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## NEPAL TRANSITION INITIATIVE

AUGUST 16, 2006 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

**SEPTEMBER 30, 2009**

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PHOTO: NEPALAYA

A boy stands beneath the bus that transported the traveling A People War exhibition.

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Contract No. DOT-I-00-03-00005-00, Task Order 2



**A community in a remote mountain village participates in a radio dialogue about the peace process. Using traditional porters' baskets (*dokos*), the NTI program brought equipment to radio-blind areas to enable communities to record and broadcast radio programs.**

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All photos are courtesy of the NTI program unless otherwise indicated.

**FRONT COVER:** A Madeshi woman teaches a Pahadi woman to paint in the traditional Mithila style. Groups of women from different ethnic groups painted scenes of peace in public places throughout the volatile *terai* to advance communal harmony.

**BACK COVER:** Women in the *terai* reporting to their group during training on their roles in Nepal's peace process. The NTI program viewed women as critical target actors who were more likely than men to share what they learned with family and friends.



Nepal's future will be determined by how well the Constituent Assembly can write a truly inclusive constitution that meets the needs of all Nepalis – no matter their ethnicity or religion.

# ACRONYMS

<b>CCD</b>	Centre for Constitutional Dialogue
<b>CDF</b>	Community Development Fund
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
<b>NGO</b>	nongovernmental organization
<b>NTI</b>	Nepal Transition Initiative
<b>OTI</b>	Office of Transition Initiatives
<b>PSA</b>	public service announcement
<b>SWIFT</b>	Support Which Implements a Fast Transition
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>UNMIN</b>	United Nations Mission in Nepal
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development



**Children viewing a Mithila painting portraying communal harmony. The NTI program used traditional art forms to reach a broad audience.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After a decade of conflict, the Government of Nepal and the Maoist rebels signed a landmark peace agreement in November 2006 that created a road map for sustainable peace. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) helped increase awareness of transition issues and encourage Nepal's citizens to engage actively in the peace process.

Through the Support Which Implements a Fast Transition (SWIFT) II contracting mechanism, USAID/OTI created a support program to assist with Nepal's peace process and challenging political transition. The Nepal Transition Initiative (NTI) was a small-grants program designed to stabilize volatile communities, support the election of a Constituent Assembly, raise awareness about the country's key political agreements, and strengthen Nepal's media. The three-year (2006–

2009) program made significant contributions to Nepal's transition from conflict to its current path to peace and development.

NTI focused on supporting three key elements of the political transition: the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), the election of a Constituent Assembly, and the writing of a new constitution. In determining appropriate interventions, programming took into account such national and local trends as the rise in ethnic-based politics and the frustration of Nepalis who felt disengaged from the peace process. Although in broad terms the NTI program viewed its ultimate role as supporting a peaceful, democratic transition, its targeted objectives were to:

1. Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to the political transition

2. Increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process<sup>1</sup>

Although the signing of the CPA was widely celebrated, regions of Nepal without access to radio, television, or newspapers did not receive the news for days or weeks. Nepal is severely challenged by its topography, lack of transportation, and poor communication infrastructure. Its population is linguistically diverse. Under the assumption that an informed populace would be more likely to support the peace process, the NTI program emphasized increasing access to information on critical transition agreements. NTI established a network of so-called local peace volunteers to facilitate dialogues about the peace process within their communities. Local radio stations received equipment and training that enabled them to present national-level issues to listeners in their own languages. Small community radio stations were supported in the remotest mountain regions to bring information to all Nepalese citizens. In terms of information about the transition, NTI lived the slogan “more is better.”

Not unexpectedly, Nepal’s peace process created high expectations among its citizens. During the conflict, local government services were severely limited in most rural areas (many communities

were without any significant local development for nearly 10 years). In addition, many ethnic, caste, and religious groups quickly realized that the peace process and rewriting of the constitution provided an opportunity to address long-held grievances and increase their representation at the central level. These unrealistic expectations quickly led to frustration that often escalated into protests and violence. Community stabilization activities, especially in the eastern and central *terai* (southern plains) became a significant focus of the NTI program late in the first year. The program made a strategic decision to target youth, who were especially active in the political transition, after a series of basic assessments. As a major component of the community stabilization sector, the program mobilized more than 123,000 youth across the eastern and central *terai* to implement small-scale infrastructure projects under community development fund activities. NTI also trained 900 youth facilitators to teach their communities about their right to government services through a citizen charter campaign.

The Constituent Assembly election in April 2008 was the first nationwide balloting since the early years of the Maoist insurgency. The assembly was elected to write a new constitution and determine the future of the nation’s governance.

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<sup>1</sup> The original second objective was “increase effectiveness of key political institutions.” In January 2008, the NTI program revised this objective to better reflect the political reality that, at that time, most key transition-related institutions were not functioning.

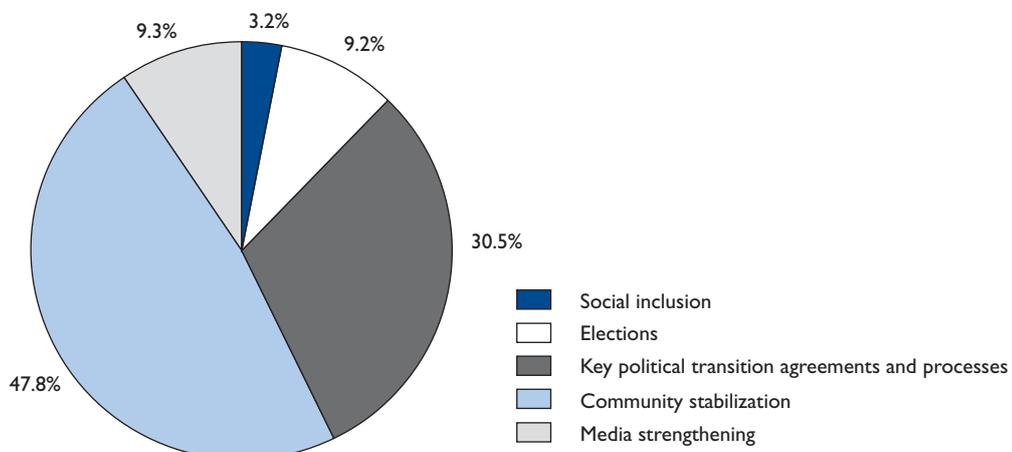
At the national level, NTI supported Nepal’s Election Commission by establishing the first media center used during an election. NTI also produced and aired thousands of voter education public service announcements (PSAs) throughout the country. With an established field office, the NTI program was uniquely placed to help disseminate voter education materials in rural communities in the eastern *terai*. For many communities, NTI’s election activities offered the only way to learn about the election process and its significance to Nepal and its citizens.

In its first year, the NTI program recognized the importance of a strong media sector. To support Nepal’s fragile transition, the media needed assistance to disseminate information broadly and effectively. Equipment and training were provided to enable radio stations to increase pro-

gramming capabilities. NTI support made possible Nepal’s first live, nationwide, toll-free call-in radio program, *Nepal Chautari*. Radio-poor areas were targeted by providing local radio stations with larger transmitters. Journalists were trained on their roles in a democracy and a professional code of conduct. A USAID/OTI-funded assessment revealed that NTI had significant impacts on the media sector through innovative activities and its focus on linking national and local media.

Major challenges remain as Nepal struggles to address the most sensitive steps outlined under the CPA while managing growing ethnic fragmentation. The Government of Nepal and the international community recognize the importance and viability of the CPA as a guide to attaining sustainable peace. Once these challenges are overcome, the country can move toward economic growth and the promise of the “New Nepal.”

### NTI SECTOR FOCUS: LIFE OF PROJECT



During severe water shortages in Kathmandu, the NTI program worked with a local sanitation organization to distribute water from trucks on which graphic messages were posted. Along with drinking water, Nepalis received messages about sanitation and reminders to engage in the peace process.



### SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Partnered with and developed capacity of 180 local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), of which approximately 60 percent received donor funding for the first time
- Developed capacity of 48 core staff, including 19 youth hired from the eastern and central *terai* region
- Provided more than 20,000 youth with training in conflict mitigation, psychosocial counseling, and local transition-related facilitation
- Communicated the cost of war to more than 300,000 people through *A People War*, a traveling exhibition of photographs by Nepali photographers
- Created *My Life, My Belief*, a radio program based on U.S. National Public Radio's *This I Believe*

### COMMUNITY STABILIZATION

- Mobilized more than 123,000 youth across the eastern and central *terai* for community stabilization activities
- Rehabilitated local infrastructure in 455 communities in 11 districts; communities averaged a 96 percent match of NTI funds

### RAISING AWARENESS ON KEY TRANSITION DOCUMENTS AND ELECTION SUPPORT

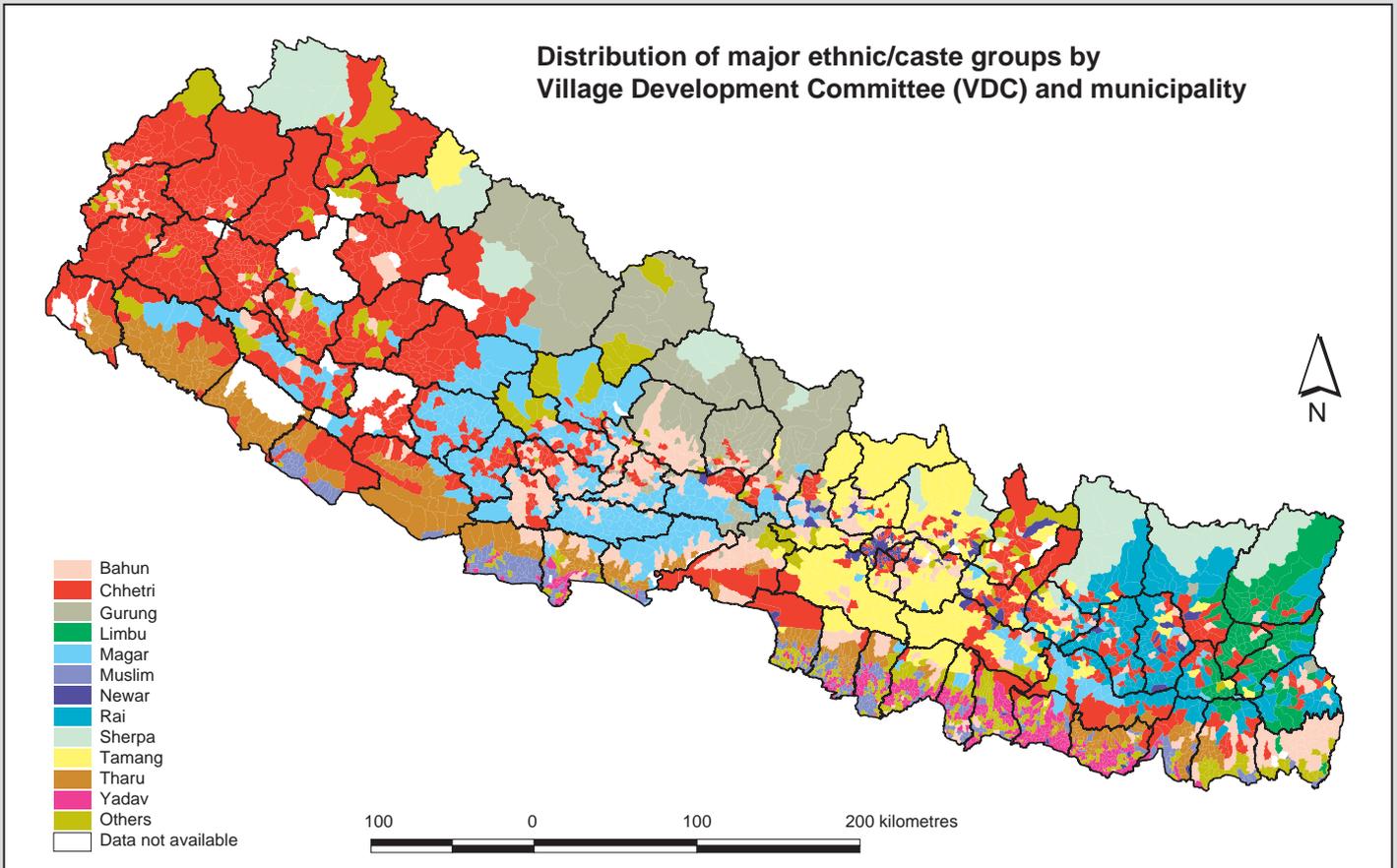
- Designed, produced, and distributed approximately 7 million printed materials
  - 5.2 million invitations to registered voters to encourage participation in the election

- 600,000 posters, brochures, and booklets in support of the election and transition
  - 10,000 music cassettes provided to school children to promote peace
  - 60,800 copies of a manual explaining the process for counting ballots and releasing results
  - 500 PSAs produced for television, radio, and cinema and collectively aired several thousand times in support of key political transition agreements
  - 146 television and radio PSAs concerning the Constituent Assembly election developed in Nepali and more than a dozen local languages
  - 60,000 people in five radio-blind remote mountain districts reached through the use of *doko* mobile radio units
- in radio show, *Nepal Chautari*, which was transmitted over 53 radio stations
- Supported the first live, toll-free call-in talk show outside Kathmandu, which was replicated in local languages across the country
  - Provided 45 radio stations with digital audio broadcast receivers to expand access to information on Nepal's transition
  - Provided equipment support and training to 32 radio stations to increase programming capacity
  - With the country's most popular comedy duo, produced a television series educating viewers about the peace process
  - Created the first media center used for a Nepali election, which allowed the Election Commission to provide accurate information about the election and its results

#### **MEDIA STRENGTHENING**

- Supported development of the first nationwide, toll-free call-

Distribution of major ethnic/caste groups by Village Development Committee (VDC) and municipality



SOURCE: Pitamber Sharma, "Unraveling the Mosaic: Spatial Aspects of Ethnicity in Nepal," Himal Books, 2008, page 20.

Nepal is a true ethnic mosaic with more than 100 recognized ethnic groups. Many of these groups have protested — some violently — to pressure the Constituent Assembly to recognize their cultures and identities in the new constitution. One of Nepal's greatest challenges will be maintaining communal harmony while building a more inclusive "New Nepal."

# INTRODUCTION

## OTI MISSION

The mission of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is to support U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Seizing critical windows of opportunity, OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs.

Emerging from a decade of conflict in which 13,000 people were killed, an already fragile economy severely hampered, and ethnic sentiments enflamed, Nepal faces many obstacles on the difficult path to peace. A deep mistrust among political leaders who were on opposite sides during the conflict has inhibited cooperation and consensus. Nepal's diverse population (see facing map) yearns for peace and is impatient with political wrangling. Many of the country's ethnic, caste, and religious groups seized the opportunity to press for Nepal's new constitution to redress their grievances. More than ever, Nepal needed innovative approaches to address the political, economic, and humanitarian consequences of the debilitating conflict.

Soon after the May 2006 ceasefire signed by the Maoists and the Government of Nepal, USAID created a program through its Office of

Transition Initiatives to provide innovative support for Nepal's peace process and assist the country in its post-conflict transition. USAID/OTI commenced its program at the request of, and in close coordination with, the U.S. Embassy and the USAID Mission to Nepal. By July 2006, OTI had executed four grants to support the ceasefire agreement. That August, Chemonics International was selected as USAID/OTI's implementing partner through a competitive bidding process and opened an office in Kathmandu.<sup>1</sup>

With an in-kind grants mechanism, targeted short-term technical assistance, and system of rolling political assessments, the NTI program was uniquely positioned to fill critical gaps and catalyze the peace process. After three years, NTI has surpassed expectations and became a model for future OTI programs around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> OTI managed the program directly in June and July 2006 while the procurement decision was being made. Chemonics opened its office in Kathmandu in August.



**Community members debate transition issues during a recorded radio program. NTIs strategy of working with local radio stations gave more Nepalis a voice in the peace process.**

## CHAPTER ONE

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### **SPEAKING OF DIVERSITY**

The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities has identified 125 languages spoken in Nepal. More than half of the population speak one of these languages rather than Nepali as their mother tongue.

Nepal has undergone a rapid social and political transition in the past two decades. A decade-long Maoist insurgency took root and then ended with the signing of a landmark peace agreement, an election that was internationally recognized as free and fair ushered in a Maoist-led government, and a deeply entrenched monarchic system that had governed social and political life for centuries was dismantled. A new constitution is being created to introduce and guide an administrative system that addresses Nepal's diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic makeup fairly. Events of the past three years have shown that Nepal is undergoing a deep transformation that will lead either to further conflict or to long-lasting peace and democracy.

In 1990, the people of Nepal and the country's major political parties staged the *Janandolan* (People's Movement) that ush-

ered in multiparty democracy. Although the monarchy retained ultimate control, Nepal installed a more representative parliamentary structure, and its people had a stronger voice in how they were governed. During this time, a group of disgruntled Communist politicians broke from mainstream politics and started an armed uprising in the remote mid-western region of the country — the so-called people's war.

