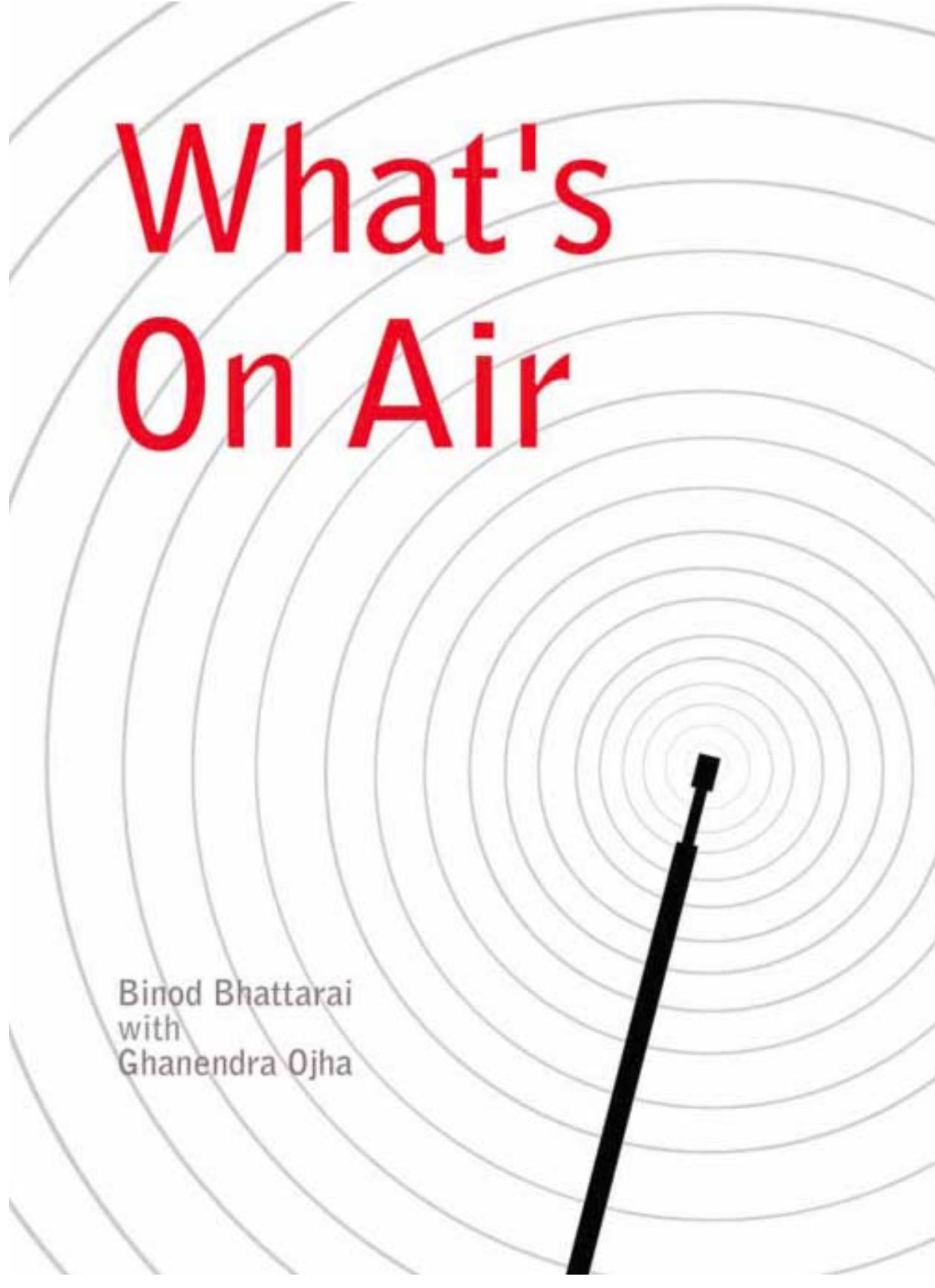


What's On Air

The background of the cover features a series of concentric, light gray circles that create a ripple effect, centered on the right side of the page. A thick, solid black arrow points from the bottom right towards the center of these circles, ending just above the innermost ring.

Binod Bhattarai
with
Ghanendra Ojha

What's On Air

A study of the content of
community-run FM radios in Nepal

Binod Bhattarai
with
Ghanendra Ojha

CRSC/NEFEJ
Kathmandu

What's On Air

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The learning process

The idea to look into what Nepal's community radios were broadcasting began at a one-desk office at the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) that has a rather grandiose name – Community Radio Support Centre (CRSC). I proposed the study only to later realise that I had trapped myself in a commitment that would not let go of me for more than a year. I tried wriggling out of it since I was planning to remain out of Nepal for about a year. Nothing worked. Raghu Mainali, Coordinator of CRSC was not one to let go easily and came up with an alternative suggestion to every excuse I could think up to avoid doing this study.

That was how Ghanendra Ojha came into the picture. Raghu suggested that I use a research assistant to help with the legwork. It was when the student who at times had challenged me in class, especially when we were discussing radio, came to mind. Ghanendra was made for the task. He had an interest in radio and was enthusiastic about being a part of the team.

The methodology was a product of consultations among the three of us. We discussed doing a thorough content study, but there were budget limitations.

What you are holding is a product of about

a year of planning and fieldwork, discussions over email and during my brief visits back to Nepal during 2008. It took us a little longer write up the report, but that is because of my unpredictable schedules more than anything else.

Ghanendra and I will consider our purpose achieved once we see more and more people starting to become interested in assessing the substance of the community radio movement and not just its structure.

Thank you Raghu for forcing me to complete this assignment. It has been a wonderful learning experience. Also next time you give us a task of this nature, please dig deeper in your pockets to let us do a more thorough work.

Ghanendra, thank you for helping with the most difficult task of collecting data, translating them into readable tables and for having answers to every query that came your way.

Finally, thank you CRSC, Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists, for letting us do this experimental study. I assure you we will do a better job next time.

Binod Bhattarai

Kathmandu

A word on content

Community radio is here to stay in Nepal. We in the radio movement talk about serving communities, giving voice to their concerns and talking with communities about things that can help to improve livelihoods. We now have over 130 community radios all of which say they are here to do all of the above.

As believers in the empowering role that community radio can play in the lives of people, the Community Radio Support Centre (CRSC)/Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) decided it was time to look at what they have been broadcasting. We hope this effort can be the essential first step towards getting the wide network of radios we have to start focusing on the soul of radio – the content.

The CRSC/NEFEJ has prepared and published a set of indicators for assessing community radios in collaboration with the stakeholders themselves. They all agree that content should be one of the most important basis for assessing whether the radio serves its community or not.

This study was designed by CRSC to try to get a broad idea of the content of community radio in general. We hope it will be the beginning of interest and efforts to generate and disseminate knowledge on the

content. That will serve as important feedback to stations and help them innovate, re-position and re-focus programming for better serving their communities.

The study attempts to look into the nature of programs produced and broadcast by selected community radio stations in Nepal. It did not specifically look into scripts and/or news texts or the type of music and entertainment on air. The assessment was based on interpreting what was on their weekly program grids and interviews with people running the stations. If only a step towards quality programming on community radio, CRSC believes it is doing its part for the simple reason that the journey has begun.

CRSC/NEFEJ would like to take this opportunity to thank Free Voice, the Netherlands, for supporting the effort. We are grateful to Binod Bhattarai and Ghanendra Ojha for taking up the task. Similarly, thanks also go to Rabin Sayami for designing this booklet.

Raghu Mainali

Coordinator, CRSC/NEFEJ

Abbreviations

ACORAB	Association of Community Radio Broadcasters
CIN	Community Information Network
CRSC	Community Radio Support Centre
DFID	Department for International Development
FM	Frequency Modulation
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
MOIC	Ministry of Information and Communication
NEFEJ	Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists
NGO	Non Government Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Nepali community radio

1.0 Introduction

FM radio first caught the public's imagination during the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy and Human Rights in late 1989 and early 1990. Transmitters with FM frequency bands became popular in Kathmandu after those protesting against the Panchayat System - a controlled "democratic" model that had the king at the helm of affairs - and demanding establishment of multiparty democracy discovered that police were using different FM frequencies for communications aimed at crushing the protests. Police communications received by FM receivers and passed on to the protesters had helped many avoid arrest and detention.

Democracy was established in Nepal in early 1990. Thereafter a group of communication enthusiasts met at the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) to discuss the establishment of an independent FM radio station. It was a time when radio was a government monopoly in all of South Asia. Nepal too had no laws to allow independent broadcasters. NEFEJ decided to take a lead in the initiative to lobby for appropriate policy and legislative changes, and to apply for a broadcasting license. It first applied for a license on October 23, 1992, five days after the government announced the new communication policy (October 19, 1992) that said it would allow independent broadcasting.

