview of the issues facing Nepal’s media in the context of the country’s current political and development challenges. Based on more than 25 interviews with leading members of Nepal’s media, government, civil society and international development communities, the briefing also draws on public opinion research carried out by BBC Media Action.

The media has played a vital role in the history of modern Nepal. During the time of the monarchy, and especially in the 1980s, newspapers constituted one of the few genuine checks on a ruling power that was otherwise unaccountable. During the decade-long Maoist insurrection in the late 1990s and early 2000s, media provided an essential platform for public debate through which democratic transition could ultimately emerge. Nepal’s unique and extensive community radio network was widely praised during the overthrow of the monarchy in 2006 for providing news and information and, in its appeals for peace, for helping to prevent the situation from degenerating into greater violence. The post-1990 and 2015 constitutions both guaranteed freedom of expression and, despite the continued challenges inherent in protecting media freedom, the country is recognised for having one of the most open media systems in the region. Some 74% of Nepalis report that the media helps to hold government to account.

Despite these achievements, this briefing asks some searching questions. Is media holding power-holders to account in the way a democratic nation might expect and does it have the freedom to do so? Is media providing the foundation for an informed citizenry capable of sustaining and strengthening the fragile democracy so many Nepalis have sacrificed so much to build? Is the media unifying society, properly reflecting the diversity and grievances of people across the country, while providing the channels of dialogue that can enable individuals to understand each other? Or is media a driver of conflict?

The people interviewed for this study did not give uniform responses to these questions. For some, the mainstream media has become politicised, corrupted and co-opted, neutered in its ability to hold government to account. Others argue that the media is still relatively free and manages to reflect a diversity of opinion. But, they maintain, media freedom is under intensifying threat and needs better protection.
For some, Nepal’s famously extensive local community and commercial FM radio network, with over 450 stations, provides a vital foundation for democratic debate and accountability, in the context of the nation’s increasingly decentralised politics. For others, local radio has largely been captured by political, business, ethnic, criminal or other factional interests, stoking polarisation — and even hate — in an already politically divided society.

Some respondents believe that national broadcast media, and especially the state broadcasters Radio Nepal and Nepal Television (NTV), are an analogue irrelevance in a country where mobile phone ownership (and with it internet access) is exploding and where a new constitution envisages devolving most decision-making to the provincial sphere. For others, a genuinely independent and revitalised national public service broadcaster, which could command trust across the country, might provide an invaluable mechanism to help hold a fragmented and divided society together.

For some, donors and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have co-opted the airwaves with content that too often means much to their funders but little to their audiences, and have failed to invest in the institutional strengthening of the media. They argue that the best journalists rarely stay in a profession that pays a fraction of what they can get working for a development organisation, and that the intellectual lifeblood of the country is being drained as key opinion-makers work for international, rather than national, players. Others argue that independent media is suffering a catastrophic market failure and that international support will be essential if there is any hope of media serving the interests of the public, rather than state, political or commercial interests.

This briefing is written principally for the international community that wants to understand the current reality of governance in Nepal and the role of media in it. The briefing does not pretend to capture the full complexity of Nepali media, politics or society. Its role is to reflect, rather than resolve, these divergent perspectives. It does not provide a blueprint for support to Nepali media. But this briefing does reach one fundamental conclusion: the media of Nepal increasingly matters in shaping the culture, society and politics of a nation that deserves better. Any governance strategy that does not understand media’s role, or prioritise it within future support, is likely to fail.

A brief history of Nepal

The country that is now Nepal emerged from a series of smaller kingdoms ruled at different times by Kings Gopal, Mahispal, Kirants, Lichhawi and Malla. After decades of rivalry between the medieval kingdoms, modern Nepal was unified by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of the small principality of Gorkha, in the latter half of the 18th century. Nepal lost more than a third of its territory to the British India Company in the Anglo-Indian war of 1814–16. The Rana family took over power from Shah and ruled for 104 years.

In 1950, the country started its transition to democracy after a small band of intellectuals instigated a revolution against the Rana dynasty and formed the Nepali Congress Party (an earlier precursor was the Praja Parishad, founded in 1939 to lead a revolution against the Ranas). In 1960, declaring parliamentary democracy a failure, King Mahendra carried out a royal coup and dismissed the elected B.P. Koirala’s government, declaring that a “party-less” Panchayat system would govern Nepal.

After 30 years of active rule by the monarchy, the Nepali Congress Party and the communist parties joined together to overthrow the Panchayat system. This led to the creation of a multi-party democratic system within the framework of a constitutional monarchy in 1990. In February 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal launched a bid to replace the parliamentary monarchy with a democratic republic through a Maoist revolutionary strategy known as the “people’s war” that ended in a decade-long civil war, killing 13,000 Nepalis. In 2005, King Gyanendra dismissed the entire government and assumed full executive powers, declaring a “state of emergency”. In 2006, strikes and street protests by political parties (including the Maoists) forced the king to reinstate the parliament.

On 28 May 2008, the elected Constituent Assembly (CA) declared Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic, abolishing the 240-year-old monarchy. After the failure to draft a constitution within an agreed deadline, the existing CA was dissolved and a new CA election was held. In May 2015, shortly after the major earthquakes that struck the country on 25 April and 12 May, the second CA passed the new constitution with the required two-third majority. Ethnic groups such as the Madhesh, Tharus and some indigenous groups have protested vigorously that their concerns have not been addressed in the new constitution, which came into effect on 20 September 2015.
INTRODUCTION

The remaking of Nepal in the 21st century

The 28 million people of Nepal can claim to be among the most resilient on the planet. They have needed to be. The country is still emerging from decades of political unrest and conflict that ended in 2006. The multi-party democracy system created in 2008 after the overthrow of the monarchy is widely perceived to have failed to improve the country’s governance. Day-to-day life for most Nepalis remains extremely challenging. In April and May 2015, the country suffered two earthquakes killing almost 9,000 people. Over the long, cold winter of 2015–16, Nepal barely weathered a blockade of its border and main trade routes with India, which created acute shortages of fuel, medical supplies and, at times, food.

Over centuries, the country has been a place of refuge for many different groups from surrounding areas. That legacy shapes its 21st-century culture and society. Nepal is made up of more than 120 ethnicities and more than 100 languages and dialects. While the nation of Nepal has historically been shaped by its kings and by conquest (see box on page 4 – A brief history of Nepal), Nepali national identity has also been defined by the capacity of its diverse people to get on with each other. “Woven from hundreds of flowers, we are one garland that is Nepali,” hails the opening lines of the national anthem, epitomising that self-image. Co-operation, rather than competition, has often been key to surviving in what can be inhospitable terrain.