By 2001, this Maoist insurgency had gained strength, and violence and attacks against the state had moved from rural parts of the west throughout the country. In that year, Crown Prince Dipendra allegedly killed nine members of the royal family before committing suicide. These events traumatized the nation, energized the Maoist movement, and led to the installation of the slain king's brother, Gyanendra, as the new monarch.

During the next five years, the Maoists intensified their activities throughout Nepal. Insurgents attacked police posts, ambushed patrols, and targeted political leaders. During this period, a series of ceasefires between the government and the insurgents was intended to create opportunities to discuss ways to end the violence. The Maoists used each ceasefire to regroup, growing stronger and more daring each time the peace talks failed.

The situation peaked in early 2005. After a second round of major peace talks failed, the king declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament again, and seized executive power. In the following year, the army battled the Maoists throughout the country. Although the military was better armed, the Maoists' guerrilla tactics and public support in rural areas proved daunting. Each side brutalized supporters of opposing forces. By the end of the conflict, an estimated

13,000 people — most of them civilians — had been killed.

The events of April 2006 were the turning point for Nepal's political situation. Protests erupted in Kathmandu and spread throughout the country. This *Janandolan II* — the second People's Movement — forced Gyanendra to restore parliament, brought Maoists and political parties together for peace talks, and effectively ended the 200-year-old monarchy. By May, the government and the Maoist insurgents had signed a ceasefire code of conduct and arms management agreement. On November 21, the Government of Nepal and the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, a 12-point understanding outlining processes for creating an interim constitution, integrating the Nepal Army and the Maoist People's Liberation Army, and electing the Constituent Assembly that would write a new, permanent constitution.

## TIMELINE OF CRITICAL EVENTS

April-May 2006	November 2006	January 2006	January 2007	June 2007
<p><i>Janandolan II</i> (People's Movement)</p> <p>Multiparty democracy restored</p> <p>Ceasefire between Maoists and Government of Nepal</p>	<p>Comprehensive peace agreement signed</p>	<p>Interim constitution promulgated</p>	<p>First identity-based movements in <i>terai</i> (Madhesh Andolan I)</p>	<p>Constituent Assembly election postponed until November 2007</p>

OTI begins program (June 2006)

Chemonics opens Kathmandu office (August 2006)

Itahari field office opens (July 2007)

## MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY

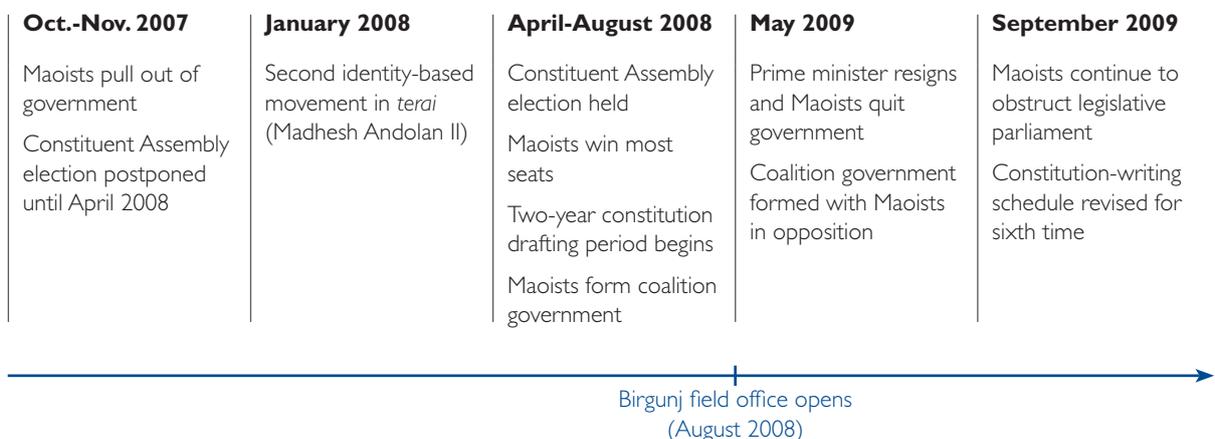
Since the first Janandolan in 1990, Nepal's multiparty democracy has flourished. Seventy parties registered candidates for the Constituent Assembly election.

After the ceasefire, the United Nations established a mission in Nepal, UNMIN, to monitor the arms management agreement and observe activities of the two militaries. The CPA specified that soldiers of the Nepal Army be confined to their barracks and members of the People's Liberation Army restricted to cantonments throughout the country. UNMIN soon began the lengthy and politically complex task of registering and verifying the status of Maoist combatants in cantonments. Determining what to do with the combatants has remained a major obstacle to the peace process. The Maoists demanded integration of verified combatants into the Nepal Army, but the major political parties have so far refused to consider this as a viable option.

*Janandolan II* culminated in the signing of the CPA, restoration of a multiparty democracy — and, seemingly, a country on the path to peace and security. The CPA mandated election of a new

legislative body, the Constituent Assembly, that would write the new constitution, decide the fate of the monarchy, restructure the state, and address the grievances of ethnic, religious, and caste-based groups. Citizens' expectations skyrocketed.

Within two months after the CPA was signed, the first major ethnic-based agitation occurred among the Madhesi people in the *terai*, Nepal's "bread basket" and commercial hub. The first *Madhesh Andolan* (Madhesi uprising) in January 2007 was sparked by bloody confrontations between Maoist supporters and Madhesi activists campaigning for representation in the new constitution. Within days, thousands of Madhesis took to the streets of the central and eastern *terai*, beginning what was to become an ethnic rights movement. New regional political parties formed. Armed underground groups became more active, threatening and committing violent acts against



other ethnic groups, especially the historically dominant hill groups. These events changed Nepal's political dynamic as people in the *terai* mobilized to claim their ethnic rights and the Madhesi movement captured the attention of other marginalized groups throughout Nepal.

Although the political parties, including the Maoists, formed a coalition government after the signing of the CPA, reaching consensus was difficult and time-consuming. In spring 2007, the government announced that an election would be held in June. In May, the election was postponed until November because of political disagreements. In October, the Maoists were unhappy with the direction of the peace process, the coalition government was falling apart, and the election was postponed again. By December, the parties had bridged their differences, and elections were rescheduled for April 2008. The public — including agitating ethnic groups — had long since grown impatient.

In January 2008, Madhesis repeated their earlier demand that the entire *terai* be recognized as a single Madhesi state in the new constitution with proportional representation in all state bodies. In this second *Madhesh Andolan*, thousands blocked the east-west

highway that is the country's main transportation artery, preventing movement of goods and people. During the 16-day protest, nine people were killed and hundreds hurt. Ultimately, a new agreement between Madhesi leaders and the government paved the way for the country to elect the Constituent Assembly.

The April 2008 election was largely peaceful, and international observers declared it free and fair — an important step in the peace process. Voter turnout was the highest in Nepal's history. Defying most predictions, Maoists won more than 33 percent of seats in the assembly, emerging as its largest bloc by a wide margin. By August, the Maoist party had formed a government with the support of several other left-leaning parties.

The passionate campaigning by all political parties and the election itself had at least one unanticipated result. Ethnic tension was exacerbated by candidates' promises of representation and a more inclusive system for marginalized ethnic, religious, or caste-based groups.<sup>1</sup> Election results showed that this strategy worked broadly: parties that campaigned in ethnic-majority states on issues of concern to marginalized communities (primarily Maoists and Madhesis) received the most votes.

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1 In Nepal's multi-faceted society, one can be labeled as a member of a caste as well as a specific ethnic group. Although abolished in Nepal more than 50 years ago, the hierarchical Hindu caste system continues, especially among conservative Hindus. "Untouchable" Dalits, often characterized as the most oppressed of Nepal's castes, are members of various ethnic groups, so they are identified by both designations. Identity is a major issue in Nepal's peace process as various groups press for their rights in the new constitution.

## THE “NEW NEPAL”

Despite the slow pace of the peace process that serves as a reminder of the many issues not yet fully addressed, Nepalis share a vision of a democratic, peaceful, and inclusive society in the post-conflict period — the “New Nepal.”

Most of Nepal’s more than 100 officially recognized ethnic groups viewed the election and plans for creation of a new constitution as a chance to exercise their rights in the “New Nepal.” Following the election, identity-based movements gained strength throughout the country. Larger groups, including the Limbus in the eastern hills and Tharus throughout the *terai*, were especially effective at organizing and carrying out protests that led to agreements with the government and assurances of their rights under the new constitution.<sup>2</sup> Smaller groups, such as the Lepchas in Ilam district, also organized to demand separate, identity-based states. Whether the ethnic groups’ stated needs are met and their rights recognized will be revealed in the eagerly awaited first draft of the constitution.