The National Broadcasting Act was enacted in 1993 and even the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) praised it — as one that could “serve as a model for broadcasting worldwide.¹ Clause 11 dealt with the production and dissemination of programs and listed the following priorities:

- “Development oriented programs such as: agriculture, education, industry, commerce, science and technology, health, family planning and forest and environment protection,
- “Programs to promote harmony among all classes, languages, cast(e)s, religions and religious groups and to establish equality and goodwill among all,
- “Programs which contribute to the growth of different languages and cultures in Nepal,
- “Programs which contribute to the growth of national interests and national unity,
- “Programs related to the growth of moral and national awakening,
- “Programs related to the awakening of social awareness,
- “Programs not affecting detrimental influence on Nepal's relation with neighboring and friendly countries,
- “Programs related to foreign policy pursued by the nation,
- “Programs related to the growth of folksongs, folklore and culture,
- “Programs covering important activities on the national and international levels.”²

Actual licensing of independent radio took longer because of delays in formulating the necessary by-laws or regulations. The inability of government officials, including the new political leaders heading the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC), to change their mindsets and their unwillingness to give up their monopoly on the airwaves were major reasons for the delay. Essentially the leaders from all parties were content with using Radio Nepal, the state broadcaster, for partisan interests. This was reflected in the frequent changes in the programming teams of major current affairs programs following almost every change in the minister heading MOIC.

The National Broadcasting Regulation was issued on June 11, 1995 and a clause in it gave government a right to impose special conditions. Rule 9 (j) allowed it to issue, undefined, “other conditions” that broadcasters were required to abide by³ using which the MOIC imposed 19 conditions on Radio Sagarmatha – the first independent radio licensee. The conditions were restrictive, possibly aimed more at curbing the growth of FM rather than its promotion.⁴ The first condition barred “commercial programming” or advertising; another one required the inclusion of a representative of the MOIC as a member of the board of directors. The station was also barred from broadcasting news.

Next the independent-radio initiative became a victim of the political instability that began with the announcement of snap elections in July 1994. The November 1994 election returned a hung parliament and set off a period of instable minority and coalition governments. NEFEJ and its partners juggled with the license application explaining the utility of FM radio to four different ministers and four secretaries at the communication ministry before finally being granted permission to broadcast. “We used to patiently explain independent radio to the prime minister, minister and secretary. By the time they would have begun to understand something they would either be removed from office or transferred. In this manner we had to begin from zero every time.”⁵

Meantime, NEFEJ had begun a feasibility study for FM radio with support of the International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC) and later managed to “smuggle” a transmitter (100-watt) and radio equipment into Nepal using the diplomatic privileges of UNESCO.⁶ Thereafter, NEFEJ wrote to the MOIC requesting for a “temporary frequency” but the ministry did not respond. NEFEJ began “testing” its equipment on March 31, 1996. The MOIC became aware of the trial broadcasts on the third day after which the secretary of the ministry personally telephoned NEFEJ and threatened to take away and “dump the equipment in the Bagmati River.”⁷ The ministry also sought an explanation from NEFEJ seeking clarifications on why it had gone ahead with the test broadcasts.⁸ Radio Sagarmatha was eventually licensed on May 18, 1997 and it began two-hour broadcasts on May 22, 1997.

Radio Nepal introduced FM broadcasting in Nepal in 1995⁹ but the channel was used only for entertainment programming. It was envisaged as a vehicle to raise revenue by selling air time blocks to private broadcasters.

Radio Sagarmatha was operated under a board of directors representing four organizations (NEFEJ, Nepal Press Institute, Worldview Nepal and Himal Association – and a mandatory representative from the MOIC). The arrangement continued for little over a year after which NEFEJ decided to run the station on its own.

1.1 Radio in 2009

In mid-2009 Nepal had licensed 323 radio stations of which around 200 were broadcasting. The radio sector comprised of large commercial FM stations broadcasting content produced in Kathmandu to over 50 of Nepal's 75 districts and smaller ones that produced their own content and/or used a mix of locally-produced and externally-supplied programs. The growth in FM stations had also led to the establishment of a number of content production organizations. These groups produced and distributed programs nationwide. Some content producers/distributors were radio stations that passed on centrally produced content to affiliates while others were NGOs and private companies. The state broadcaster Radio Nepal also used FM to relay its national and regional broadcasts across the country.

Ownership-wise, independent FM radios in Nepal can generally be grouped into three categories: community, commercial and state-run.¹⁰ This, however, is not a result of government policy but a classification used by radio advocates. In end 2009, Nepal had no laws on ownership, and broadcasting remained largely unregulated.

The government removed all restrictions – written and unwritten – on licensing after the political changes of April 2006. As result Nepal now has stations of almost every size (with transmitters ranging from 50 watts to 10,000 watts). In mid-2009, only a handful of Nepal's 75 districts did not have radio. Some stations also had clear links with political parties.

The cabinet also approved a “special provision” for “regularizing” clandestine transmitters operated by the Maoists during their armed insurgency (February 1996- April 2006).¹¹ Following this, on September 20, 2009, the government licensed five stations. The stations were Janasandesh P. Ltd. Kirtipur; Janasancha Kendra (Radio Ganatantra), Dhankuta; Janasancha Kendra, Morang; Naya Nepal Sanchar Sahakari Sanstha, (Jana Awaj), Nepalgunj; and Naya Karnali Bikas Kendra, (Bhe-Ka Awaj), Kalikot. The equipment used by the Maoists was transferred to these organizations as part of the “regularization” process.¹² One of the regularized radios is a private station, two are cooperatives and two are run by NGOs. Leaders of other political parties have also invested in “community” radio, which is well-known. It was manifested in the election of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB), where leaders from different political parties had camped in Butwal to support their candidates.

The broadcasting law does not have clear provisions on license terms. As of early 2009, almost all available frequencies in Kathmandu Valley had been allotted and because there are no rules on when the licenses would come up for renewal and/or reallocation, others

wishing to establish and operate radio stations just cannot.¹³

Radio ownership in Nepal has also largely remained restricted to the elite. According to Gopal Guragain, a radio journalist and entrepreneur who is managing director of Communication Corner P. Ltd. and Ujjyalo FM 90, “Ownership-wise, all of Nepal’s FM stations are under the control of the well-off, the street smart (*Tatha-batha*) and influential individuals.¹⁴ Raghu Mainali, the coordinator of the Community Radio Support Centre (CRSC), agrees: “Those with money have opened local radios.” He adds that the radios are controlled by the local rich and are emerging as the new power centers in the districts.¹⁵ The growth of radios was supported by donors who helped in procuring equipment and in training.

1.2 Content production for radio

The radio expansion was accompanied by the growth of content production organizations. There were five major players in this arena in 2009. Communication Corner P. Ltd., Antenna Foundation, Equal Access (Nepal), Nepal FM and the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB). Communication Corner also owns a radio station in Kathmandu where most of its programs are sourced. Its major productions are *Kayakairan*, *Nepal Darpan* and *Nepal Khabar*. The programs are distributed via satellite to over 74 radio stations.¹⁶ In early 2009, 54 stations were simultaneously broadcasting its news programs *Kayakairan* and *Nepal Darpan*.¹⁷ The participating stations did not pay for content but had an agreement to allow Ujjyalo FM to place advertisements (four minutes for every 30 minutes, the participating station can place ads for the remaining 2 minutes). In October 2009 the station shared around five hours of content every day.¹⁸ This included both news and current affairs based programs. The station also had a “news sharing” arrangement with two stations outside Kathmandu (Pokhara and Chitwan), under which news produced by them was also broadcast from Kathmandu.

The ‘barter’ arrangement with airtime seemed to be benefiting both sides. Network owners got more audiences to “sell” to advertisers and the stations were able to obtain quality programming without having to pay in cash.

Other content producers such as Antenna Foundation were producing up to 10 hours of weekly programming until 2008, which in August 2009 had come down to about 4.5 hours a week.¹⁹ The other major content producer, Equal Access was producing about 4 hours each week.²⁰

Different international and sometimes Nepal-based donors have supported content production – for state and peace building and/or behavior-change and development support communication. The programming volume has fluctuated with the availability of funds. Some other radio stations also produce news-based content, which is broadcast on partner stations in different parts of the country. Nepal FM is one such station. It had

about four hours of shared content daily on 57 stations in October 2009.²¹

Antenna Foundation, is a “radio production and training house” set up in 2002. It produced and distributed about half dozen programs to 55 stations. Antenna Foundation produced both news-based programming and drama on social issues. Its flagship news-based program was *Nepal Chautari*. About 51 stations broadcast its productions including *Mero Jindagi* and *Naya Bato Naya Paila*.

The other major content producer, Equal Access Nepal is an affiliate of Equal Access, a California-based charity. It has been doing “Behavioral Change and Development Communication” on radio in partnership with organizations engaged in service delivery and outreach programs. The United Nations Children’s Fund used to produce its best-known program *Sathi Sita Manka Kura*, a talk-based show aimed at adolescents.

In early 2009, 38 FM stations carried the BBC Nepali Service. Radio Sagarmatha was the first independent station to begin BBC Nepali Service broadcasts in April 1999.²² Humagain et. al (2009) have grouped networking of radio in Nepal in three types:

- Networking in terms of technology (including ownership of technology)
- Networking in terms of technology and programming
- Networking or sharing of programs by those who don’t own the technology (Using the “Open Channel” provided by Communication Corner.)

Those using the Open Channel (the second channel) of Communication Corner for distributing content were Antenna Foundation and other NGOs and social groups that also produced and distributed programs. Ujjyalo 90 FM planed to retain the Open Channel as a public access channel until 2011.

The users pay a fee for using the service and different rates are applicable for use during prime time and off-prime time hours.²³ Ujjyalo 90 FM had the largest network with 80 affiliated stations in October 2009. According to Humagain, Bhatta and Maharjan (2009) Ujjyalo 90 FM has a policy to discourage local radios from broadcasting over 30 percent of centrally produced content (2009:33).