However, since the monarchy’s overthrow in the 21st century, the challenge faced by Nepal is how to prepare its divided nation for the future through democratic dialogue and negotiation. That process has proved protracted, difficult and increasingly bitter, particularly around the passing of the 2015 constitution (see box on page 6 – Constitution and politics in Nepal).

The current political settlement, founded on a negotiated peace following the decade-long Maoist insurgency from 1995, has been successful in preventing a return to outright war. However, most of the people interviewed for this paper consider almost all the institutions of the state to be politicised, unaccountable and co-opted by different political factions. The new constitutional arrangements, despite being highly progressive in many ways, have raised fears in some corners that this highly diverse society might become even more divided, and identity-based politics even more prevalent.

With this political backdrop, this briefing examines the role of media at this crucial time in the country’s modern history. The briefing unfolds as follows:

Part 1 asks why a media system that is ostensibly free, numerous and vibrant has proved unable to hold authority to account in a country ranked as among the most corrupt in the world. This section describes growing concerns over politicisation and co-option, particularly of the mainstream Kathmandu-based media, as well as other economic and technological challenges. It concludes that the survival of a genuinely trusted, independent media is in serious jeopardy but that, even in its current form, media is playing a more effective accountability role than almost any other set of institutions in Nepal.

Part 2 focuses on the role of local and community media. Nepal is unique in having so much of its population able to access the country’s extensive community media network. This section reflects a range of views on whether the reality of local radio reflects the ideals of its founders and what its role is now in fostering local democracy, community and accountability.

Part 3 describes the complex nexus between the varying types of identity politics that are increasingly prevalent in Nepal. This section examines the role of both national and local media in stoking tension and providing platforms for dialogue and discussion between groups and across a sometimes divided nation. This section argues that the historic determination of an extremely diverse people to get on with each other is being sorely tested and that media provides both a growing problem for, and a potentially vital solution to, the challenges of social cohesion in Nepal.

Part 4 looks at the role that the international development community has played in supporting Nepali media. It relays a series of criticisms that international development actors may be hampering – however unwittingly – the process through which Nepal remakes itself.

Part 5 concludes with some policy recommendations for the international development community.
Constitution and politics in Nepal

Nepal is defined as “an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal, democratic republican state” in its constitution, passed on 20 September 2015. Out of 598 members, 507 voted in favour of the constitution while 25 voted against, with 61 members of the CA representing political parties based in Terai boycotting the final vote.

The constitution has divided the nation into seven states and sealed Nepal’s march from a constitutional monarchy to republicanism, and from a unitary system to federalism.

A mixed electoral system has been adopted comprising a combination of “first past the post” and “proportional representation” systems. The prime minister, who is elected by a parliamentary majority, is the executive head of government, while the president is elected by federal and provincial representatives of parliament.

The constitution provides an exhaustive list of fundamental rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, and provisions for affirmative action for historically prejudiced or disadvantaged communities such as Dalits, indigenous people, minorities and women. The constitution contains guarantees around press freedom as well as an independent, fair and competent judiciary.

Recognising the rights of women, the constitution of Nepal states that “women shall have equal ancestral right without any gender-based discrimination”. It also reaffirms the 1990 constitution’s abolition of the death penalty.

While the constitution was welcomed by the majority of the people of Nepal, ethnic Madhesh parties from the plains region of the country started a protest against the constitution, which led to the blockade of supplies from its Indian border in winter 2015–16. Since then, steps have been made to amend the constitution in an attempt to address these concerns. This has not satisfied the Madhesh parties, who continue to protest against the constitution.
PART I

Media and accountability: impunity, co-option and trust

A central tenet of democratic theory is that a free media is important in ensuring that government is held to account, delivers for its people and spends public money in the service of the public. On the surface, Nepali media seems well-placed to deliver on this accountability function, with constitutional safeguards for media freedom and a media ranked as at least “partly free” by Freedom House. Yet Nepal ranks 130 out of 168 on the 2015 Transparency International Corruption perception index.

Why, if media is so apparently vibrant in this country, is governance so apparently unaccountable? The answer – at least according to those interviewed for this paper – lies in a growing politicisation and co-option of media, both at national and local levels, and a climate of declining freedom of expression. This section focuses on how this plays out in the mainstream media, while Part 2 examines the role of local community and commercial media.

“Mainstream media”: pincer ed between politics and economics

Based mainly in the capital Kathmandu, mainstream Nepali television, radio and newspapers constitute a vibrant, crowded and competitive media environment (see box on page 8 – The main actors in the Nepali media landscape).

Such a media might normally be expected to be highly effective in exposing corruption and holding power to account. But it does not. One problem that some international observers, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), highlight a deteriorating climate of freedom of expression in Nepal. One particular source of pressure on independent media, according to the CPJ, has ironically come from anti-corruption authorities in the country.

A broader concern is summarised in the opening section of a 2014 Asia Foundation report on impunity in Nepal, which suggests that corruption has become so ingrained across the democratic and institutional landscape of Nepal that no single accountability mechanism can hope to make a difference:

“A newspaper uncovers an instance of high-level corruption, and there is widespread outrage. The court issues an arrest warrant for a conflict-era murder, and the parties aggressively and effectively shield their cadre from police action. In response, civil society groups instigate furious campaigns calling for the individual to be punished. People are deeply angered as each such case comes to public attention through media reports. The sense on the street is that Nepal’s new democratic rulers are behaving much like its older absolutist ones. They have established themselves as a separate class, accountable to no one and above the law.”

Above: Journalists protest in Kathmandu in March 2006. A determinedly independent media represented one of the few checks on the governments of the time. Many in the media now fear that their independence is being eroded by political co-option.
This widespread culture of impunity is a problem perceived by many of the experts interviewed for this report. “There have been only rare instances when the government have been responsive to media reporting,” says Bhrikuti Rai, a reporter for South Asia Check. “Most of the time, despite exposing corruption or poor service delivery, [media] fails to create a ripple among general people because people have given up on good governance and accountability from the government,” says Kunda Dixit, editor of Nepali Times.

This culture of impunity is further enabled by the politicisation of almost all institutions in Nepali politics. “It is hard to find any sector which is not politised and corrupt,” says Sabita Baral, a lawyer. “Lawyers, journalists, teachers and even human rights organisations are associated with different political parties – the whole system has been corrupted and so change is not easy.”