In May 2009, after only nine months in power, the Maoist-led government quit amid disagreements about the tenure of the chief of army staff, an indirect result of a stalemate over the reintegration of the Maoist fighters into the Nepal Army. A coalition government was formed under the leadership of the third-largest party, the United Marxist-Leninists. The Maoists remained in opposition, launched protests against the new government, effectively obstructed all parliamentary proceedings, and slowed the writing of the new constitution.

Political wrangling and unexpected hurdles, along with weak governing coalitions and changes in leadership, all have delayed the constitution-writing process. The political standoff continued into September 2009, and the writing of the constitution seems certain to extend past the expected end date of May 2010.

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2. Agreements between the government and specific groups often conflict with each other and have yet to be implemented.



After the traumatic 10-year conflict, the NTI program found humor an effective means of sharing information about sensitive, transition-related topics. Local drama groups attracted audiences throughout Nepal.

## CHAPTER TWO

# POLITICAL TRANSITION SUPPORT

Political transitions bring both challenges and opportunities. In the past three years, Nepal ended a Maoist insurgency, removed its monarchy, and began writing a new constitution that promises to change the system of governance and structure of the state. Although sporadic violence and innumerable obstacles remain, the transition has been a remarkable achievement by the people of Nepal.

### **NTI RESPONSE**

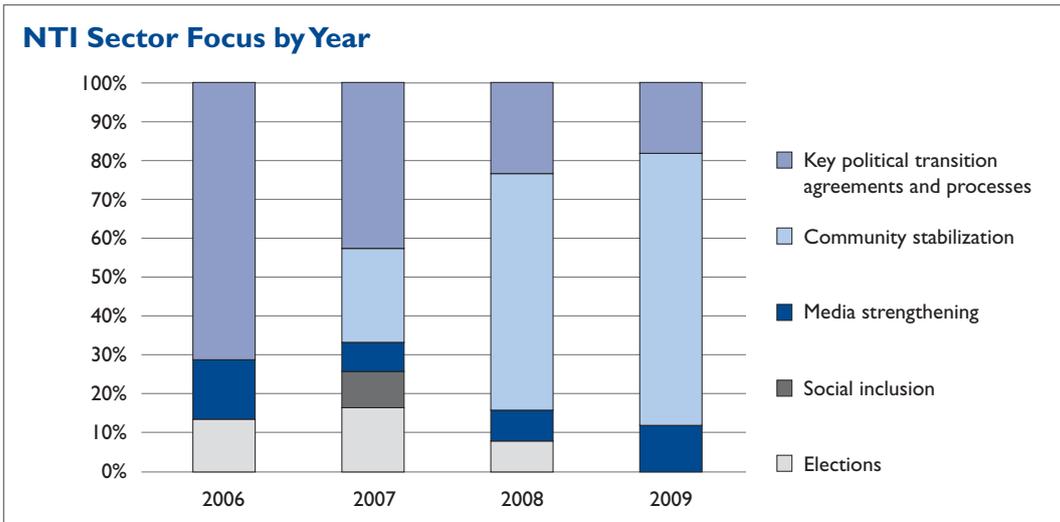
Within this evolving context, the NTI program made flexibility and creativity priorities in a quickly changing and uncertain environment. NTI planned programming around critical milestones and events in the peace process through a multipronged and phased approach. At the same time, the program addressed emerging trends and underlying causes inherent in post-conflict, political transitions.

The NTI program identified five sectors in which to focus activities:

1. Key political transition agreements and processes
2. Community stabilization
3. Media strengthening
4. Social inclusion
5. Elections

The NTI program addressed issues strategically as rapidly as they arose — by shifting objectives when necessary, allocating funds to specific sectors to meet those objectives, trying new approaches, and maintaining good networks with critical partners so grants could be awarded at strategic times.

In late 2007 and in the lead-up to the Constituent Assembly election in April 2008, many activities focused on demand at the national level to disseminate information about the peace agreement and election. OTI issued 20 grants



in the election sector, including seven to Nepal’s Election Commission. In June 2008, following the election, NTI revised Objective 2 from “increase effectiveness of key political institutions” to “increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.” The change reflected the fact that the political institutions had not been established and oft-cited demands for social inclusion and government attention to basic needs, especially in the eastern and central *terai*, had not been met.

NTI also transformed the social inclusion sector into a cross-cutting theme in the OTI activity database after the program’s first quarter, accounting for the zero expenditure for the remainder of the project period. Because social inclusion was at the root cause of the conflict in the *terai*, the decision was made that it should be a cross-cutting focus of most NTI grants.

During the past three years, NTI has initiated programming around specific events:

1. The signing of the CPA
2. Events leading to and following the Constituent Assembly election
3. The writing of the new constitution

During the same period, NTI identified trends and underlying issues of strategic importance to accomplishing program goals and contributing to restoration of peace and democracy in Nepal. The hierarchical nature of Nepali society and increasing social and political fragmentation throughout the program period as a result of identity politics led NTI to integrate community cohesion and stabilization activities within its small grants program. At certain points (and for certain activities) it became clear that targeting specific populations, such as youth and women, was essential to address potential impediments to the peace process. Some activities also built on critical local and national

### OTI ACTIVITY DATABASE

As a best practice, OTI uses a grants database for each of its programs. The database houses the electronic record for each grant, including daily implementation notes, financial data, success stories, and other information. A copy of the database is submitted to OTI/ Washington weekly to share current information on the grants and overall program.

developments to complement or address gaps in the work of the government, donors, and other international agencies.

### **NTI APPROACH**

For staffing and program structure, communications, and assessing and understanding local political dynamics, NTI followed the OTI model used throughout the world. The program also initiated innovative approaches to remain relevant and responsive to unfolding developments and contribute to OTI and USAID strategic planning.

To keep programming relevant and timely, OTI and Chemonics staff participated in monthly expanded program sessions to review objectives and programmatic direction and absorb lessons learned from the field office and other OTI programs. During these half-day meetings, Kathmandu and programmatic field-office staff conducted rolling assessments of the political transition. Team members identified critical events and emerging issues, discussed probable scenarios for the coming months, and designed activities to address the most pressing issues affecting the transition.

All staff spent also at least two days each quarter in strategy review sessions to appraise the program's objectives and strategic direction, reflect on the relevance and success of past grants, and assess the political transition. Participants made recommendations for the program as a whole and for activity-level interventions to address Nepal's political evolution. NTI often invited outside experts to discuss topics of interest to the program.

The NTI program benefited from smooth working relationships and good communication with and between OTI and Chemonics leadership. Senior management (OTI's country representative and deputy country representative and Chemonics' chief and deputy chief of party) used weekly discussions to review operational and programmatic issues and maintain ongoing communication to ensure mutual understanding and support for the program's overall direction.

To gather timely and relevant information and assess progress, the program relied on local and national-level sources. Technical specialists and targeted assessments contributed to planning. For example, a Nepali research firm assessed NTI's media interventions to focus future programming. Analysis of trends in the *terai* by a post-conflict specialist with experience in the region influenced the types and modes of programming needed. A monitoring and evaluation specialist assessed means and methods of collecting information to evaluate success and attribution of the program's small grants, specifically a series of grants implementing small-scale infrastructure activities.

At the local level, NTI understood the need to keep abreast of the rapidly evolving situation in Nepal. To better understand fluid political developments in target districts, the program recruited 19 youth from the central and eastern *terai* to serve as community mobilizers and evaluate local program activities. After receiving training in participatory rural appraisal and facilitation techniques, the mobilizers collected baseline information on major

issues facing their districts and community groups, monitored activities, and reported weekly on the security situation in each district.

### NTI REACH

During NTI's inception and early stages, activities focused at the national level (Year 1 activity map), largely to respond to and support the government and mobilize around recent and unfolding events. After the first year, it became increasingly clear that the epicenter of violence and potential for conflict had shifted from areas formerly held by Maoists (which had become generally stable) to the eastern *terai* (Year 2 activity map). In response to the first *Madhesh Andolan*, programming focused more on that region. After a series of assessments, the

NTI program determined that the eastern *terai* could have the greatest negative impact on the peace process. Therefore, the program opened the Itahari field office in July 2007 to allow NTI to work directly with community-based organizations and local NGOs in areas where many donors did not work and where violent protests had occurred earlier in the year. A flexible approach to programming allowed geographic and program focus in response to emerging "hot spots" and evolving events. This capability was enhanced when the program opened a satellite office in Birgunj in 2008. Through these offices, the NTI program worked with local organizations at the community level in 10 districts of Nepal's most volatile region (Year 3 activity map).