ACORAB launched its own network in May 2009. Member stations share a news-based program produced in Kathmandu. The network also serves as vehicle for carrying programming of the BBC Trust.²⁴ ACORAB used the satellite facilities at Avenues TV for up-linking programs. The network was supported under a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project and ACORAB hoped to raise resources locally for continuing the project after it ended in December 2009. On July 9, 2009, there were 165 licensed community radios of which 116 were members of the Community Information Network (CIN).²⁵

ACORAB produced and distributed *Sajha Khabar*, a news-based program. It was also planning

to distribute news from Radio Nepal (the state broadcaster), “as demanded by member stations,” and *Katha Mitho Sarangiko* (drama produced by the BBC Trust). It was also considering the distribution of the BBC Nepali Service to interested member stations. As a policy, ACCORAB allows participating stations to adapt *Sajha Khabar* to suit the local context.

The content producers and distributors remain outside the reach of broadcasting laws and regulation because they do not need to be licensed, even though their programs are broadcast to a larger public (as radio stations do). A 2007 study of community radios in Nepal said the following about the programs produced and distributed in this manner:

“Syndicated programming, mostly developed by a handful of production houses in Kathmandu and financed by donor funds, now constitutes a significant percentage of community radio programming across the country... Although this type of programming represents an asset to the sector in terms of quality, access to knowledge and diffusion and exchange of information and opinion between local and national perspectives, there is a risk that syndicated programming displaces local content and that a major part of its appeal is as a source of funding.”²⁶

The aforesaid study added that “one of the so called community radio is reported to have as high as 70 percent of its programming sourced from Kathmandu-based production houses; others air up to two or three hours per day, often in prime time.”²⁷ It concluded that the risks associated with this type of programming was the displacement of local content, particularly during prime time, and the reinforcement of the centre-to-periphery “power dynamic.” Said simply, this means that local stations have provided space for high-quality paid content rather than giving voice to local issues. The other outcome of this model of broadcasting is the loss of incentive for building local capacity for quality programming.

A more recent 32-station study by ACORAB found that 66 percent of its member stations had problems meeting their operational costs and that only one third of them had formal/written editorial policies. The study said that the stations were producing “two-thirds” of the programs themselves.²⁸

The positive side of centrally produced and distributed programming is quality. This has been possible because content producers and distributors are generally better resourced and have access to donor funding – part of which is passed on to participating local stations. It is a type of relationship where stations and content producers receiving donor support assume the role of “local donors” and pick and choose participating stations through processes that are not always open and transparent. Donors meantime are satisfied with the number of stations that the content they support is on, irrespective of how the support is affecting the development of local radio, and how the emerging oligarchies in content production and distribution could affect power relations and even media independence over the long term.

The sharing of content results in cost-savings, especially for smaller stations that cannot

produce high-quality drama and educational programs. Local stations can also benefit from wider listenership by broadcasting centrally produced news and current affairs programs. The downside is that they have no editorial control on what they broadcast, which is decided by their content suppliers, which may sometimes include errors and mistakes, and sometimes, biased content. The content suppliers benefit from the audience numbers they can claim to be broadcasting to while competing for advertisements.

The UNESCO study made a specific recommendation with regard to syndicated program production. It said, “Given the increasingly important role played by production houses, one akin to a radio service in terms of their role in creating content for the public, professional production houses should be publicly regulated as part of the overall FM radio sector. Production houses should be licensed to provide specific types of service, classified accordingly, and bound to guidelines governing their operations. Classification of radio services need to be concerned with the total amount of syndicated programming and the percentage played in primetime.”²⁹

2.0 Community radio theory and practice

Nepal’s community radio ownership is diverse and includes stations run by Non Government Organizations (NGOs) and cooperatives. Included are groups that are not only interested in media and communications but also in social activism. In some cases, individuals and groups with close links with political parties run the community radios and the relationship sometimes reflects on programming.³⁰ Different local government organizations – village development committees and municipalities – also have investments in radio, some 100 percent others partial. These radios are not strictly “community” in terms of organization and governance but are closer to the communities they serve, than for example, a state-run national broadcaster or a large Kathmandu-based commercial station. Many of the local radios run by elected governments can be grouped as community radios, provided their content is about the community and not the politicians under who the stations operate.

The CRSC has developed a benchmark for community stations, which when adopted and put to use could be a basis for the classification.³¹ Among others, the performance assessment manual grants 25 out of 100 points to programming, where it has 14 criteria for assessing the relevance of programs. For programming, it requires stations to devote 15-25 percent of broadcast time to news and information, 25-35 percent for education and 40-60 percent time for musical programs. It also requires stations to allot specific time (in percentage) to local language programming.

Community radio, according to UNESCO, has an approach that differs from conventional broadcasting. “Its specific focus is to make its audience its main protagonists, by their involvement in all aspects of its management and program production, and by providing them with the programming that will help them in the development and social advancement of their community.”³² According to the Independent Radio and Television Commission of Ireland

(1988), “A community radio station is a non-profit organization consisting of members of the community and its programming is based on community access and participation. It reflects the special interests and needs of its listeners whose first duty it is to serve.”³³

Community is a concept that links people to particular values. When UNESCO began promoting community radio in 1980, the “idea was using the airwaves as a key to knowledge and information, as a means of cultural expression and independence, a forum for dialogue and participation.”³⁴ Generally, the term community is associated to territoriality, which however, has become fuzzy as a result of interaction that is taking place between people and groups, often through the media. Community therefore is also about shared values, and community media according to Crispin C Maslog, have the following characteristics:

- Owned and controlled by people in the community
- Usually smaller and low-cost
- Provides interactive two-way communication
- Non-profit and autonomous, therefore non-commercial
- Limited coverage or reach
- Utilize appropriate, indigenous materials and resources
- Reflect community needs and interests, and
- Programs or content support community development.

The notion of community media would apply to community radio. The aforesaid characteristics can also serve as a measure of whether or not and to what extent a media is community-oriented. While most of the characteristics listed above refer to the structure and organization that can be verified with relative ease, three of the ideas relate to content. The idea of the media providing interactive two-way communication, reflecting community needs and interests and the having programs or content supporting community development, can therefore serve as content-based indicators of community.

A recommendation for classification of community radio was also made in a UNESCO report in 2007. The report suggested the following criteria for classifying and regulating community radio:

- Transmitter and effective radiated power
- Size and geographic spread of target listenership
- Degree of remoteness of the licensee
- Number and type of radio services in the local areas, including whether a station is the only FM or community service
- Type of ownership: cooperative, non-profit organization, local government,
- Approach to programming: proportion and priority of a) community access and volunteerism, b) local news, issue of community/public interest, c) local arts and culture, d) syndicated public interest programming, e) commercial entertainment, f) indigenous languages

- Approach to revenue generation: proportion and priority of a) local voluntary contributions (membership, donations, etc.), b) local services (announcements, equipment rental, multimedia services, etc.), c) development contracts, d) commercial advertising and corporate underwriting, e) donor grants.³⁵

The World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) defines community radio in the following words: “Community radio responds to the needs of the community it serves, contributing to their development within progressive perspectives in favor of social change. Community radio strives to democratize communication through community participation in different forms in accordance with specific social context.”³⁶ Another definition by Maslog about community media helps better contextualize this discussion. Accordingly, community media “provide better access and opportunities for people participation in community development. The more ownership of the media are diversified the more open they are to varying shades of opinion and the greater public participation in discussion of issues. The more pluralistic voices there are in society the greater the chances for the development of a democratic society.” (1997:1)³⁷

Community radio therefore seeks to address to the needs of specific groups with shared social needs and values. Since it would be wrong to assume that values and needs are monolithic, even in socialist societies, the notion of democratic communication needs to be brought into the definition. In absolute terms, democratic communication is understood in the context of participation in generating and disseminating information. More realistically this would mean the people’s access to information that is relevant for taking decisions on matters related to their lives. Radio in Nepal has undoubtedly increased the access to information in even the remotest corners of the country. Whether or not the information is relevant is open to discussion, as that would depend on a host of factors. This study is an attempt to classify the type of information being carried on community radio, which is perhaps the first step towards a study of relevance of the information.