But journalists themselves often take a less charitable view of their profession than the public does. Indeed, many interviewed for this paper argue that the media is itself caught up in this culture of corruption and has become increasingly vulnerable to political co-option, much of it aimed at advancing specific interests and at

Right  An edition of Radio Nepal with an opinion poll on a last-ditch effort to agree on a new constitution in January 2015. According to a January 2016 edition of the Nepali public considers almost all institutions to be corrupt. Journalists, teachers and doctors were considered least corrupt.

The main actors in the Nepali media landscape

State-run newspaper/radio/TV: The Nepali government retains a formidable place in the Nepali media landscape. The state-controlled Gorkhapatra Corporation publishes newspapers and magazines, including the national vernacular Gorkhapatra which was originally launched as a weekly newspaper in May 1901 and became a daily newspaper in 1961. It also publishes the daily English-language newspaper The Rising Nepal daily, and a children’s magazine Muna, a youth-oriented magazine YubaMancha and a monthly literary magazine Madhuparka.

Radio Nepal was established in April 1951. It airs programmes on medium wave (AM) and FM frequencies and reaches all 75 districts of Nepal, covering 87% of the population.

Nepal Television (NTV) was established in January 1985. It reaches 72% of the country’s population. NTV produces broadcasting news, documentaries, telefilms, comedy shows, interviews and other entertainment programmes.

Press Council Nepal is a statutory body that promotes the standards of a free press and advises the government on the development of healthy and credible journalism. It monitors news, articles and editorials in print media and deals with complaints lodged against print media.

National Information Commission (NIC) is an independent body for the implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI). It is responsible for the protection, promotion and implementation of RTI in Nepal.

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) is a representative body of more than 10,000 media personnel working in all areas of media – print, electronic and online – across the country. The FNJ promotes and protects the freedom of the press and freedom of expression, as well as the professional and physical security of journalists.

Nepal Media Society (NMS) is an umbrella organisation of mainstream media outlets in the country. It owns 10 large-selling national dailies and 11 satellite TV channels.

Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB) was established in 2002 to promote, protect and strengthen the capacity of its 293 community radio members from 74 districts.

Broadcasting Association of Nepal (BAN) is an umbrella organisation of private FM operators in Nepal with 160 members.

Press Union/Press Chautari/Revolutionary Journalists’ Association: Like other professionals, most Nepali journalists are affiliated with a journalism association linked to a particular political party.

Sancharika Sumuha is a forum of women journalists and writers established in 1996 to promote a healthier, more gender-sensitive media.
preventing media from playing its accountability role. “Nepal's media is enjoying something that might be called anarchy,” says Devraj Dahal, country director of the German foundation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. “The current system inevitably results in self-censorship, with business tycoons and other political interests having influence which does little to serve the public interest,” he adds. Dahal’s words are echoed by Nandita Baruah, deputy country representative of The Asia Foundation, who notes that, “Media independence is extremely suspect in Nepal, with much of the mainstream media aligned to political interests.”

For business or private interests, the advantages of owning or influencing the media are obvious. “If, for example, I’ve invested in a major hydropower scheme and want a licence, then I need political relationships to secure that, and having a media presence helps me do that,” says one media commentator who asked to be anonymous. But the net result, according to many interviewees, is an essentially political, rather than commercial, media market in which media is subsidised by different political and other actors in order to advance their interests.

Indeed, it is this political subsidy of the media that largely explains why there are so many media outlets in Nepal, well beyond the number that the market can sustain. Ranjit Acharya, CEO of Prisma Advertising and a leading expert on Nepal’s media market, insists: “The number of media is at least 200% more than the advertising base available to support it.”

Out of 16 TV channels broadcasting out of Kathmandu, Acharya estimates that only five are making a profit and that the prospects of this changing are slim, at least in the medium term. The inherently weak advertising base is further undermined by other trends. Growing Nepali access to Indian television channels, for example, means that large Indian brands – which would normally advertise in Nepal in order to promote brand awareness – can effectively do so through the advertising they are already paying for in India. Mobile phone usage is also expanding quickly and, with it, the use of Facebook and Twitter, trends which Acharya believes will further undermine the advertising available to Nepal’s traditional media.

The lack of income available to the media promotes a climate in which so-called “brown envelope” journalism – where journalists are paid to write or broadcast favourable material, or cancel unfavourable material – can flourish. “Some journalists are simply not paid for three or four months at a time,” says Ranjit Acharya, making many vulnerable to accepting bribes for agreeing to publish positive stories or not publish embarrassing stories. Government attempts to improve the employment conditions of journalists have faced opposition from media owners’ organisations, three of which expressed dismay at an initiative to set a minimum wage of 19,500 Nepalese Rupees (NRP) (approximately USD 180) per month.
The lack of professional capacity in the Nepali media sector also continues to be a major challenge. The low salaries paid to journalists, and the paucity of resources available to the media sector, have also made it difficult for the industry to invest in raising standards. “While the constitution guarantees 100% of media freedom, we can only ever use 60%, because of the lack of well-trained journalists capable of working in the sector,” says Kunda Dixit, editor of Nepali Times. He points especially to the lack of capacity to carry out effective investigative journalism and laments the lack of skills available to exploit the new opportunities offered by social media and data journalism.

The dependence of Nepali media on political subsidy is further reflected in the sorts of stories that increasingly tend to get published. “One political faction will expose something of embarrassment to another faction,” explains Taranath Dahal, chairman of the Freedom Forum of Nepal and former president of the FNJ. Having such overtly politicised rivalries played out over media threatens to undermine public trust in media, while allowing anyone who is accused to brush off the allegations as politically motivated. When corruption is reported or exposed, the usual assumption is that the media organisation is simply trying to score political points or gain political advantage on behalf of their backers, rather than acting out of a genuine desire to expose the truth. As a consequence, the key mechanism through which media can provide accountability by generating public interest is weakened.

In sum, both media’s capacity – and its inclination – to hold government to account on behalf of the public is increasingly under threat. The incentives for media organisations to act on behalf of the public interest are minimal, while the pressures to act on behalf of their owners or paymasters are considerable. Moreover, in such a highly co-opted marketplace, both public trust and credibility are at risk. Finally, those government officials who – in a different political climate – might feel sufficiently embarrassed or threatened to curb their corrupt behaviour, can instead question the credibility and legitimacy of the media and – given the broader culture of impunity – simply not take it seriously.