## YEAR 1 ACTIVITY COVERAGE SNAPSHOT (SEPTEMBER 2007)



## YEAR 2 ACTIVITY COVERAGE SNAPSHOT (SEPTEMBER 2008)



## YEAR 3 ACTIVITY COVERAGE SNAPSHOT (SEPTEMBER 2009)





**Nepal's terrain is a challenge, especially when attempting to reach remote communities with complex information.**



Youth in Makwanpur district discuss a small infrastructure activity. NTI mobilized more than 120,000 youth across 11 districts of the *terai* to implement community development activities.

“ The 19 community mobilizers, employed as part of the program’s July 2008 “scale-up” in the *terai*, have supported both program objectives. In the case of Objective 1, the mobilizers have enabled OTI to keep pace with emergent issues in the *terai*. They have served the valuable function of monitoring activities, reporting on local current events, and holding focus groups to assess community needs. This enabled OTI to design activities according to the actual needs and realities on the ground. With regard to Objective 2, and perhaps more importantly, community mobilizers are creating a visible presence in the districts and thus are seemingly addressing the long-held sense of abandonment by government and development actors. ”

2008 OTI Program Performance Review



**Women in a remote village learn about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement from the NTI program's adaptation of an easy-to-read booklet.**

## CHAPTER THREE

# KEY POLITICAL TRANSITION AGREEMENTS AND PROCESSES

### KNOWLEDGE MOTIVATES CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT

During the program period, NTI disseminated more than seven million printed materials designed to increase access to information and encourage Nepalis to engage in the peace process. The materials, developed in a number of languages, included government agreements, election and voting information, the interim constitution, and citizens' charters.

### CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

NTI initially planned activities around agreements and processes that the government had identified as milestones for political development and the restoration of peace.

In May 2006, Maoist insurgents and the Government of Nepal signed a 25-point code of conduct outlining the conditions for conducting peace talks and ending the country's decade-long conflict. Later that year, Maoists and the Government of Nepal signed the CPA, which formally ended the conflict and mandated creation of a new constitution. Nepal now had to bridge bitter political divides, heal ethnic divisions, and address the public's high expectations. The government's first challenge was to disseminate accurate and timely information about the peace agreement and its implications

to a public that distrusted it as well as the former insurgents. Of paramount importance was communicating in ways that the country's linguistically diverse and largely illiterate population could understand — and doing so efficiently across rugged terrain and an infrastructure in disarray after the conflict.

In January 2007, Nepal's parliament promulgated an interim constitution. During the same period, ethnic divisions fomented during the insurgency reignited in the central and eastern *terai*. Madhesis' protests evolved into the first *Madhesh Andolan* — the earliest of many ethnic-based movements to develop during the next two years. The political parties had expressed the need for a federal structure and more inclusive governance, and the interim constitution codified these principles. However, frustrated by perceived suppression,

Nepal's ethnic minorities began organizing to demand that the new constitution recognize their rights. Nepal's peace process was thus transformed from a complex negotiation on the reintegration of Maoist insurgents and state restructuring to the airing of ethnic and caste-based groups' grievances against the state. Communications on the peace process and the CPA now needed to address the demands of identity-based movements while encouraging Nepalis to stay engaged.

The election of the Constituent Assembly was the next challenge. Ethnic tensions ran high during the election period (including the two postponed elections). Political parties and their supporters engaged in inflammatory rhetoric. The public was eager to learn about the election process and the assembly's role, but again demanded information in local languages. Thus, preparing and distributing information was more complex and time-consuming.

Ethnic fragmentation continued after the election. In almost every region of Nepal, well-organized, ethnic-based groups demanded their own states in the new republic and proportional representation at the national level. These movements challenged the reach of the central government and reduced the effectiveness of local government. In many regions, local governments shut down or stopped serving constituents because armed wings of ethnic groups created unsafe environments. Corruption increased exponentially; opportunistic

political parties, government officials, and armed political and criminal groups became more visible and active. This situation led to another critical challenge: the need to make citizens more aware of their rights and responsibilities in a democracy while minimizing pressure on Nepal's delicate transition to peace.

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

Nepal has diverse ethnic groups, languages, and topography. To a great extent, the NTI program addressed key political transition agreements and processes by disseminating information as broadly as possible through various media and in multiple languages. Its three-pillared approach focused on supporting the local and national media and promoting dialogues among stakeholders, and supporting the Constituent Assembly's outreach efforts. This approach was tied directly to the program's two objectives: increase access to information and increase local-level engagement in the peace process.

Such formats as call-in radio shows, television serials, and PSAs enabled the program to provide important and timely information on the peace process to millions of people. In the months after the signing of the CPA, many Nepalis remained uninformed about the peace process, preventing them from fully engaging in the debate on the future of their country.

Although more Nepalis have access to radio than television,

the program also used televised serials, PSAs, and talk shows to present information on the peace process and the elections. Television also was used in an effort to manage expectations after the Constituent Assembly election.

Popular in Nepal, comedy proved an effective mechanism for communicating political messages — particularly to audiences with lower literacy. A favorite comedy group, MaHa Sanchar, uses humor for both social and political messaging and has been recognized for its ability to make audiences think critically about political and social issues. The NTI program worked with MaHa Sanchar to develop six television programs and 10 one-minute television PSAs in Nepali and

regional languages, using the group's well-known characters to present post-conflict and transition messages. A number of television stations broadcast the MaHa Sanchar programs in prime time, and the shows were often rebroadcast due to their popularity.

The NTI program used PSAs as simple, effective tools to communicate important messages broadly. At the start of the program, PSAs in movie theaters informed the public about key points of the ceasefire code of conduct. NTI later worked with a Nepali animation company to develop cartoon characters representing broad segments of the population. The characters were used in television PSAs over the life of the program to communicate messages and infor-



**Animated characters representing diverse ethnic communities of Nepal (with Nepali names) appeared in public service announcements to convey messages of peace and security and encourage citizens to vote.**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Comic Performance Communicates Serious Messages



PHOTO: MADAN KRISHNA SHRESTHA AND HARI BANSHA ACHARYA

*Hari Bansa plays Ama (mother) in the television show of the same name. An assessment of NTI's media programming found that 55 percent of television viewers in Kathmandu and the surrounding districts recognized the characters from the team's programs.*

**“What if we do this instead?” asks a comedy series with a serious purpose.**

With the aim of informing people about Nepal's transition and promoting positive attitudes to influence the peace process, USAID/OTI supported a TV series starring Nepal's leading comic duo. MaHa — Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansa Acharya — are known for their comic genius and respected for their democratic convictions. The show, *Madan Bahadur/Hari Bahadur*, depicts the relationship of a conniving villager and his kind-hearted neighbor. Episodes involve such transitional issues in Nepal as the plight of internally displaced people, inclusiveness and social harmony, demonstrations and strikes, the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement, arms management, women's rights, land mines, human rights abuses, victims' compensation, and elections. MaHa's use of humor attracted and held audiences and raised awareness of serious issues.

Broadcast on Kantipur TV, *Madan Bahadur/Hari Bahadur* quickly became one of Nepal's most popular shows, with an estimated 7.5 million viewers. The series, originally planned for 12 episodes, was extended to 15. ACNielsen research revealed that the show's popularity was surpassed only by regular news bulletins.

The show's catchphrase, “*yaso gare kaso hola*” (“what if we do this instead?”) became a part of everyday conversation as well as a common and readily recognized headline for op-eds and editorial cartoons.



Street drama troupe in Dhanusha district performs in the local language. Nontraditional outreach methods like street dramas brought messages of peace and democracy to media-poor areas and illiterate populations.

mation about voter education and manage expectations; later, they appeared in PSAs to encourage respect for the media and its roles and responsibilities during Nepal's transition. In the week before the April 2008 election, the NTI program worked with FM stations in the eastern *terai*. The stations wrote PSAs encouraging patience and nonviolence after the election — regardless of the outcome — and asked candidates running in their listening areas to read the messages for broadcast. Numerous candidates participated, and the stations broadcast the PSAs starting the day after the election.