The ACORAB has prepared draft legislation and policies for lobbying parliament and government, and it also is an attempt to define community radio. The “qualifications” suggested by the proposed draft for a radio to be classified as “community radio” are:

- Clarity of target community and area where the station is to be operated
- Arrangements for appropriate representation of people from different “religions, color, gender and groups” in the targeted area
- The executive committee of organization running the radio and the management committees must have major changes once every two years
- Such radios can be established by non-profit social, religious and different consumer groups and their networks.³⁸

Clause 5 of the proposed regulations governing community radio lists “conditions” that the stations would have to meet:

- Should not have profit making as an objective. Where the radio makes a profit it

must be used for capacity development, improving programming and for community development

- Must broadcast programs of concern to local community and in local languages
- Interested individuals from community must be allowed to participate and be represented in the management and operation of the station
- Need to have the objective of uplifting the culture and arts of the targeted communities
- The organization running the community radio has to be elected democratically and should ensure appropriate representation of the community in the organization
- Priority for establishing new radios would be given to rural stations. Stress would be on establishing radios in communities without access to communication facilities
- Political parties, their sister organizations or groups operating under the control and directives of political parties and government and organizations directly under the control of the government will not be allowed to operate community radio
- Stations established prior to this policy and those with licenses and preparing for operation would have to meet the aforesaid conditions and convert into community radio.³⁹

All definitions of community converge into some common values as articulated by W. Jayaweera, Director, Division for Communication Development at UNESCO. Accordingly,

- “Community radio is constituted as a not-for-profit (nor for loss) operation.
- “It is intended to serve specific communities, either geographically-based or communities of interest.
- “It has a management structure that is representative of the community that the station is designed to serve and to which it should therefore be accountable.
- “It provides programming that is relevant to the community being served, with emphasis on local content and community empowerment.
- “Community radio actively involves community members in its operations – both as audience and as participants.”⁴⁰

Notes

Carlos, Arnaldo. Kjell, Linder 1994. Nepal: Establishment of FM community radio. UNESCO Paris (Technical Report, provisional version) cited in Bhattarai (2000), p110

² His Majesty's Government. 2050. Nepal Gazette. Vol 43, Jestha 27, 2050 (June 3, 1993), p7 (unofficial translation)

³ His Majesty's Government. 2052. Nepal Gazette. Vol 45, Jestha 28, 2052 (June 11, 1995). p3 (Unofficial translation)

⁴ B. Bhattarai (2000). "Radio: Sounds of openness" in Kharel, P (Eds.) Media Nepal 2000. Nepal Press Institute for a rough translation of the conditions. p 104-105

⁵ Shekhar Parajuli. 2007. Media Sambad: Nepali Patrakaritabare Antarbarta. Interview of Raghu Mainali. Martin Chautari. Kathmandu. p-91 (Translation by author)

⁶ The MOIC had not issued a license needed for import. Therefore, an approval was obtained from the Ministry of Education, which was used as basis to import the equipment, using UNESCO's support.

⁷ Interviews with Raghu Mainali and Om Khadka, NEFEJ, June 2009

⁸ Shekhar Parajuli. 2007. p-94

⁹ Ghamaraj Luitel, Madhu Acharya. (2061 BS) Nepalka Samudayik Radio Itibrittanta. p-12

¹⁰ Raghu Mainali. 2002. Radio Pledge. Community Radio Support Centre/ Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists categorizes stations into four groups: government, community, commercial and public radio. p-40

¹¹ Published in the Nepal Gazette, on September 17, 2007

¹² According to records of the Ministry of Information and Communication, CPN (M) central committee member Ananta (Barsha Man Pun) had signed the letter requesting the ministry to transfer the equipment to the first station listed above. The head of the Koshi Regional Bureau Gopal Kirati had signed off the equipment to the second and third stations.

¹³ In developed countries this right is ensured to all because radio operators are required to rebid for the licenses after a certain period which theoretically also provides space for new broadcasters to bid. This remains a major oversight in legislation on radio in Nepal.

¹⁴ Shekhar Parajuli. 2007. p-122

¹⁵ Ibid, p-100

¹⁶ One Channel is used by Communication Corner/Ujjylo FM 90 and the other "open" channel is used by content producers such as Antenna Foundation, Equal Access, Radio Audio and Radio Tarang. See: Ujjyaloko Khoji, the 11th anniversary publication of Communication Corner.

¹⁷ It is difficult to keep track of the number of participating stations as they vary with the programs. The same is true for keeping track of new radio stations. All the numbers used are correct for the time for which they are reported.

¹⁸ Interview with Gopal Guragain, Communication Corner P Ltd. October 15, 2009

¹⁹ Conversation with Madhu Acharya, Antenna Foundation, September 9, 2009

²⁰ Based on conversation with Upendra Aryal, Equal Access, September 9, 2009

²¹ Interview with Hem Bahadur Bista, Nepal FM, October 16, 2009

²² Devraj Humagain, Komal Bhatta and Harshaman Maharjan. 2009. Radio Network: Abhhyas, Antarbastu ra Sthaniya Prabhav. Martin Chautari. p-20

²³ From radio listenership data, prime time or the time when audience numbers are highest are "up to 7 am" and 7-8am, the other two time slots with high audiences are early afternoon 12 to 3 pm and 9-10 pm. (Based on AC Nielsen data for May 2008). The prime time rates for satellite use according to Gopal Guragain (October 2009) is about Rs1000 per hour, including tax.

²⁴ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funded the BBC Trust to produce programs on state building in Nepal in 2007. Some Nepali broadcasters opposed the UNDP project (supported

by the British aid agency DFID) as they were not provided an opportunity to bid for the contract. Their argument was that bringing in a foreign contractor would distort the market and take away foreign funds that were available for supporting the growth and development of Nepali stations. The UNDP contracted the BBC to continue with the work in 2009. This time, however, it also invited other content producers to bid. The BBC Trust, which had prior experience executing the program for UNDP, came with ACORAB as its Nepali partner and won the bid.

²⁵ Interview with Pramod Tandukar, executive director, ACORAB July 9, 2009

²⁶ Ian Pringle and Bikram Subba. 2007. Ten years on: The state of community radio in Nepal: A report prepared for UNESCO. p-5

²⁷ Ibid, p-21

²⁸ ACORAB. Community Radio. "Organizational strengthening of community radio: A study." Year 1 Vol. 3. September-November 2009. p5

²⁹ Ibid, p-32

³⁰ Interview with Raghu Mainali, CRSC

³¹ Raghu Mainali, Yadav Chapagain, Bikram Subba. 2009. Community Radio: Performance Assessment System. Community Radio Support Centre. Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists.

³² UNESCO. Community Radio Handbook. p-15

³³ UNESCO. 2003. Legislation of community radio broadcasting: Comparative study of the legislation of 13 countries. p-6

³⁴ Martin Allard. 1997. "On the Air: The development of community Radio". In Maslog, Navarro, Tabing and Teodoro (eds.) Communication for people power: An introduction to community communication. UNESCO-Project TAMBULLI, Institute of Development Communication, UPLP. College of Mass Communication, UP Diliman. UNESCO National Commission, Philippines.

³⁵ Ian Pringle and Bikram Subba. 2007. Ten years on: The state of community radio in Nepal. UNESCO. p-27

³⁶ Felix Loibrero. 1997. "Community broadcasting in the Philippines". In Maslog et. al (eds) p27

³⁷ Crispin C. Mablog 1997. Community Communication: Concepts and practices in Maslog et. al. (eds), p-1

³⁸ Samudayik Radio Prasarak Sangh Nepal. 2009. Samudayik Radio Sambandhi Nitiharu, 2066 (Prastabit). Draft version obtained on July 9, 2009. Translated by authors.

³⁹ Ibid (translated by authors)

⁴⁰ Foreword in R. Mainali et. al. 2009

Table 1: Independent radio in Nepal

Development Region	Zone	Community	Commercial	Total
EAST	Mechi	5	6	11
	Koshi	12	15	27
	Sagarmtha	18	2	20
CENTRAL	Janakpur	18	6	24
	Bagmati	25	29	54
	Narayani	12	28	40
WEST	Lumbino	17	12	29
	Gandaki	14	11	25
	Dhaulagiri	6	6	12
MID-WEST	Rapti	19	1	20
	Bheri	24	5	29
	Karnali	11	1	12
FAR-WEST	Seti	7	6	13
	Mahakali	7	0	7
	TOTAL	195	128	323

**As of July 2009*

Source: Mainali R. Bhushal B. 2009. Community Radio Context and Statistics. Community Radio Support Centre. NEFEJ

3.0 Research method

This report attempts to assess the programming of community-run FM stations. The analysis is based on a review of the programming of four stations – all of which claim to be community broadcasters. The stations included in the study were Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu; Radio Madanpokhara, Palpa¹; Radio Swargadwari, Dang; and Radio Bheri, Surkhet. The stations were selected purposefully – those included in this study operate mainly in Kathmandu and in the Western and Mid-western regions. The basis for restricting the study to these regions was the role these stations had played in taking Nepal's radio movement forward even during times that were not very favorable in terms of government policy, and also because they were among the first radios in their respective regions. The other reason was the budget and time available for the assessment.

The study attempted to analyze content based on weekly program grids and interviews with the radio operators. It compared the content based on the program grids and looked into the time allocated to different type of programs. The desk study of available literature

(including program grids) was followed up with interviews with the staff and managers of the selected stations. The field interviews were carried out in January 29-31, 2009. The study was done before the finalization of the CRSC performance assessment benchmarks and therefore it did not attempt to compare the content based on the criteria.

The study has classified programs into three broad categories: news (news-based programs), informative/educational programs and entertainment programming. Current affairs programs including those with news related content was counted under the informative/educational category. This applied to programs like *Aja Ka Kura* (Radio Sagarmatha) which is based largely on talk rather than news as it is. It has also recorded the languages in which the programs were broadcast. The study, however, did not conduct a proper content analysis in terms of subjects/topics, language used, voice opportunity, nor did it attempt to look at the discourse. It did not also look into the genre of the musical programs and topics/subjects of drama that were broadcast. Therefore, it is more a less a broad attempt to understand the typology of programs broadcast by the community stations, rather than a detailed study of content.

4.0 Organization

The report is begins with a background of the stations included in the study. The analysis and findings focus on programming, based largely on the program grids. The analysis looks into (1) program types (2) programming and broadcast time (3) news and current affairs programs and source of content (4) externally produced content and local productions (5) local language programming (6) relevance of programs and (7) programs in terms of prime listening time. The final section contains the conclusions.