**A brighter future for mainstream media?**

Based on the analysis presented thus far, the prospects for media to play a prominent role in holding government to account in Nepal appear to be quite grim. However, while mainstream media may be largely failing in its accountability mandate, there is an argument to suggest that it is failing less than the other institutions in the country.

One source of optimism is the economy. Ranjit Acharya of Prisma Advertising puts it this way: “If we get political stability and the constitution working, that will change the mind-set of investors – especially foreign investors. When the rule of law becomes properly established, the market will get a positive effect and the media won’t depend on other sources – then we can expect things to start to happen and levels of corruption will decline.”21

Others point to the long-term potential of social media to help to re-energise the media sector by modelling how to bring in a more diverse range of voices. “The media in Nepal is relatively free compared to other South Asian countries and social media is now giving an immense platform for diverse opinions which are yet to find room
in the mainstream media,” says Bhrikuti Rai, the reporter from South Asia Check. 22

A long tradition of media freedom and dynamism, as well as the country’s rich intellectual and cultural underpinnings, provide yet another source of hope. Indeed, despite the challenges outlined above, media appears to be doing as much, if not more than, any other institution to publicise and expose wrongdoing in Nepal and continues to command substantial public trust. Such a conclusion is supported by BBC Media Action data (see box – The views of the Nepali public). While the mainstream media does not command widespread trust (only 20% of those surveyed trusted newspapers “a lot”), all forms of media outperformed trust in government officials (9%) and trust in the military (7%).

Moreover, for all the scepticism, both within the industry and in society at large, the Nepali public clearly feels that the media continues to play a vital accountability role. BBC Media Action research found that 61% of Nepalis believe that the country’s media “makes government react to the needs of ordinary people” and 74% believe that media “helps hold government to account”. Just over half (51%) say that media influenced who they voted for at least “a bit”.

For a media system to be reasonably independent of political influence, and for it to be able to hold authority to account, it needs to have some degree of financial autonomy. What is clear is that, at least for now, there does not appear to be an economic model capable of sustaining a strong and independent media in Nepal. That may emerge over time as the economy strengthens, as regulation and policy improves (see Conclusion) and as the professional capacity of media builds. For now, however, there appears to be a market failure. Development actors may want to question whether they are doing enough to support one of the very few institutions that holds at least some promise of playing an effective accountability role in the country.

The views of the Nepali public

In November 2015, BBC Media Action carried out a nationally representative public perception survey consisting of a sample size of 4,000 people covering all regions of Nepal. This box provides an excerpt of some of the findings.

Public perceptions of the role of media

• 74% of people agree or strongly agree that media “does a good job of covering national issues relevant to me”

• 67% of people agree or strongly agree that media “does a good job covering local issues relevant to me”

• 59% of people agree or strongly agree that media “provides people like me with the opportunity to question government officials of relevance to me” (22% either disagree or strongly disagree)

• 56% of people agree or strongly agree that “media makes government officials react to the needs of ordinary citizens” (18% disagree or strongly disagree)

• 66% of people agree or strongly agree that media made government and officials more accountable after the earthquake (19% say they do not know and 22% disagree or strongly disagree)

• 76% of people agreed or strongly agree that “media was relevant to me or my problems after the earthquake”

• 85% of people disagree or strongly disagree that “media provided inconsistent and inaccurate information following the earthquake”

• 33% state that they have at least “a fair amount” of knowledge about the new constitution.

• Just under half of the respondents (47%) state that they have at least “a fair amount” of knowledge about political issues and current affairs

Trust in the media and other institutions as a source of information for political issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top sources</th>
<th>Trusted “a lot”</th>
<th>Trusted*</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends and family</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local chiefs/village elders</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers/magazines</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government officials</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The military</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet sources</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents were asked if they trusted these sources to give them information on political issues and current affairs “a lot,” “a bit,” “not very much,” or “not at all.” The “trusted” column is a summation of those who responded “a lot” and “a bit.”
PART 2

Local media: serving communities or musclemen?

Nepal is unique in that the “mainstream” Kathmandu-based media outlets are arguably a minority part of the media landscape. There is no other country where such a high proportion of people can access such a wide choice of local-level “community” and commercial radio. Community radio, in particular, has been significantly supported by the international development community. What is less clear is whether local radio lives up to the ideals that the founders of the country’s community media movement originally envisaged.

“It is more difficult to get a driver’s licence in Nepal than it is to get a radio licence,” says Jibachh Chaudhary, manager of Samad FM in the Terai region. Indeed, Nepal has arguably the most open licensing regime in the world. Raghu Mainali of the Community Radio Support Centre estimates that there are around 450 functioning local community and commercial FM radio stations in the country, covering more than 90% of the population and 74 out of 75 districts. Although local commercial stations are currently on the rise, the community radio network grew out of a concerted effort in the late 1990s by activists determined to build local-level democracy through community-owned radio.

“We started community media to create a common platform to express common concerns on behalf of a common humanity and to break the monopoly of the elite over the people,” explains Mainali, a pioneer of community radio in the country. He continues: “The ethos of community media was rooted in it being free from individual or caste interests as well as its determination to create bridges, not divides, in society.” Above all, he stresses, it was designed to serve and reflect local interests: “Kathmandu media interprets media in very different ways to community media and we have been successful in breaking their monopoly.”

The achievements of the community media movement have been considerable. “Eight or nine years ago, community radio played a very big role in keeping communities and society together,” says Ranjit Acharya, CEO of Prisma Advertising. In particular, community media was credited with being pivotal during the overthrow of the monarchy in 2006, both in informing ordinary Nepalis across the country of their constitutional rights, and in encouraging peaceful rather than violent protest. It is widely credited with improving political participation and deepening democracy in Nepal.

When it comes to holding government to account, several observers also argue that it is possible to achieve the most impact at local level. “Local government will respond very quickly to media stories that embarrass them or reveal problems, while at the national level they won’t,” observed Taranath Dahal, chairman of Freedom Forum, at the height of the economic blockade. The strength of local media’s accountability function is borne out by BBC Media Action’s own research and experience in Nepal.

Despite this, many interviewed for this briefing argue that this local community radio network – once considered an international exemplar of democratic vibrancy and freedom of expression – is increasingly in trouble. They contend that what was once a critical driver of grassroots democracy and peace in Nepal has been co-opted by political parties, other power brokers and even donors, rather than serving the interests of their communities.