The NTI program used some nontraditional methods to provide specific audiences with key documents and information. Street

dramas were effective for communicating to illiterate and semi-literate rural audiences. Themes included communal harmony during the tense election period and the negative effects of *bandhs* (protests that shut down transportation and markets) on the local economy. Street dramas in local languages were particularly effective. Three activities in the eastern and central *terai* developed drama scripts based on 24 songs in the Maithili language about communal harmony and the importance of participating in the peace process. Most dramas were presented in rural areas with minimal access to newspapers and television, where they drew large crowds. Within weeks, the songs were broadcast on Nepali radio stations and played on buses and in tea stalls throughout the region.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the country, tea stalls play an important role as public places where people can share information and debate politics.

# SUCCESS STORY

## Supporting Nepal's Constituent Assembly



*Members of civil society organizations debating federal systems with constitutional experts. NTI's equipment and logistics support to the United Nations Development Program helped to accelerate establishment of the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue by several months.*

**NTI provided equipment and logistics support to establish the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue. Without NTI assistance, the Centre's opening would have been delayed by several months.**

After the Constituent Assembly election on April 10, 2008, Nepal took another step forward on the road to peace — and NTI provided essential support.

The Constituent Assembly was tasked with drafting a new constitution while addressing significant economic, social and political issues. Many members were not sufficiently informed, and the Assembly itself required support for transparent and inclusive processes, including promotion and facilitation of public outreach

and media coverage for Assembly proceedings and the drafting of the constitution.

NTI supported the Secretariat of the Legislative Parliament of Nepal in providing equipment and facilities support to establish a media resource center for journalists, a press conference hall, and an internal system to broadcast Constituent Assembly proceedings to maintain a professional public information interface for the Assembly. Technology provided to the resource center for media representatives' use included connectivity to a broadcast-quality television signal and live, closed-circuit television for real-time viewing of Assembly proceedings. The center provides a live feed for journalists and media outlets.

When the Constituent Assembly is in session, at least 70 print, radio, and television journalists visit the media resource center. To date, the center has provided access to 39 outlets, including CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, and Indian and Nepalese channels. It has facilitated national, local, and international media coverage by providing a suitably equipped facility and disseminating the authoritative information that the secretariat prepares and releases.

With the Secretariat and assistance from the United Nations Development Program, NTI provided equipment and rented space for the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD), which provides training, expert advice, information and dialogue space for Constituent Assembly members and the public. A live feed of Assembly proceedings can be seen at the CCD. The CCD supports Assembly members with research, translation, and other services. The CCD also conducts the Constituent Assembly-Civil Society Forum, where Assembly members can meet and exchange ideas with civil society groups.

After its January 2008 strategic review, the NTI program decided to target women to disseminate key information about the peace process. Women were perceived as less politically motivated than men but as “connectors” who were inclined to share information with peers. Although some earlier activities had targeted women, the program launched new ones to increase their participation in the peace process and build their confidence as vocal community leaders. Several activities provided many rural women in the eastern and central *terai* with copies of the CPA and educated them on their roles in the development of Nepal’s constitution. Subsequently, during its public outreach campaign, visiting members of the Constituent Assembly invited women’s groups to discuss issues they wanted the new constitution to address.

The NTI program supported the outreach efforts of the Constituent Assembly and creation of the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD), led by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). To enhance the media management function of the assembly’s secretariat, NTI provided a media advisor who developed specifications and budgets for equipping a media resource center, press conference hall, and internal broadcasting system at the International Convention Center (where the assembly meets). The NTI project also provided support and equipment for a sophisticated internal broadcasting system that professionalized Constituent Assembly meetings and public

outreach, facilitated the work of media representatives, and enabled the creation of recordings as a permanent, public record of assembly proceedings.

UNDP requested that NTI help establish the CCD, believing it was the only program that could secure a lease in a timely fashion. Although a simple intervention, this assistance allowed the UNDP and other donors to focus on setting up the CCD rather than delaying start-up until they could approve the lease agreement.

Disseminating accurate and timely information has played a major role in Nepal’s ongoing transition despite the challenges of ethnic and linguistic diversity and a weak communication infrastructure. Given the importance of the transition to Nepal’s future, the program operated on the principal that “more is better” and inclusion is critical. The NTI program focused on conveying key transition-related information to the remotest mountain districts, underserved marginalized communities in the *terai*, and educated elites in Kathmandu.

## **IMPACT AND SUCCESSES**

More than any other element in the NTI program’s interventions, speed was critical in communicating information on the peace process. The National Monitoring Committee on the Code of Conduct of the Ceasefire and Election Commission could disseminate their messages to the public quickly and effectively because the NTI program’s network of partners (local peace volunteers, FM stations, local NGOs,

## FAST AND FLEXIBLE ELECTION SUPPORT

The Election Commission released a document less than three days before the election that, for the first time, explained the process for counting ballots and releasing results.

Through its network, the NTI program provided 60,800 copies to partner organizations for distribution to the public and placed another 1,600 (in English and Nepali) with the commission's media resource center, UNDP, and UNMIL for distribution.

NTI also arranged for the document to be published the day after the election in three major national dailies and four regional dailies in the *terai* with a total circulation of 376,000. Electronic copies were distributed to all FM radio station partners and other partner organizations.

and others) reached such large segments of the population.

NTI considered all methods of distributing key information during the life of the program. It used traditional media — radio, television, and newspapers — and less traditional ones such as street drama, theater, and cultural presentations. Early in the program, radio drama was piloted as a way to engage youth in the eastern *terai* in the debate on the CPA. However, the program's complex messages and listeners' difficulty in empathizing with the dramatic characters resulted in only moderate success. Learning from this experience, the NTI program turned to street drama and comedy, which reached intended audiences more effectively.

Within the first year, it became clear that the NTI program must shift its focus from the national to the community level because Nepalis outside Kathmandu were particularly frustrated and numerous intense, local protests threatened the peace process. Opening a field office in July 2007 in Itahari, where violent protests had occurred earlier in the year, allowed the project to work directly with community-based organizations and local NGOs to make inroads into areas where many donors did not work. NTI activities enabled the program to bring information about the peace process to the area. This capability was enhanced when the program opened a satellite office in Birgunj, Parsa district in August 2008. Through these offices, the NTI program worked with local

organizations at the community level in 10 districts of the *terai*.

The NTI program did not develop new resources if appropriate ones were available. It distributed existing materials to avoid duplicating or overlapping efforts of other donors or government agencies. For example, in early 2007, a partner NGO developed posters in Nepali and Maithili on key points of the CPA. After determining they were appropriate for future activities, the program reprinted the posters to expedite the flow of information and avoid unnecessary effort. The principle was equally applicable to the use of human assets. In late 2007, the program developed and mobilized a network of peace volunteers throughout the eastern and central *terai* to educate communities about the CPA. In the months before the April 2008 election, the NTI program tapped the same network to distribute materials produced by the Election Commission.

## BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Activities in this sector revealed two important lessons: Local languages matter, and diverse modes of delivery are essential. Communities outside Kathmandu want information in their own languages, presented by people from their own localities; they often downplayed information presented by people from the capital. In the eastern *terai*, radio stations traditionally broadcast entertainment programs in local languages and news and political discussions in Nepali. The NTI program's 2007

युवा हाम्रो पालो शान्ति र विकासका लागि हातेगालो



Information dissemination campaigns that used posters with images and local languages got information out quickly to rural areas. Posters like this one encouraged youth of all ethnic groups to work together for their communities.

### PEACE TRAVELER

In late 2007, NTI partnered with the oldest radio station in the eastern region, Koshi FM, on the Shanti Batuwa (Peace Traveler) radio program. The “travelers” were multilingual radio journalists in remote areas who recorded dialogues and questions about the peace process and local issues. The station received hundreds of requests from listeners for segments to be recorded in their villages.

Koshi FM workers joked that the station’s name should be changed to Shanti Batuwa “...since that is what everyone calls about.”

regional media survey revealed that political discussions in Nepali did not engage listeners because they did not believe the information concerned them. The NTI program supported the eastern region’s oldest radio station in producing a show on national issues in Nepali and local languages. Listeners’ responses were overwhelmingly positive. From that point forward, the NTI program ensured the translation into local languages of materials and radio programs broadcast outside Kathmandu.

The NTI program’s ability to distribute information in a timely manner throughout the life of the project is attributable to its diverse methods and well-developed networks. The project worked through radio and television as well as street dramas, skits, and debate programs. Simple dialogues facilitated by local people were particularly useful in rural communities. This variety of avenues enabled the program to reach the public regardless of their level of literacy, education, or access to traditional media.