5.0 Brief background of radio stations included in the study

5.1 Radio Sagarmatha

Radio Sagarmatha is a Kathmandu-based station, which being Nepal's first independent radio licensee also served as model for many stations that came later. The Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), a non-governmental organization (NGO), owns the station. Radio Sagarmatha attempts to serve the needs of perhaps the most diverse audience for any community radio to have. Its signals cover the entire Kathmandu Valley, the seat of Nepal's capital, and some neighboring districts. Kathmandu Valley is Nepal's most cosmopolitan settlement in terms of its population diversity and sophistication.

The station has paid staff and also employs volunteers. Most of its programming is in Nepali even though the Newar make up the single largest population group in all three districts of the valley – Kathmandu (29.6%), Lalitpur (40.32%) and Bhaktapur (55.85%).²

Radio Sagarmatha's programming can be grouped into three categories: News educational/

informative and music/entertainment. *Hal-chal Radiopatrika* (Halchal Radio magazine) and the relay transmission of the BBC Nepali Service are its better known news programs. It has a range of educational/informative programs aimed at specific audience groups and also the general listeners. The programming includes social development themes ranging from HIV/AIDS control and teaching English by radio to earthquake safety. It also has entertainment programming. In mid-2009, Radio Sagarmatha claimed to have an audience of around 2.5 million.³ The station had 1020 minutes (17 hours) of programming every day.

5.2 Radio Madanpokhara

Radio Madanpokhara was licensed on January 1, 1999. The radio in Madanpokhara village was preceded by other communication experiments, such as wall newspapers and “audio towers”. The Village Development Committee (VDC) owns and runs the station. The station began broadcasting on April 5, 2000 and was on air for 984 minutes (16.40 hours) every day. Radio Madanpokhara had news educational/ informative programs and entertainment. The managers/staff at the station said they believed in having locally produced programs on local subjects/topics. The broadcast language is overwhelmingly Nepali even though the station is located in the western region where the Magar make up the largest population group with 50.9 percent of the population. The station claimed to be broadcasting to an audience of about 400,000.

Radio Madanpokhara was established with some very broad objectives.

- To inform citizens for making them aware, organized and active for allround development of society
- To take the ideals of democracy to communities
- To improve traditional, difficult communication methods and to broadcast reliable information
- To inform rural people about all aspects of the lives of other rural folk
- To take impartial information on global events to the community.
- To spread information on local languages, culture, arts and religion and to reform and conserve them
- To inform people about educational programs and the importance of people’s participation
- To operate a two-way communication system with the community
- To search for and broadcast (information) on useful systems/technologies suited to the economic, technological, social, educational and cultural practices of the rural people
- To make arrangements for appropriate communication systems to prevent immoral and decadent culture on national culture
- To operationalize “Build Your Village Yourself” or the “Right of Villages to Villages” policy.⁴

The VDC retains the right to lead, inspect, manage, monitor and form and dissolve sub-committee running the station. The sub-committee comprises a coordinator who is either the VDC chair or a Ward Chair appointed by the VDC, and a secretary, executive director and nine members selected by a meeting organized by the VDC.⁵ The VDC members are elected officials.

5.3 Radio Swargadwari

Radio Swargadwari in Dang district in mid-western Nepal began broadcasting on December 24, 2002. Like the other radios included in the study, the station had a programming mix of news, information and entertainment. Radio Swargadwari claimed to be reaching about 1.1 million listeners in Dang and the neighboring districts. The radio was on air for 993 minutes (16.55 hours) every day. The language of programming was largely Nepali. The station serves an area where the largest population group is the Tharu (31.86%).

5.4 Radio Bheri FM

The Bheri Multipurpose Cooperative Limited runs Radio Bheri FM. It was licensed on September 16, 2003. The station is located in Birendranagar of Surkhet District. The station broadcasts for 1080 minutes (18 hours) every day. The largest population group in the district is Chhetri (27.72%) followed by the Magar (20.63%). The station's major language of programming was Nepali.

6.0 Analysis and findings

6.1 Program types

The programs at the stations included in the study were broadly grouped into news, informative/educational and entertainment. The informative/educational programs dealt largely with specific subjects, not necessarily linked with a current event. Programs in this category included those dealing with education, health and other issues related to development. The entertainment programs included music. Religious programs were counted as a separate category because though informative and educational to some, they may not have the same value for all listeners (especially non-believers).

Radio Sagarmatha had 156 programs each week. It had three news programs every day, or 21 each week. There were 75 programs of the information category and 60 in the entertainment group. Radio Sagarmatha did not have a religious program.

Radio Madanpokhara had 208 programs each week. This included seven news programs daily (49 each week) and 75 programs that fell in the informative/educational category.

The number of entertainment programs was 77 excluding seven religious programs it had each week.

Radio Swargadwari had 172 weekly programs of which 49 were on news. It had 54 informative programs, 48 on entertainment and 21 religious and “other” programs, mainly instrumental music

Radio Bheri FM had 201 programs each week. Nine daily programs dealt with news or it had 63 such programs each week. The number of informative programs was 47 and it was 77 for entertainment/music. The remaining 14 programs were religious and “others”. (Table 2)

Table 2: Weekly programming of the four radio stations (%)

Radio	News	Informative/ Educational	Entertainment	Religious/ Others	Total
Sagarmatha	21 (13.6)	75 (48)	60 (38.4)	0	156 (100)
Madanpokhara	49 (23.6)	75 (36)	77 (37.1)	7 (3.3)	208 (100)
Swargadwari	49 (28.5)	54 (31.3)	48 (28)	21 (12.2)	172 (100)
Bheri FM	63 (31.3)	47 (23.4)	77 (38.4)	14 (6.9)	201 (100)
Total	182	251	262	42	737

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

In general entertainment/music dominated the programming at the stations followed by informative/educational programs. News programming made up about 14-3 percent of the program-mix.

The stations outside Kathmandu had more news programs while the Kathmandu station had more informative/educational content. Radio Sagarmatha does not have a religious program but those in the districts had allocated time for religious programming. Radio Sagarmatha and Radio Bheri had the highest percentage of entertainment programming. Among the stations, Radio Swargadwari had more informative/educational programs compared to entertainment. It had more informative programs compared to other types of programming.

The district-based stations had a higher percentage of news and current affairs programming. Radio Bheri had the highest percentage of time allotted for news and current affairs (31.3%); that at other stations was 28.5 percent for Radio Swargadwari and 23.6 percent for Radio Madanpokhara. Not all of the news programs were locally produced, however. (See: Section 6.3)

6.2 Programming and broadcast time

The study counted the broadcast minutes at the stations for getting an idea of the prioritisation. The findings are reported in Table 3.

Radio Sagarmatha had 1,365 of 6,650 minutes of broadcast time allotted for news each week. That for informative programs was 2,225 minutes. The remaining 3,060 minutes were allocated for entertainment programs.

Radio Madanpokhara allotted 1,820 minutes of 6,710 minutes for news 2,290 minutes for informative/educational and 2,425 minutes for entertainment programs. The remaining 175 minutes were allotted for religious and other programming.

Radio Swargadwari allotted 1,715 of 6,705 minutes each week for news and current affairs, 2,080 minutes for informative programs and 2,525 minutes for entertainment. The remaining 385 minutes were spent on religious and other broadcasts.

Radio Bheri FM had 2,110 minutes of 7,330 for news programs, 1,470 for informative programs and 3,330 minutes for entertainment programming. The remainder of the broadcast time was used on religious and other programming (420 minutes).

Table 3: Time allotted to different categories of programs (minutes)

Radio	News	Informative/ Educational	Entertainment Music	Religious/ Others	Total
Sagarmatha	1365	2225	3060	0	6650
Madanpokhara	1820	2290	2425	175	6710
Swargadwari	1715	2080	2525	385	6705
Bheri FM	2110	1470	3330	420	7330
Total	7010	8065	11340	980	27395

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.3 News programs and source of content

Of 1,365 minutes devoted to news programming each week, Radio Sagarmatha had 210 minutes of programming from the BBC Nepali Service. The station produced the remaining 1,155 minutes of programs.

Radio Madanpokhara had 1,820 minutes of news programming each week. Of this 875

minutes were allocated for externally produced content from Nepal-based content providers and 210 minutes for BBC Nepali Service. It produced the remaining 875 minutes of content.

Radio Swargadwari had 1,715 minutes on news each week of which 560 minutes were allotted for externally produced content supplied by Nepal-based producers and 210 minutes for BBC Nepali Service. It produced the remaining 945 minutes of the content.

Radio Bheri FM had 2,110 minutes for news programming. It had 1,260 minutes of externally produced content from Nepal-based producers and had 255 minutes (30 minutes for six days and 75 minutes on Sunday) allocated for the BBC Nepali Service. It produced only 595 minutes of its own content (Table 4).

Table 4: Source of news and current affairs content

Radio	External programs (Nepali)	Locally produced programs	BBC Nepali Service	Total
Sagarmatha	0	1155	210	1365
Madanpokhara	875	725	210	1820
Swargadwari	560	945	210	1715
Bheri FM	1260	595	255	2110
Total	2695	3420	885	7010

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

Radio Bheri FM had the largest volume of externally produced content. It added up to 1,515 minutes of programming each week, including the BBC Nepali Service. Radio Madanpokhara had 1,095 minutes and Radio Swargadwari 770 minutes. Radio Sagarmatha had 210 minutes allocated to the BBC Nepali Service each week. Radio Sagarmatha was the station with the highest volume of self-produced programming.