C.K. Lal, one of Nepal’s most renowned intellectuals and columnists, is caustic in his assessment of the sector: “Community media starts with prayers, followed by the news from Kathmandu, followed by a discussion programme reflecting a narrow range of voices, all the while fawning over the muscle-men who own the station.”

Professor P. Kharel of the Department of Journalism and Communication at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, agrees, estimating that 90% of local FM radio stations “are run by district or zonal level political leaders”.

Taranath Dahal of Freedom Forum references his own experience of sitting on the board of a community radio station. While still an advocate for the sector, he acknowledges that these stations are increasingly struggling to remain true to their original mission: “There is often very little difference between commercial and community radio, and community radio stations are not always owned by the community,” he explains.
They operate in the same advertising market, and there is little difference in either content or business model.” His assessment is that more than 75% of local radio stations are in crisis.33

Ranjit Acharya of Prisma Advertising notes that the market available to support local media is even more challenging than the one for mainstream media, and that most community broadcasters were always dependent on donors to keep them going. “Kathmandu has 34 community radio stations while Delhi has just eight commercial ones,” he points out, arguing there is neither the economic base nor the data available to support that number on a commercial basis.34 While radio remains the most accessible medium in the country – 72% listen to it on a regular basis according to Madhu Acharya of Sharecast Initiative – it receives by far the least advertising income.35 This means that after equipment, electricity and other running costs, there is little money left for what people actually want: quality local programming. Instead, stations tend to broadcast what is most easily available to them – often syndicated, donor-funded, Kathmandu-originated content that is rarely produced to reflect the interests of their audience.

Raghu Mainali of the Community Radio Support Centre acknowledges that “political interference in community media is the biggest challenge” and that many community radio licences are granted to political district or zonal leaders.36 However, he also argues that much of the criticism levelled at the sector misunderstands the resilience of genuine community radio and makes the mistake of lumping all local radio stations together. His organisation has developed a community radio performance system, recognised by UNESCO, against which his organisation can test the character of a radio station. He has piloted it with 50 radio stations and estimates that “around 100 genuine community radio stations survive across the country”. (see box on page 14 – BBC Media Action’s work in Nepal.) Taranath Dahal of Freedom Forum also points out that, as mobile phone ownership increases, local radio is unlikely to lose its relevance or its audience, since more and more people are listening to radio on their phones.37

Above Radio Sisne, in Rukum in Western Nepal, broadcasts the BBC Media Action-produced programme Sajha Sowal (Common Questions). Nepal is unique in having so many community radio stations. These have played a much admired role in the democratic transition of Nepal, but concerns have grown that too many of them have been co-opted by local power brokers and other political interests.
Many commentators argue that some of the challenges preventing community media from playing an effective accountability and community role could be solved by a degree of consolidation in the sector and by changes in regulatory policy. “Much of this would be solved by improved regulation,” says Taranath Dahal of Freedom Forum. Any reform of the regulation surrounding community radio will need to be carefully considered, if it is to retain the sector’s undoubted strengths while addressing the challenges of political interference. Under the 2015 constitution, broadcast regulation at the local level will be managed by provincial, rather than national, authorities. It remains to be seen whether this will lead to regulatory structures that serve public and community interests better than the current system, or to an even more fragmented and politicised broadcast environment.

BBC Media Action’s work in Nepal

BBC Media Action has been working in Nepal since 2007 using media and communication to address issues that include governance, maternal and child health, and gender-based violence. In the event of a major disaster, such as the 2015 earthquakes, it works with and supports local media to prepare information and broadcast programmes that will help those affected.

A substantial focus is placed on building capacity of media, especially local FM radio. This includes co-development of local-level programmes, training in editorial values, programme format and technical aspects, and mentoring. From December 2011 onwards, more than 1,200 local discussion programmes with over 40,000 live audience members have been produced and broadcast by BBC Media Action partner stations across all regions in Nepal.

The main BBC Media Action initiative is the radio and television political discussion show Sajha Sawal (Common Questions), which was first broadcast in 2007 on Kantipur TV and the BBC Nepali Service and has since become the country’s most popular current affairs programme with a reach of 6.6 million people. Every week, Sajha Sawal brings together a panel of politicians and other decision-makers with a live audience, carefully chosen to represent a broad cross-section of society. Sajha Sawal aims to provide a platform for people from all walks of life, including some of the most marginalised populations in Nepal, to express their views about the issues that matter to them and to hold government officials and political leaders to account. Since its launch in 2007, over 30,000 people have been part of the studio audiences, asking tough questions of panels of politicians and decision-makers, local officials and experts. Results from a 2015 BBC Media Action national survey found that 89% of audience members agree that Sajha Sawal “makes government officials react to the needs of ordinary citizens” and more than 90% agreed that it provides opportunities for marginalised communities to raise questions.

Since the earthquake on 25 April 2015, BBC Media Action has also been producing the “lifeline” radio programme Milijuli Nepali (Together Nepali), and a series of short dramas KathaMaala (The Garland of Stories) with Radio Nepal. Both of these are designed to support the recovery and wellbeing of earthquake-affected populations. Milijuli Nepali reaches 2.16 million listeners. In addition, the organisation has co-produced lifeline and debate programmes with partner FM stations, while training them on production.

Left This audience data was collected between 2011–2016.
PART 3

State, nation and society: the role of media in shaping the future of Nepal

Media has always played a role in shaping the nation of Nepal. In 2016, as a new political settlement continues to be negotiated, that role may prove to be as important as at any time in the country’s history. This section looks at the role of the media in fostering social cohesion at a time of political change in the country.

Media in an era of identity-based politics

Politics have changed profoundly in Nepal over the last decade, not just in how power is determined, but in how political relationships are negotiated. For centuries, Nepal was governed through the authority of the king. At the risk of simplifying highly complex political dynamics, the politics of authority gave way to the politics of ideology when the insurgency and following peace process brought the Maoists into a multi-party government. The new constitution is arguably an attempt to reconcile a new set of dynamics – the politics of identity. For many interviewees, media is, one way or another, likely to play an essential role in enabling Nepal to remake itself under its new constitutional and political framework.

“It is important to understand how nations are made,” says C.K.Lal, in an interview for this briefing. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Lal rejects the western notion of the state, believing that multiple nations can occupy the same limited geographical place. Borrowing from the US academic Benedict Anderson, Lal argues that nations are socially constructed and “imagined” by their people. “How do you build a country with multiple nations? It needs to imagine itself,” says Lal. “It is the role of the media to enable our nation to imagine itself.”