PHOTO: NEPA-LAYA

**Students wait to see A People War. All Nepalese students were invited to tour the exhibition, and every school along the tour received the companion book of photos for its library.**

## CHAPTER FOUR

# COMMUNITY STABILIZATION

Community stabilization and social inclusion were consistent themes in the NTI program, although the focus and location of activities shifted over time in response to Nepal's fluid political dynamics. Within a few months of the start of the NTI program, many people, particularly in the *terai*, began to doubt that the CPA provided concrete benefits for them. Growing frustration at the slow pace of change was seen as a critical factor that could threaten peaceful transition if not addressed meaningfully. NTI's programmatic response was relevant and timely. Community stabilization activities, largely in the *terai*, were initiated in early 2007 and became an increasing focus beginning in early 2008. In large part due to positive feedback regarding the initial impact of these activities, the NTI program received \$500,000 in additional U.S. Government funds in 2008 to

accelerate and expand existing community stabilization activities to new areas.

### CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

The Constituent Assembly elections originally scheduled for June 2007 were postponed — first to November 2007 and then to April 2008. In January 2007, violence erupted in the *terai*, home to half the country's population and the nexus of transport for petroleum, food and other necessities to Kathmandu and the rest of the country. Madhesis and other traditionally disadvantaged groups felt increasingly marginalized by the peace process but empowered by ideologies and demands for ethnic liberation instilled by the Maoist rebel movement. The disorder reignited in January 2008, reflecting Madhesis' frustration over their perceived exclusion from the interim constitution — specifically,

# SUCCESS STORY

## Stopping the Stoppages



A radio journalist captures the comments of leaders of a political group about their use of *bandhs* as a form of protest. The NTI program used radio programs to raise awareness of the economic and social impact of *bandhs* on communities and create pressure on organizations that often used *bandhs*.

*Bandhs* — protests that shut down transportation and markets — plague Nepal whenever a perceived injustice occurs or a set of demands is not met. According to Nepalbandh.com, Nepal averaged at least one *bandh* per day over the past two years. *Bandhs* may be organized by parties protesting political differences, ethnic groups demanding recognition of their rights in the constitution, trade unions demanding better pay, or communities protesting road accidents. During particularly tense periods, many *bandhs* become violent. *Bandhs* have caused social and economic harm to most regions of Nepal, but especially the *terai*.

To communicate about — and despite — problems caused by *bandhs*, NTI supported activities to develop and broadcast information on their impacts. Local FM stations produced and aired live talk shows on which panelists discussed *bandhs*' impacts in the region. Local economists and business leaders discussed loss of business and jobs caused by *bandhs*, and local NGO representatives and government officials discussed alternate means of protest and dispute resolution processes. PSAs were developed and aired in campaigns highlighting the impacts of *bandhs* and describing peaceful forms of protest.

Some broadcasts did more than communicate about problems; they motivated listeners to change their actions. One case involved the Tharu community, which protested throughout the *terai* to demand recognition of its rights in Nepal's constitution.

A protest in Lahan, Siraha district, led to clashes between the Tharu and Madhesi communities. During a government-imposed curfew to address threats of violence, leaders from both communities discussed the conflict on the air. Within 30 minutes each side agreed to call off attacks on the other, and the government subsequently lifted the curfew. The radio station's program manager commented, "Through... USAID/OTI, we recognized the frustrated mindset of local youth, and we knew we must stop the situation before it got worse. Tensions were high, and we felt dialogue was the best way to solve the problem."

what they saw as a disproportionately low number of election constituencies assigned them by the Election Commission. The commission subsequently revised the allocation to a number the Madhesis found acceptable. The NTI program recognized the importance of addressing the destabilizing violence and disruptions to daily life that could affect Nepal's fragile peace — which the country's security agencies were unable to control — particularly as the election date approached.

The election ushered in sweeping changes, including abolition of Nepal's monarchy, installation of a Maoist-led government, and increased political representation for Madhesis and other ethnic groups. This transition milestone also heightened expectations of a population wearied by years of instability and hopeful that a new political order would reverse Nepal's economic stagnation and improve social conditions.

However, coalition governance quickly proved more challenging than expected. Many members of the Constituent Assembly were first-time elected officials who lacked the educational and professional background to draft a constitution and work effectively in their new roles. The NTI program recognized the need for programming to manage expectations for rapid change, noting that the broad loss of confidence and disconnects between citizens and elected officials would jeopardize peaceful transition. While political deadlocks on key issues of the peace process and writing of the constitution occurred

at the national level, ethnic-centered rights movements and armed groups at the local level demanded formal guarantees of employment, housing, or inclusion in government bodies; separatist states; or autonomous control of land and resources.

During this period, conflict dynamics became increasingly localized and complex, spurring the NTI team to focus intensively on monitoring to ensure that activities were relevant, appropriately targeted, and addressed the right conflict drivers at the local level. Political and criminal violence increased in many areas; *bandhs* debilitated commercial activity and became more common. All of these factors had destabilizing effects at the community level leaving youth particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups offering empowerment and financial gain.

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

The NTI program defined community stabilization broadly to encompass a range of activities addressing vulnerability to conflict at the grassroots level. Focusing primarily in districts in the central and eastern *terai*, NTI supported activities in an attempt to mitigate ethnic and social tensions and their outcomes — increasing violence; proliferation of armed groups (many of which were recruiting youth); and use of *bandhs*, extortion, and other extra-legal measures that crippled local transport and commerce. Fragile communities were further debilitated by ineffec-

A youth volunteer takes a break during conflict mitigation training in Bara district. Through local NGO partners, the NTI program developed a network of youth volunteers across the terai. The network was mobilized to teach communities about the peace process and voting procedures and to mitigate local conflicts.



tive, nonresponsive, or absent government structures and deteriorating economic, security, and social conditions.

NTI's approach included a focus on youth (defined for this project as ages 16 to 30) as important agents of change. Youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Youth-focused grants supported community development, establishment of school debate clubs, and mobilization of youth in sanitation campaigns, sporting events, and peace rallies in their communities.

Opening the Itahari field office in July 2007 allowed the program to work directly with community-based organizations and local NGOs to reach into areas where many donors did not work and where violent protests had occurred earlier in the year. As the only bilateral donor with a full-time expatriate presence

in the *terai* through its field office, NTI was well positioned to respond quickly to anticipate instability in the run-up to the election. Opening the field office also bolstered NTI's capacity for effective implementation and augmentation of grassroots-level community stabilization efforts that required a longer-term presence in the region.

In response to the disturbing trend of youth joining armed groups, NTI piloted a series of community stabilization activities in early 2008. These community development fund (CDF) activities established youth mobilization committees in Nepal's tensest areas. Youth were supported with training and small amounts of money they could use to work with their communities, prioritizing and implementing small-scale infrastructure activities. The positive grassroots response to CDFs led USAID/Nepal and OTI to



PHOTO: NEPALAYA

People visit the A People War photo exhibition.

People watch entertainers and invited guests at a peace rally in Saptari district. When unrest broke out across the eastern *terai*, the NTI program supported peace rallies to encourage ethnic groups to work and live in harmony.



scale up CDF programming in the *terai*, using \$1 million in additional U.S. government funds and OTI monies. Activities included reconstruction of community libraries and early childhood development centers and rehabilitation of roads and schools.

The NTI program also supported local radio, television, and print programming and PSAs. Local languages and friendly formats were used to communicate similar messages and information on key topics. Numerous other grants focused on youth engagement and conflict resolution training. The program also trained and mobilized hundreds of youth as “peace volunteers,” whose role was to help mitigate

conflict in their communities, hold local dialogues about the peace process, and encourage residents to support and engage in the peace process.

During this period, NTI supported a traveling exhibition, *A People War*, that used photos and stories to depict the effects of the costs of 10 years of conflict in Nepal. The exhibition had a powerful impact on viewers throughout the country, many of whom had suffered deeply as a result of the conflict, and was invited to tour to Bangladesh and India.

The NTI program also saw promotion of good governance as an indirect method for improving community stabilization to address one result of the

# SUCCESS STORY

## Youth Bring Positive Change to Their Communities



*Hand pump in Parsa district before and after community development fund activity.*

**Nepalese youths' efforts provided symbolic and tangible value for their communities.**

**In response to growing civil unrest and to engage youth positively in their communities, NTI replicated the community development fund model in 11 districts of the central and eastern *terai*.**

In response to growing civil unrest and to engage youth positively in their communities, NTI replicated the community development fund model in 11 districts of the central and eastern *terai*. Youth were trained in facilitation skills, participatory rural appraisal, and local development planning and facilitated community meetings to identify development priorities. Using an in-kind mechanism, NTI supported implementation of small-scale infrastructure activities with about \$400 worth of equipment and materials per project. The process had a strong impact on how communities viewed youth and significantly changed youths' views of their roles in their communities.