6.3.1 Source of content on Radio Sagarmatha

Radio Sagarmatha produced two of its three news programs. The only externally produced program was the BBC Nepali Service. Among the informative/educational programs, only five (10.4%) out of 48 programs were sponsored (for lack of better term) or externally produced.⁶ The station produced all of its (24) music/entertainment programs. Similarly, out of 75 informative and entertainment programs on Radio Sagarmatha only six or eight percent had sponsors.

Table 4.1: Content on Radio Sagarmatha

Program type	External content	Self-produced content	Total
News	1	2	3
Informative/educational	5	43	48
Music/entertainment	0	24	24
Religious/others	0	0	0
Total	6	69	75

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.3.2 Source of content on Radio Madanpokhara

Radio Madanpokhara produced two of seven news programs. Of 32 informative/educational programs, five were externally produced/sponsored. The station produced all of its music/entertainment programs as well as one religious program. In all, 10 programs at the stations were externally produced.

Table 4.2: Content on Radio Madanpokhara

Program type	External content	Self-produced content	Total
News	5	2	7
Education/informative	5	27	32
Music/entertainment	0	22	22
Religious	0	1	1
Total	10	52	62

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.3.3 Source of content on Radio Swargadwari

Of seven news programs at Radio Swargadwari, three (42.8%) were externally produced. In terms of educational/informative programming, 13 of 36 programs were externally produced, while the station produced all of its entertainment and religious programs. Overall, 16 (20%) of the station's programs were externally produced/sponsored.

Table 4.3: Content on Radio Swargadwari

Program type	External content	Self-produced content	Total
News	3	4	7
Education/informative	13	23	36
Music/entertainment	0	34	34
Religious	0	3	3
Total	16	64	80

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.3.4 Source of content on Radio Bheri FM

Seven of nine news programs (77.8%) at Radio Bheri FM were externally produced. Also 18 (52.9%) of the educational/informative programs were externally produced/ sponsored. The station produced all of its entertainment and religious programs. Overall, 25 programs or 29.1 percent of the station's programs were externally produced/ sponsored, which was the highest for the stations included in this study.

Table 4.4: Content on Radio Bheri FM

Program type	External content	Self-produced content	Total
News	7	2	9
Education/informative	18	16	34
Music/entertainment	0	41	41
Religious	0	2	2
Total	25	61	86

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.4 Externally produced/sponsored content and local productions

Among the stations included in the study, Radio Bheri FM broadcast 7,330 minutes each week of which 2,175 minutes were allotted to externally-produced/sponsored content. It was the highest for the radio stations included in the study. Radio Swargawari had the second largest chunk of externally-produced/sponsored programs (23.1%) followed by Radio Madanpohara (18.2%) and Radio Sagarmatha (5.9%). (Table 5)

Table 5: Externally produced and self-produced content on community radios (minutes)

Radio	External content	Self- produced content	Total
Sagarmatha	390	6260	6650
Madanpokhara	1220	5490	6710
Swargadwari	1550	5155	6705
Bheri FM	2175	5155	7330
Total	5335	22060	27395

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

6.5 Local language programming

Generally, the FM stations studied allotted very little time for local language broadcasts. Radio Sagarmatha had 156 programs every week and only three (1.9%) in languages other than Nepali. The station had broadcasts in Bhojpuri/Maithili, Tamang and Newari languages.

Radio Madanpokhara had three non-Nepali language broadcasts (1.45%) out of 208 programs each week. The station had *Madanpokhara Halchal* broadcast twice each day in the Magar language and two other programs, *Moolbatiya* in Kumal and *Kanunglam* in Magar languages.

Radio Swargadwari had 172 programs each week and only one was in the local language. The station had *Kabila*, a program in the Tharu language, on air seven days a week. It accounted for 4.06 percent of the broadcast time.

Radio Bheri FM had 201 programs each week of which three (1.98%) were in the local languages. The station had three local language programs, one in Tharu, one in Magar and one in the Acchami language. Together, all the four stations had 737 programs each week of which only 17 (2.3%) were in languages other than Nepali (Table 6). (The same program *Kabila*, which was broadcast all seven days, was counted as seven)

Table 6: Language broadcasts of community FM stations

Radio	Local language content	National, or other language content	Total	Remarks
Sagarmatha	3	153	156	Nepal Maai(Maithili) Munasaa: (Nepal Bhasa) Tamang Kaai (Tamang)
Madanpokhara	3	205	208	Moolbatiya(Kumal) Kanunglam (Magar) Madan Pokhara Halchal Magar language (twice day)
Swargadwari	1x7 (Days)	165	172	Kabila (Tharu)
Bheri FM	3	198	201	Ojrar Dagar (Tharu), Kane Myakcho Laam (Magar) Samjhaauni- Birsaauni (Achhami) (Twice a week)
Total	16	721	737	

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

In terms of time allotted, Radio Sagarmatha had only 135 of 6,650 minutes allotted for local language programming each week. This works to about two percent of the total minutes broadcast per week. Radio Madanpokhara had allotted 105 minutes (1.5%) of broadcast minutes per week. Radio Swargadwari had 315 minutes (4.7%) and Radio Bheri 215 minutes (2.9%).

Radio Swargadwari had the highest proportion of time for local language programming compared to other stations. The station has a daily program in the Tharu language (*Kabila*), which accounted for all the 315 minutes of local language programming. Radio Madanpokhara had lowest proportion of time allotted for local language programming.

Table 6.1: Local language programming (minutes)

Radio	Local language programming	Other programs	Total	Remarks
Sagarmatha	135 (2%)	6515	6650	45 Minutes Maithili songs/Nepal Mai, (Maithili/Bhojpuri); Munasaa: 45 Minutes (Newar); 45 Minutes Tamang Kai (Tamang)
Madanpokhara	105 (1.5%)	6605	6710	30 Minutes Magar; 15 Minutes Kumal
Swargadwari	315 (4.7%)	6390	6705	315 Minutes Tharu
Bheri FM	215 (2.9%)	7115	7330	30 Minutes Tharu, 30 Minutes Magar. 100 Minutes Achhami
Total	770 (2.8%)	26100	27395	

Source: Fieldwork and review of program grids

If local language programming is taken as an indicator, all of the community radios studied are anything but local in terms of their relevance to the larger social groups. Even where there is language programming, there is a tendency to have music rather than serious talk-based programs – as evident in the case of Radio Sagarmatha.

6.6 Relevance of programs

For the purpose of this analysis, all programs with locally relevant content were grouped as local; those without locally relevant content were classified as national. The locally relevant programs were either locally produced or had content that was relevant to its listeners. All musical programs were put under this category under the assumption that music has universal appeal. Programs with both locally relevant and nationally relevant content have been classified as mixed. Nationally relevant content was defined to include programs that had relevance to listeners nationwide, and not necessarily only in the area where it was broadcast. (News of an incident in any part of the country, for example.)

Radio Sagarmatha had 51 news programs each week. Three (Radio Khabar Patrika, Halchal and BBC Nepali Service) were news-based programs, one of which focused on national issues (BBC Nepali Service) while the others were mixed in terms of content. Similarly, of 48 educational/ informative programs, 16 dealt with local issues and five

included programs of national relevance. The remaining programs were mixed. Of 24 music-based programs, six were of local relevance and 18 were mixed.

Table 6.6.1: Relevance of content: Radio Sagarmatha

Content Category	Local	National	Mixed	Total
News-based	0	1	2	3
Educational/informative	16	5	27	48
Music/entertainment	6	0	18	24
Total	22	6	47	75

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Madanpokhara had 39 news programs. Of seven news-based programs, two dealt with local issues while five were on national events/issues. Of 32 educational/informative programs, 21 dealt with local issues while four were on issues of wider or national relevance. The remaining seven programs were mixed. Similarly, of 21 music-based programs, six were of local relevance, five national and 10 mixed. Radio Madanpokhara also had a religious program.

Table 6.6.2: Relevance of content: Radio Madanpokhara

Content Category	Local	National	Mixed	Total
News-based	2	5	0	7
Educational/Informative	21	4	7	32
Music/entertainment	6	5	10	21
Religious program	0	1	0	1
Total	29	15	17	61

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Swargadwari had 43 news programs. Seven of the news-based programs included two with locally relevant content; four were of national relevance and one mixed. Of 36 educational/informative programs, 13 were local, 13 national and 10 mixed. Similarly, of 34 music-based entertainment programs, 10 dealt with locally relevant content, five were of national relevance and 19 were mixed. The station had two religious programs.

Table 6.6.3: Relevance of content: Radio Swargadwari

Content Category	Local	National	Mixed	Total
News-based	2	4	1	7
Educational/Informative	13	13	10	36
Music/entertainment	10	5	19	34
Religious program	0	2	0	2
Total	25	24	30	79

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Bheri FM had 43 news programs. Of the nine news-based programs only one had locally relevant content, seven had content of national relevance and one was mixed. Of 34 educational/informative programs nine were local, 16 national and nine mixed. The station had 40 entertainment programs of which eight had locally relevant content and five, content of national relevance. The remaining programs were of the mixed category. The station had two religious programs.

Table 6.6.4: Relevance of content: Radio Bheri FM

Content Category	Local	National	Mixed	Total
News-based	1	7	1	9
Educational/Informative	9	16	9	34
Music/entertainment	8	5	27	40
Religious program	0	2	0	2
Total	18	31	36	85

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

6.7 Programs in prime listening time

The study grouped programs in terms of the prime listening hours.

Radio Sagarmatha had two news-based programs (*Radio Khabar Patrika* and *Halchal*) during the prime listening hours of the morning. The program *Halchal* is broadcast for 15

minutes every day and adds up to 105 minutes. *Radio Khabar Patrika* is broadcasts for 75 minutes daily or 525 minutes each week. The station produced the program.