This suggests that the role of media merits more attention than it has traditionally attracted in governance and development analysis of the country. Many interviewees disagree on the precise roles and responsibilities of Nepali media – in particular, the balance between legitimising long-suppressed identities and bringing together a divided nation, between elite and community power, between the centre and periphery. However, almost all of them feel that media’s role in relation to how Nepal remakes itself is likely to be critical, either for good or ill.
In many respects, the media ecology of Nepal is well suited to the highly decentralised political settlement that the new constitution has endorsed, and it provides important foundations for the kinds of reimagining Lal proposes. The well-established community radio network has already provided localised platforms for debate and discussion to play out, however imperfectly. For communities who feel that national media outlets do not reflect their realities, grievances or aspirations, there is a broadcast infrastructure potentially suited to doing just that.

Given the highly fractured character of politics in the country, however, such a fragmented media landscape also raises inevitable concerns that media outlets – both mainstream and local – will be used to foster tension. “The influence of political parties and other, mostly financial, interests in the media has been pivotal in deepening the divide between people from different ethnic groups and regions, especially in the context of the current political crisis,” says Bhrikuti Rai, a journalist.

Some of the clearest indications that the local media has a role in fuelling tension have been seen around the recent crisis in the Terai in the south of Nepal (see box on page 17 – The complex reality of local media in the Terai). It is easy to point the finger at the most flagrant examples of local stations fuelling ethnic tension, but many Madheshis accuse the Kathmandu media of ignoring or deliberately misrepresenting their concerns. This is something with which the editor of the Kathmandu-based Nepali Times, Kunda Dixit, agrees: “Much of the national media in Kathmandu is so detached and disinterested in what is happening in the plains that it has no idea of what is going on, to the extent of sometimes being racist.”

He also highlights the role of FM stations along the east/west highway whose signal reaches into Madhesi areas. They “tend to be anti-Madheshi and stir up anger,” says Dixit, who believes that radio is polarising opinion on both sides. But he insists that not all media should be tarred with the same brush, arguing that some media is “doing its job properly, including the BBC, as well as state radio which is surprisingly balanced, and some of the big commercial broadcasters like Kantipur”.

Some in the international community echo Dixit’s criticism of national media. “Where is the place of the Madhesi in the story of the nation?” asks Renaud Meyer, country director for the UN Development Programme (UNDP). His feeling is that “there has been real under-reporting of the reality of what is going on in the Terai”. Meyer also argues that the impact of
The blockade on the ordinary lives of Nepalis was not well reported or well understood in the Terai itself. He concludes that different sides have much to lose by continuing tension: “Political participation is seen as being a zero-sum game in Nepal and tends to be about how you divide the pie rather than how we can make the pie bigger.”

The challenge of enabling conversations across communities, rather than mainly within them, is intensified by the rapid rise of digital and social media. Already, 94% of the Nepali population has access to a mobile phone, according to BBC Media Action research, with Facebook accounts growing rapidly to some 5.8 million by August 2016. Such access is freeing up discussion.

**The complex reality of local media in the Terai**

The traditional image of Nepal is that of a “Himalayan mountain kingdom”. Not only is Nepal no longer a kingdom, but around half of its population lives in the plains of the Terai. While there are numerous ethnicities across Nepal, tensions between the “hilly people” and the “plains people” have intensified in recent years, with the Madhesh and Tharu plains people in particular lobbying for greater recognition and representation.

These tensions have increasingly been played out over the airwaves. There have been accusations from some Madheshis that Kathmandu-centric media outlets are effectively propagandists for a dominant national narrative that ignores their concerns. There have also been accusations that the anger in the Terai has too often spilled out over local radio into hate and incitement to violence.

Some of this complexity is revealed in an interview with Jibachh Chaudhary of Samad FM. This radio station, a partner of BBC Media Action, is one of seven FM stations in the Terai and remains committed to reflecting a range of different perspectives in its coverage. The station broadcasts to different communities, both from the Madhesh and the Tharu people, and it has diverse presenters, including one from the hilly region. “People really like our debate programmes and we are determined to provide different viewpoints in them,” Chaudhary says.

Retaining an editorial balance has always been difficult, but it became more so in the context of the constitutional crisis during the winter of 2015–16. Chaudhary observes, “The situation is that they [Madheshis] want only positive coverage even if they are doing negative things – but we are wanting to balance between Madhesh and other perspectives.”

The pressure is coming not just from activists in the region. “When we go for field reporting and people gather, they give us pressure that we leave one issue and have to broadcast their perspective,” says Chaudhary. Such a highly-charged political climate means that the station sometimes feels it is necessary to self-censor its coverage. Although staff members have not received explicit physical threats, “it’s been made clear to us that the journalists who are in the Madhesh movement will be protected but that they cannot protect those who are not in the movement,” Chaudhary says.

Of the six other radio stations in the region, one is commercial and the others are community stations. Most have represented a more vocal outlet for Madheshi anger and grievance, but it is not clear how much blame lies at the door of the radio stations themselves for inflammatory and hate-filled coverage. “There are different factions at work within the Madhesh movement, some of whom are more extreme than others,” says Chaudhary. He describes how a station manager from another radio station was beaten by a sub-group of protesters because their coverage was not sufficiently sympathetic to that particular group within the movement. The net result is a climate of fear in which journalists are, according to Chaudhary, “afraid all the time”.

The most inflammatory coverage does not necessarily come from news reporting. “It is the reporting from the rallies where the [coverage gets most unpleasant],” Chaudhary explains. “The rallies can be infused with hate speech, which is broadcast live and also reproduced through the press releases which are simply rebroadcast.” Newspapers from outside the region became unavailable in the months following the passing of the constitution because newspaper vendors were so afraid to sell them.

Some of the most intense anger is focused on the mainstream Kathmandu media, according to Chaudhary. “The Madheshis are angrier with the national media than they are with the Prime Minister or any other politicians because its views are so biased,” he says. There is also great hostility to national television news, although this is less relevant because “most people are accessing Indian TV channels”. He states that people do not listen to the state broadcaster, Radio Nepal, and although there is a five-minute Madheshi-language news bulletin, very few people tune in to it.
and transforming communication, including within the extensive Nepali diaspora. However, it may also be exacerbating existing trends towards conversations within specific groups in society rather than between them, creating an “echo chamber” effect.