Table 6.7.1a: Prime time AM programming on Radio Sagarmatha

Program	Minutes per week	Producer
Radio Khabar Patrika	525 (6:00-7:15)	Local
Halchal	105 (8:45-9:00)	Local
Total	630	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Table 6.7.1b: Prime time PM programming on Radio Sagarmatha

Program	Minutes per week	Producer
Halchal	210 (6.45-7.15)	Local
BBC Nepali	210 (8.45-9.15)	BBC
Halchal	105 (9.45-10.00)	Local
Total	525	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Sagarmatha had three news-based programs in the evenings. It produced two of the programs, while the third was a BBC production. Overall, the station was producing 60 percent of its news-based programs on prime time.

Radio Madanpokhara had five news-based programs in the prime time in the morning. Two of the programs were based on local activities and were of local relevance. The station carried three news-based programs produced in Kathmandu – news from Radio Nepal, *Kayakairan* produced by the Communication Corner/ Ujjyalo FM and *Nepal Chautari* produced by the Antenna Foundation. In terms of broadcast time, Radio Madanpokhara had 910 minutes of news-based programming in the morning of which 245 minutes (26.9%) was locally produced. Kathmandu-based content producers produced the remaining 665 minutes (73.1%).

Table 6.7.2a: Prime time AM programming on Radio Madanpokhara

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Kayakairan	210 (6.00-6.30)	Communication Corner
Sthaniya Gatibidhi	105 (6.30-6.45)	Local
News Radio Nepal	105 (7.00-7.15)	Radio Nepal
Madanpokhara Halchal	140 (8.00-8.10)	Local
Nepal Chautari	350 (8.10-9.00)	Antenna Foundation
Total	910	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Madanpokhara had six news-based programs in the evening. Of these, the radio produced two programs. Communication Corner produced the remaining two, and BBC Nepali Service and Radio Nepal produced one each. The total news-based program time on the station in the evening was 735 minutes of which the station produced 140 minutes (19%). The remaining 81 percent was produced externally.

Table 6.7.2b: Prime time PM programming on Radio Madanpokhara

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Nepal Khabar	70 (6.00-6.10)	Communication Corner
Sthaniya Gatibidhi	70 (6.30-6.40)	Local
News Radio Nepal	105 (7.00-7.15)	Radio Nepal
Nepal Darpan	210 (8.00-8.30)	Communication Corner
BBC Nepali Service	210 (8.45-9.15)	BBC
Madan Pokhara Halchal	70 (10.00-10.10)	Local
Total	735	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Swargadwari had five news-based programs in the morning of which it produced two news bulletins and *Khaj-Khabar*. Three programs were externally produced. Radio Nepal produced one and Antenna Foundation two. Radio Sagarmatha and Radio

Swargadwari produced one program – *Akhabar/patrapatrika* – jointly.

In terms of broadcast time, Radio Swargadwari had 945 minutes of news-based programs in the morning of which only 70 minutes (7.4%) was locally produced, 48.1 percent was produced externally and 44.5 percent was a joint-production.

Table 6.7.3a: Prime time AM programming on Radio Swargadwari

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Akhabar/patrapatrika	420 (6.00-7.00)	Co-production
News Radio Nepal	105 (7.00-7.15)	Radio Nepal
Bulletin	35 (8.00-8.05)	Local
Nepal Chautari	350 (8.10-9.00)	Antenna Foundation
Khoj Khabar	35 (9.00-9.05)	Local
Total	945	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Swargadwari's evening news-based programming comprised of five programs. The station produced three of them and the remaining two were productions of Radio Nepal and the BBC. In terms of broadcast minutes, 47 percent of the news-based programs were in-house productions and 53 percent of programs were externally produced.

Table 6.7.3b: Prime time PM programming on Radio Swargadwari

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Khoj Khabar	210 (6.00-6.30)	Local
News Radio Nepal	105 (7.00-7.15)	Radio Nepal
Swargadwari Bulletin	35 (8.00-8.05)	Local
BBC Nepali Service	210 (8.45-9.15)	BBC
Swargadwari Bulletin	35 (9.55-10.00)	Local
Total	595	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Radio Bheri FM had six news-based programs in the morning of which two – *Bheri Khabar* and *Bheri Highlights* – were locally produced. The remaining four were productions of Radio Nepal, Anetna Foundation and Communication Corner. In terms of broadcast minutes, the station had 945 minutes of news-based programming of which 25.9 percent was locally produced and external producers supplied the remaining 74.1 percent.

Table 6.7.4a: Prime time AM programming on Radio Bheri

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Kayakairan	210 (6.00-6.30)	Communication Corner
Bheri Khabar	210 (6.30-7.00)	Local
News Radio Nepal	35 (8.00-8.05)	Radio Nepal
Bheri Highlights	35 (8.00-8.05)	Local
Nepal Chautari	385 (8.05-9.00)	Antenna Foundation
Nepal Khabar	70 (9:00-9:10)	Communication Corner
Total	945	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

In the evenings, Radio Bheri had six news-based programs. Of this the radio produced two program while five were externally produced. In terms of broadcast minutes, Radio Bheri had 885 minutes of news-based programming in the evenings of which 210 minutes (23.7%) was locally produced.

Table 6.7.4b: Prime time PM programming on Radio Bheri

Program	Time (m/week)	Producer
Nepal Khabar	70 (6.00-6.10)	Communication Corner
Bheri Khabar	210 (6.30-7.00)	Local
News Radio Nepal	35 (8.00-8.05)	Radio Nepal
Nepal Darpan	210 (8.45-8.30)	Communication Corner
BBC Nepali Service	255 (8:45-9:15)	BBC
Nepal Khabar Highlights	35 (10.55-11.00)	Communication Corner
Total	885	

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

In terms of total news content, Radio Sagarmatha had 1365 minutes of news-based programming of which 84.6 percent was produced in-house. Likewise, Radio Madanpokhara had a total of 1365 minutes of broadcast time allotted to news-based programming of which 735 minutes (46.2%) was supplied by external content providers. Radio Swargadwari had 1155 Minutes of news-based programming of which 36.3 percent was externally produced. That for Radio Bheri was, 1725 minutes, of which external content producers supplied 65.5 percent.

Table 6.8: Summary of prime time news programming (week)

Radio	AM	PM
Radio Sagarmatha	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 630 minutes. (100% internally produced)	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 525 minutes. External production 210 minutes (40%)
Radio Madanpokhara	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 910 minutes. External production 665 minutes (73.07%)	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 735 minutes. External production 595 minutes (80.9%)
Radio Swargadwari	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 945 minutes. External production 455 minutes (48.1%) (Akhabar/ Patrapatrika is a co-production)	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 595 minutes. External production 315 minutes (52.9%)
Radio Bheri FM	Total time allocated for news-based programs: 945 minutes. External production 700 minutes (74.07%)	Total time allocated for news based programs: 885 minutes/ External production 605 minutes (68.4%)

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

Table 6.8a: Total in-house and external programs during prime time (%)

Radio	AM: Time for news-based programs		PM: Time for news-based programs	
	In-house	External	In-house	External
Sagarmatha	630 m. (100%)	0	315 (60%)	210 (40%)
Madanpokhara	245 (26.93%)	665 (73.07%)	140 (19.1%)	595 (80.9%)
Swargadwari	490 (51.9%) Khabar Patrapatrika is a co-production)	455 (48.1%) Khabar Patrapatrika is a co- production	280 (47.1%)	315 (52.9%)
Bheri FM	245 (25.93%)	700 (74.07%)	210 (23.7%)	675 (76.3%)
Total	1610	1820	1015	1795

Source: Fieldwork and program grid

7.0 Discussion

Growth of radio in Nepal has been phenomenal. Except for two stations that have shut down – one in Kathmandu shut down owing to labor disputes another in Makawanpur — most of the stations are still broadcasting. Many others are in different stages of establishment. The content production and distribution sector has also expanded and continues to flourish. What this has meant is that Nepal now has medium that allows communication with populations that were largely unreached, say, 10 years ago. Another trend in broadcasting is the growth of centrally produced content, which now reaches most corners of the country.

News from the BBC Nepali Service continues to be preferred by most stations. The demand for BBC programming could be a result of many factors including the inability of Nepali stations to do the same level/quality of programming and the “if-another-station-has-it-we-should-too” mentality. It is also an irony that stations continue using . BBC Nepal service as it also implies that their own programming is not as good or as professional.

Stations based in the district had more news programming compared to the Kathmandu

station. This also included stations with large rural audiences. The news content was mainly sourced from Kathmandu-based content providers. The situation reflects inability of rural stations to provide programs that could be of more use to their listeners (in terms of development-related programming). This conclusion is an assumption because we could not find studies on rural information needs to cross check. The higher volume of news content perhaps reflects the obsession that those operating the stations have with national politics (which generally is the dominant content of news programs).

The preference for BBC Nepali Service and Kathmandu-produced news and their dominance in terms of volume of total content remains a rarely reported blotch of the successful FM radio movement in Nepal. The stations have therefore failed to deliver to whom they claim to stand for – the local communities. It also underscores the need for greater investment in capacity and institutional development of the stations, a subject that donors – including those that continue to use the radio network to spread development (and sometimes their own public relations content) messages.