This briefing reaches no judgement on the claims being made about media’s role in fostering division. But the issue clearly raises serious concerns over the future capacity of the Nepali media to enable dialogue across different groups in society. While there is ample energy and significant money – much of it political – being invested in media that reflects specific ethnic, factional or other interests in society, there appears to be very little invested in the kind of media that can transcend and connect across those different interests. Nepali society is astonishingly resilient and has been defined historically largely by people’s determination to get on with each other. But media often seems to be getting in the way of that process, at least during moments of tension of the sort prompted by the recent constitutional crisis.

The prospects for media that enables dialogue across divides

Connecting different communities with each other appears to be an increasingly important evolution in a media system that currently seems to encourage either hyper-local, in-group echo chambers or national-level discourse that is seen to represent the interests of an elite.

Various media-based solutions to this problem are offered by the different people interviewed for this paper. “What I’d really like to see is for a [community radio] signal broadcast from a station in the west of the country to be available to those in the east, and vice versa,” says Raghu Mainali of the Community Radio Support Centre.46 Mainali has also developed a series of proposals of how reformed national-level state broadcasters, Radio Nepal and NTV, could link with community media to create a broadcasting system that builds on the advantages of both.47 Others point to the potential of Radio Nepal and NTV. They argue that if these national broadcasters could be reformed so that they served the public, rather than the government, they could function as a critical, independent democratic platform through which Nepalis might reshape their nation. Taranath Dahal of Freedom Forum, for example, believes that “Radio Nepal and NTV could have a really important role in terms of national cohesion.”48 Kunda Dixit, editor of Nepal Times, agrees, but maintains that this role would depend on “political appointees no longer heading it and it clearly establishing both credibility and balance in its reporting”.49 BBC Media Action’s own efforts to create national and local platforms for public debate are outlined in the box on page 14 – BBC Media Action’s work in Nepal.

No radio has a truly national reach across the nation, but Radio Nepal comes closest, reaching more than 80% of the population and broadcasting in 21 languages. It has a generally poor reputation for its programming but, especially in times of crisis, it has proven its continuing relevance. “Radio Nepal and NTV were best when the earthquake hit,” says Dixit.50 “They had the reach, they were quick and agile, and when rumours were going around they countered them.” He argues that commercial media, for all its energy, does not have public service as its core mandate, insisting that “there is something [in Radio Nepal and NTV] that keeps the public service role intact”. In an interview for this briefing, Sher Dhan Rai, the Minister of Information and Communication, says that the government is committed to the reform of Radio Nepal and NTV and has “set up a committee to examine” how such reform could take place, possibly within “six months or a year”.50

The precise model for better organising and supporting the media system, to enable greater dialogue across divides within the country, will depend on future public and political debate and decision-making in Nepal. What is clear is that, if Nepali media is in the process of remaking itself as many interviewed for this briefing argue, both national and local media will be integral to the public debate that enables this to happen. If international development support is likely to be useful in that process of dialogue, then development actors should be paying attention to the media.
PART 4

The role of the international development community

Many of those interviewed for this briefing (not all of whom wanted to be quoted) argue that – at least where media support is concerned – the international community is in danger of doing more harm than good. In particular, they argue that it is failing to grasp the role of media in enabling the kinds of debate necessary for society to navigate a moment of complex political change.

Criticisms of this sort took four specific forms. First, donors seem determined to support media to reflect their own developmental concerns, rather than those of the people on the ground. Sponsored content by development agencies – for example, to raise awareness of a particular issue – may make sense on a case-by-case basis. Collectively, however, critics argue that it is creating a media system that seems more focused on shaping how Nepalis think and determining what they should know, than on reflecting their concerns and realities.

Second, and relatedly, many feel that too many international NGOs and donors see the media as a way of gaining publicity for themselves, rather than as a set of institutions that should serve the Nepali public. “Media is manipulated by international NGOs and donor interests,” says professor P. Kharel of Tribhuvan University. “Expats get lots of coverage in Nepali media, which seldom happens in other parts of the world,” he adds. C.K. Lal links this to a broader problem of donors being insufficiently in touch with the problems faced by the country. “Donors are more at fault than government in shaping our current situation because they only engage with elites,” he says. This complaint of external influence extends to the conceptual framing of much international development support, especially when it comes to media assistance. “We need less of a focus on the kinds of racial and ethnic awareness-raising initiatives which have been popular with donors, and more on a common social awareness,” says Raghu Mainali of the Community Radio Support Centre.

Third, media support is considered to be short-term and project-based rather than strategic or capable of really making a difference to the sector. Raghu Mainali, reflecting on his decades of support and commitment to the community media movement, insists that too many donors “are ad hoc, temporary and focused too much on their own short-term results frameworks.” He argues that this has an effect on the long-term health of a sector that is as vulnerable to political co-option as the community media sector. “Donors need to move away from one-off training and capacity building and towards holistic development of media,” says Madhu Acharya of Sharecast Initiative. He provides an example of where assistance is likely to be most needed, saying that “we need to flip the model where radio, which reaches and engages most people, has the least advertising, and print has most.”

But the most severe criticism extends beyond the issue of media support to the intangible, longer-term effects of the hiring policy of international development agencies. Many argue that Nepal needs its best and brightest minds and spirits to shape its own future on its own terms, as it remakes itself at this critical historical juncture. But, they fear, many of those in the best position to nourish and foster public debate in the country are either working for, or acting as consultants to, international agencies. Rather than shaping or provoking public discourse, founding news organisations or generating intellectual or spiritual insight into the challenges confronting the country, these individuals are serving as administrators and shapers of international development programming.

These criticisms suggest a need for the international community not only to reflect on the kinds of support it is providing (or failing to provide) to media, but also to examine whether it is facilitating or impeding a process through which Nepal remakes itself.

“Media is manipulated by international NGOs and donor interests... Expats get lots of coverage in Nepalese media, which seldom happens in other parts of the world.”
PART 5

Conclusion

The interviewees who provided the foundation for this policy briefing did not give a uniform analysis or narrative about the role of media in Nepal. There were, however, some areas of agreement and some clear conclusions can be drawn.

First, media matters very much for the future success of the political settlement in Nepal and the future of development in the country. For all the challenges outlined in this report, media – both nationally and locally – continues to constitute one of the most important and effective mechanisms available to improve accountability. Media also provides a central platform for public debate and social cohesion in the country.

Second, the international community is likely to matter to the future of media. There are growing signs that freedom of expression is declining in the country, and that it is becoming more difficult for good journalists to carry out their jobs. At present, there is not a sufficient advertising market to sustain a free and independent media that can both serve the public interest and withstand intense political pressures. There is, in other words, a market failure, which development actors are in a position to help address. However, donors can do more harm than good, especially if they use their resources to shape media content in their own image.