Donor support for establishing radio networks, including infrastructure, and for sharing centrally produced content, is partly responsible for the skewed programming. Partly it has resulted from lack of adequate support for developing local capacity and institutions. Where there has been donor support to stations outside Kathmandu, some donors have even required stations to send the names of interviewees in their programs for approval prior to broadcasting. This check was applied to ensure that views of only certain political parties were broadcast. Such influence not only questions the impartiality of the stations but can also put them at risk from attacks by those who have been excluded.

The stations with urban listeners had more entertainment programs. In terms of news-based programming, even though district stations had a higher proportion of news compared to the Kathmandu station, much of the content was externally sourced. Radio Bheri FM, for example, produced only about 29 percent of news-based programs in terms of broadcast minutes. Radio Madanpokhara about 40 percent, Radio Swargadwari about 56 percent and Radio Sagarmatha about 85 percent. The source of external content broadcast on prime time was over 65 percent for two of the district stations while it was around 50 percent for the third station.

Programs become relevant to audiences when they can relate to and understand the content. If language is to be taken as an indicator, most of the programs broadcast on community radios studied, are not fully relevant to the listeners. Radio Sagarmatha has very little programming in the Newar and Tamang languages, the languages of two of the largest social groups in Kathmandu Valley. The Newar are the original inhabitants and the Tamang, who have large numbers in the surrounding hills (which also receive Radio Sagarmatha signals), form a sizeable population of migrant workers. The cosmopolitan nature of the capital city and its outskirts may be reason why Radio Sagarmatha has not thought it proper to increase programming time aimed at the local population groups. Radio

Sagarmatha does have broadcasts in the Maithili/Bhojpuri languages, even though the rationale of having it is unclear, especially in terms of the number of listeners.

The relevance of programming in terms of language is perhaps an appropriate indicator to assess the stations in the districts. Language programming at the stations that were studied was dismal when analyzed in the context of the speakers of different languages residing in the areas reached by the signals. Thus it can safely be assumed that the programs are mostly irrelevant to local language speakers. Even though Nepali language is more or less the *lingua franca* not all can understand the language as well as they would understand their mother tongues. Further, there is the issue of use of highly nuanced Nepali on the programs, which sometimes is difficult even for Nepali mother tongue speakers in different parts of the country to comprehend. This is a subject for a detailed content analysis in the future.

The centrally supplied programs were broadcast mostly during prime time hours. Therefore, stations with more externally produced content, were possibly the least relevant locally. A further, more detailed, assessment of the content of the stations and audience surveys may provide more evidence for supporting such a conclusion. In terms of news flows, centrally produced content still dominates the local radios.

The methodology used by this study for classifying programs is open to debate and may be contested but it was enough to reach some broad conclusions about relevance. While some would argue that news is relevant universally, irrespective of where it is produced, for this study, the notion of “proximity” in news production provides a basis for arguing that locally produced content can be of greater relevance to local audiences. There is therefore need for more in-depth studies of content as well as audience preferences for getting to the bottom of the debate. Such a study can also contribute towards ensuring a wholesome growth of Nepal’s community radios.

Notes

¹ The formal name of the station is *Samudayik Radio Madanpokhara* (Community Radio Madanpokhara).

² Census Report 2001, National Planning Commission

³ Conversation with Ghama Raj Luitel, station manager.

⁴ Radio Madanpokhara, Sanchalan Byavastha ra Bidhan (Operational provisions and constitution), 2053 (unpublished) (The Build Your Village Yourself program was a policy introduced by the government of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) in 1995.)

⁵ Ibid, 2053

⁶ These include programs produced outside the station and those whose broadcast was paid for by sponsors (donors/ Nepali civil society groups).

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Annex

The programs, which have producers or sponsors mentioned, are assumed to be produced externally. Those that do not mention sponsors/producers are taken to be produced in-house. The programs that were categorized as informative/educational for this study were as follows:

Radio Sagarmatha

S.No.	Program	External Producers/Sponsors
1	Batabaran Dabali	
2	Canvas	
3	Baidesik Rojgarima Sachetata	
4	Samantaka Swarharu	
5	Haamro Sarokaar	
6	Radio Kurakani	
7	Baal Chautari	
8	Prakop Chakra	
9	Gharghar Bolchhan	
10	English by Radio	
	Mero Katha	
11	Lukaamaari	
12	Hiddahiddai	
13	Aajaka Kura	
14	Uhile Baajeka Paalaama	
15	Aankhijhyaal	NEFEJ
16	Artha Dabali	
17	Haamro Sanskriti ra Paryartan	
18	Munaasa	
19	Yuva Aawaj	
20	Tamang Kaai	
21	Bhukampiya Suraksha	
22	Siksha Dabali	
23	Katwal	Jagaran Media Centre
24	Pravidhi	
25	Paani ra Sarsaphaai	
26	Bidhiko Saasan	
27	Sambidhansabha Dabali	
28	Khel Patrika Rangasaala	
29	Chharchhimek	
30	Sunau-Bolau	Antenna
31	Garibi Nyunikarankaa laagi Ban	
32	Sanjeevani	
33	Mero Katha	
34	Aarogya	
35	Bhuparidhi	Sponsor

36	Krishi	Education Journalists' Group
37	Sawaari Jagat	
38	Swachchha Pratispardha	
39	English by Radio	
40	Chitikka	
41	Sikshako Naalibeli	
42	Sagarmatha Online	
43	Sahaastitwa	
44	Pirmarka	
45	Basibiyalo	
46	Haamro Baalmandir	
47	Aacharbichaar	
48	Radio Kurakani (Rebroadcast)	

Radio Bheri

S.No.	Program	External Producers/Sponsors
1	Aama	Sponsor
2	Ojrar Dagar	
3	UNMIN ko Boli	Communication Corner
4	Karmayogika Kathaharu	Sponsor
5	Naya Baato Naya Paaila	Antenna
6	Asal Saasan	Pro-Public
7	Ujjyaalotira	
8	Sunau Bolau	Antenna/Radio
9	Kheldai Sikdai	Equal Access/Radio
10	Naya Nepal	Equal Access
11	Shanti Loktantra	Bheri Aawaj/Radio
12	Upaaya	Equal Access
13	Samarpan	
14	Haamro Abhiyaan	Equal Access
15	Gafsap	
16	Samjhahauni Birsaauni	
17	Kaane Myaakcho Laam	
18	Suchana Pravidhi	
19	Kaamka Kura	
20	Griha Baatika	
21	Shanti Yaatra	
22	Krishak	
23	Sabaika Kura	Equal Access
24	Samaya Sandarbha	
25	Katwal	Jagaran Media Centre
26	Haamro Majheri	
27	Haamro Siksha	Education Journalists' Group
28	CMC, Naya Nepal	Equal Access

29	Saajha Chautari	
30	Janajati Aawaj	Janajati Mahasangh
31	Saathika Kura	
32	Bikash Chautari	Equal Access
33	Desh-Parades	Equal Access

Radio Swargadwari

S.No.	Program	External Producers/Sponsors
1	Prajanan Ra Swasthya	
2	Des Prades	
	Yaatra America	Equal Access /Antenna
3	Kabila	
4	Chirphaar	
5	Naya Baato Naya Paaila	Antenna
6	Jeevan Yaatra	
7	Chwaassa Chussa	
8	Diyaalo	
9	Aajakaa Kura	
10	Sachetanaa	
11	Milijuli Sikau	Equal Access
12	Mahila Sansar	
13	Kaamkaa Kura	Equal Access
14	Viswa Chakra	
15	Shanti Jaagaran	HARPLES
16	Sanskriti ra Paryatan	
17	Mahila Aawaj	
18	Purana Kura Naya Nepal	Equal Access
19	Haamro Adhikaar Haamro Sarokaar	Creative Media Group
20	Samaya Sandarbha	
21	Mero Jeevan Mero Vishwas	Antenna
22	Sabaika Kura	Equal Access
23	Naya Nepal	Equal Access
24	Anubhav ra Anubhuti	
25	Artha Bazar	
26	Sahasaktikaran	
27	Shanti Yaatra	
28	Indreni	
29	Saathisaga Manka Kura	Equal Access
30	Samajhdaari	Equal Access
31	Dalit Aawaj	
32	Saanu Saathi	
33	Karmayogika Katha	Antenna
34	Saikshik Jaagaran	

Radio Madanpokhara

S.No.	Program	External Producers/Sponsors
1	INSEC Manavadhikar	INSEC
2	Saaiko Bela	
3	Utpeedit Aawaj	
4	Radio Talk	
5	Mahila Sansar	
6	Sawaari Yaatra	
7	Ghar Pariwar	
8	Kutir Uddhyog	
9	Watawaran	
10	Parikaar	
11	Simaapaariko Sandes	
12	Paribes Bolchha	
13	Krishak Adhikaar	
14	Baal Phulbaari	
15	Baadbivaad	
16	Maadiko Paahur	
17	Naya Baato Naya Paaila	
18	Kisaan Bolchha	
19	Jeevanko Jimmewaari	
20	Kaanunglaam	Education Journalist Group
21	Haamro Siksha	
22	Palpa Bikash Sandesh	Equal Access
23	Naya Nepal	
24	Pasu Sewa Sandesh	Equal Access
25	Apanga Sachetana	
26	Moolbatiya	
27	Haatemaalo	
28	Radio Browsing	
29	Haamro Paathsaala	
30	Jeevanko Goretoma	
31	Aakriti	
32	Seemapaariko Sandesh	

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नेवापस