The issue, therefore, is not simply the volume of resources available to support independent media and public debate, but the strategic clarity of analysis necessary to underpin the effective use of those resources. There are well-established strategies for supporting media, and Nepal needs further support in all of them. (UNESCO lists these as typically including regulatory and policy reform, improving the freedom, plurality and diversity of media ownership, professional capacity-building, building public trust in media and improving infrastructure). Effective support to media will involve taking a more coherent approach, building these issues into donors’ overarching governance analysis and support strategies, establishing clearer learning mechanisms focused on what works and what does not, and investing to build the health of the sector as a whole.

Third, the sheer number of media organisations in Nepal is not necessarily a good indicator of media freedom, plurality or quality. Regulatory reform is likely to need to be supported in this context, but close attention is needed to help ensure that it is focused on improving the independence and quality of media, not undermining it. The regulatory framework envisaged under the new constitution (where much regulatory authority passes to decentralised authorities) is likely to make understanding and responding to this challenge complex.

Fourth, perhaps the most severe market failure facing the media in Nepal relates to one of the greatest challenges facing the nation right now: how the country communicates with itself. Much media is fostering anger, division and mutual suspicion, whether locally or from the capital. Training and capacity-building, however important, will not solve those challenges. More investment needs to be made in independent, Nepali-rooted media that cuts across societal boundaries and enables difficult and challenging debate to take place.

The country’s local FM radio network continues to constitute an important asset available for public debate in the country, especially if further ways can be found to connect radio stations across the country. If a realistic political opportunity presents itself, reform of Nepal Radio and NTV, transforming them from state broadcasters to independent, creative, technologically agile public service broadcasters, could provide one of the single most important contributions to addressing the challenges highlighted in this briefing.
APPENDIX

List of interviewees

1. Madhu Acharya, president, Sharecast Initiative
2. Ranjit Acharya, CEO, Prisma Advertising
3. Krishnahari Banskota, chairman, National Information Commission
4. Sabita Baral, lawyer
5. Babita Basnet, president, Media Advocacy Group of Nepal
6. Jibachh Chaudhary, station manager, Samad FM
7. Devraj Dahal, country director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation
8. Taranath Dahal, chairman, Freedom Forum and former president, Federation of Nepali Journalists
9. Kanak Dixit, founder, Himalmedia
10. Kunda Dixit, editor, Nepali Times
11. Subhash Ghimire, editor, República English-language daily
12. Yubaraj Ghimire, editor, Annapurna Post Nepali daily
13. Lieutenant general (retired) Kul Bahadur Khadka, Nepali Army
14. P. Kharel, professor of journalism and communication, Tribhuvan University
15. Bimal Koirala, former Chief Secretary, Government of Nepal
16. C.K. Lal, journalist and political commentator
17. Keith Leslie, senior social development specialist, World Bank
18. Raghu Mainali, director, Community Radio Support Centre
20. Christian Manhart, country representative, UNESCO Nepal
21. Renaud Meyer, country director, United Nations Development Programme
22. Prateek Pradhan, Advisor, Prime Minister’s Office, Government of Nepal
23. Subodhraj Pyakurel, chairperson, Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC, human rights NGO)
24. Bhrikuti Rai, reporter, South Asia Check
25. Sher Dhan Rai, Minister of Information and Communication, Government of Nepal
26. Bandana Rana, former president, Saathi
27. Sharada Sharma, development worker, poet and novelist
Endnotes

1 Substantial additional resources exist illuminating the role of media in Nepal. A particularly valuable resource is http://www.martinchautari.org.np/index.php [Accessed 12 September 2016].


3 See, for example, Baron de Montesquieu (1748) The Spirit of the Laws (in which he argued that publicity was essential to preventing the abuse of executive power).


9 Interview with Bhrikuti Rai, Kathmandu, 1 November 2015.

10 Interview with Kunda Dixit, Kathmandu, 22 January 2016

11 Interview with Sabita Baral, Kathmandu, 15 October 2015.


14 Interview with Devraj Dahal, Kathmandu, 12 August 2015.

15 Interview with Nandita Baruwah, Kathmandu, 27 January 2016.

16 Interview with Ranjit Acharya, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.

17 Ibid.

18 In May 2016, three Nepali media owners’ organisations – the Nepal Media Society (NMS), Broadcasting Association of Nepal (BAN) and Radio Broadcasters Forum (RBF) – publicly put out a statement expressing dismay at the government’s minimum wage proposals as they affected journalists. See: Kathmandu Post (May 2016) Media orgs object to cabinet decision [online].

19 Interview with Kunda Dixit, Kathmandu, 22 January 2016.

20 Interview with Taranath Dahal, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.

21 Interview with Ranjit Acharya, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.

22 Interview with Bhrikuti Rai, Kathmandu, 1 November 2015.

23 Interview with Jibachh Chaudhary, Kathmandu, 26 January 2016.

24 Interview with Raghu Mainali, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.

25 Ibid.

26 Interview with Ranjit Acharya, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.


29 Interview with Taranath Dahal, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.


32 Interview with professor P. Kharel, Kathmandu, 17 October 2015.
33 Interview with Taranath Dahal, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.
34 Interview with Ranjit Acharya, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.
36 Interview with Raghu Mainali, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.
37 Interview with Taranath Dahal, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.
38 Ibid.
43 Interview with Kunda Dixit, Kathmandu, 22 January 2016.
46 Interview with Raghu Mainali, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.
48 Interview with Taranath Dahal, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.
49 Interview with Kunda Dixit, Kathmandu, 22 January 2016.
50 Interview with Sher Dan Rai, Kathmandu, 20 January 2016.
51 Interview with professor P. Kharel, Kathmandu, 17 October 2015.
52 Interview with C.K. Lal, Kathmandu, 22 January 2016.
53 Interview with Raghu Mainali, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.
54 Ibid.
55 Interview with Madhu Acharya, Kathmandu, 21 January 2016.
Acknowledgements

BBC Media Action is the BBC’s international development charity. It uses the power of media and communication to help reduce poverty and support people in understanding their rights. Its aim is to inform, connect and empower people around the world. It works in partnership with broadcasters, governments, non-governmental organisations and donors to share timely, reliable and useful information. The content of this report is the responsibility of BBC Media Action. Any views expressed in this report should not be taken to represent those of the BBC itself, or any donors supporting the work of the charity.

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