The activities had high symbolic and tangible value for all participants. The communities enthusiastically supported both the contributions to local infrastructure and the efforts of youth making positive changes. Communities often asked youth to implement other local development activities with government funding. Many were perceived as leaders and were invited to join school management committees or local NGOs. And training on development processes motivated communities to press their local government officials to be more accountable.

In numerical terms, this activity had significant results:

- Communities matched 96 percent of NTI's contribution in labor, materials, and other support.
- Activities mobilized more than 123,000 youth across 11 districts of Nepal's tensest region.
- More than 450 communities repaired their own roads, schools, community centers, and water taps in a region where local development had been severely lacking in the past decade.

## “LETTERS HAVE MAGIC”

Learning to spell her name was the start of the story Chameli Waiba told on the *Mero Jindagi*, *Mero Biswas* radio program. A few years ago she was illiterate. Then, in an adult literacy class, she “discovered I was Cha-meli and not Cha-mi-li, as everyone used to call me. It felt like magic... If three letters could change my name, how much would I be able to transform my life if I understood all the letters?”

Seeing that education could change lives shaped by poverty, Chameli became an activist. Her first project was to organize her neighbors to build a bridge so village children could attend the school on the other side of the Tasar River.

This and other accomplishments, says Chameli, “is the result of my knowing the alphabet, even though I learned it late. Letters have immense power. They have magic. The greatest thing in the world is the alphabet. That is my belief.”

decade-long conflict — the lack of basic local government services throughout most of the country, especially in the central and eastern *terai*. Although citizen charters written many years ago define the right to government services, the majority of the population did not know such a right existed. The NTI program trained 900 youth facilitators on citizen charters and facilitation skills and then mobilized them in their communities to teach residents about their rights and how to register a birth, transfer land, or conduct other government business. To engage local government positively, the NTI program worked with local government officials to update the charters. Extensive positive feedback on the activity by communities and local government officials led to replication throughout the *terai*, and information about citizen charters became an important element in all community stabilization activities.

Many peace volunteers became involved in multiple activities, raising the profile of youth in their communities and creating further opportunities for their involvement in community affairs. Common views that youth were not ready to assume leadership positions changed as a result of their involvement and accomplishments.

Consistent with its programming methodology, NTI used the media to amplify messages and disseminate information broadly. Innovative national-level media initiatives helped communities think about their experiences in

the conflict — and about preventing future conflicts. One popular initiative was *Mero Jindagi*, *Mero Biswas* (“My Life, My Belief”), a Nepali adaptation of U.S. National Public Radio’s *This I Believe* program, which recorded the stories of 26 people working for positive change in their communities. One was broadcast in the United States (see box).

Community stabilization activities occurred during a period of urgent need for timely programmatic responses to emerging conditions. As localized conflicts proliferated, the program increasingly operated in new geographic areas and dealt with differing local dynamics that were socially complex, fluid, and difficult to understand. This posed obvious challenges to monitoring and evaluation. NTI implemented strategies (including community mobilizers and research grants) to assess impact in ways that would inform ongoing approaches and drive future programming meaningfully. NTI also engaged expert consultants to examine youth programming and the CDF methodology and impact in more depth. These assessments generated feedback on the use of community mobilizers and the CDF process as well as recommendations and guidance for the future.

## IMPACT AND SUCCESSES

A hallmark of the program’s work in Nepal was its consistent ability to respond quickly to programming needs and opportunities. With the decision in mid-2008 to scale up CDFs and visible infrastructure activities, the program com-

# SUCCESS STORY

## Remembrance Is First Step to Reconciliation

### Innovative presentations and events foster national consciousness in Nepal



People wait to see the *A People War* exhibition in Beni, Myagdi district. Among the more than 300,000 people who saw the traveling exhibition were several top leaders of the military and the Maoist rebels.

**Nepa-laya used photos, film, music, and books to sensitize Nepalis to the importance of reconciliation and remembrance, focus on moving forward rather than reverting to violence, and encourage broad public pressure on stakeholders to maintain momentum for peace.**

One of the NTI program's most innovative partnerships under the community stabilization component was with Nepa-laya, a Nepalese publication and promotion group that operates beyond Kathmandu to expose Nepal's remotest areas to new ideas and foster a sense of national consciousness. NTI issued seven grants to Nepa-laya over the life of the program and worked extensively with the organization in developing and disseminating messaging related to Nepal's 10-year conflict. Nepa-laya used photos, film, music, and books to sensitize Nepalis to the importance of reconciliation and remembrance, focus on moving forward rather than reverting to violence, and encourage broad public pressure on key stakeholders to maintain momentum for peace.

Nepa-laya created a traveling exhibition, *A People War*, that used photos taken by photojournalists during the conflict and told stories of the effects of the Maoist insurgency. Seen by more than 300,000 people throughout Nepal, the exhibition evoked powerful emotions from visitors who included Maoist leaders, government officials, military officers, and students.

In subsequent grants, Nepa-laya used focused discussions and roundtable sessions with journalists and key civil-society actors to generate media coverage and continued discussion of the conflict's effects and the importance of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The book *A People War*, based on the exhibition, was distributed to schools, libraries, and other institutions. Tapes of *Ghatana*, an album of music based on the conflict, were presented to 10,000 children. Nepa-laya also produced a music video incorporating themes of communal harmony and diversity that was aired on television stations throughout Nepal.

Following the success of *A People War*, NTI provided Nepa-laya with support to produce a documentary film, *Frames of War*, and an accompanying book. The film, produced mostly in locations where *A People War* was shown, documented the exhibition and reactions to it. The film was shown in 30 districts in the *terai* and elsewhere to encourage communal harmony.

**“ OTI was ahead of the curve in its programming response to Nepal’s transition by, for example, initiating small-scale development projects early in the year to help stabilize communities and by scaling up in the *terai* more recently. OTI’s efforts to link national-level processes with local-level constituents through media and empowering *terai* communities to manage small development projects appears to provide the population with a sense of progress while the government forms and attempts to forge a new Nepal. ”**

**OTI PROGRAM  
PERFORMANCE REVIEW  
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mitted nearly \$1 million in funding for this purpose within two months.

Donors, beneficiary organizations, and Nepalese government offices often cited NTI as one of the best-informed and most relevant donor-funded programs in the *terai*. Stakeholders often called on staff to discuss the program’s background and context. NTI’s approach prioritized information and analysis to understand highly sensitive environments before initiating new activities; it also conducted research, monitoring and evaluation, and feedback loops throughout implementation. When travel was possible, NTI staff conducted periodic assessments in target regions to identify respected local partners who had gained buy-in and trust, interact with residents to learn about specific conflict drivers, and assess subtle political dynamics. Traveling staff shared information gleaned from assessments and monitoring visits with the larger team and other U.S. government actors or donors, as appropriate. They also presented and discussed their findings during quarterly rolling assessments.

Community stabilization activities took place against the *terai*’s unstable and changing backdrop. A volatile security situation, frequent *bandhs*, and such natural disasters as heavy floods in 2007 challenged program access and implementation. The flooding of the Saptakoshi River in August 2008 contributed to the decision to move the field office three districts to the west to better access the program’s working areas.

Security and local conditions were constant challenges that limited the NTI team’s ability to travel to some areas as often as necessary. The NTI program engaged community mobilizers based in target areas to monitor local media for nuanced perspectives that might not be available through national news sources. The mobilizers also helped monitor grant activities. The NTI program also used assessment grants that provided critical information about localized and emerging conflict dynamics in the *terai* to better inform programming in real time.

By initiating activities focused on social inclusion and communal harmony in the *terai* in early 2007, soon after violence began to increase there, the NTI program responded to a clear need that was not otherwise being met. NTI expanded the focus on community stabilization during subsequent phases of the program. By the end of the third year, NTI’s presence and experience in the *terai* made the program a critical resource that could inform other donors and the U.S. government country team about events and local realities in areas in the little-understood *terai*.

## **BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

In most cases, NTI’s community stabilization activities centered on reestablishing links between communities and local government and among ethnic groups in the same community. The conflict and the resulting politicization of ethnic identity



PHOTO: NEPALAYA

The A People War exhibition traveled to sites around Nepal. One was a hospital where a major battle occurred between the Maoists and the government forces.

had eroded traditionally strong connections in communities. Citizen charter activities successfully rebuilt some trust in local government officials. Once residents better understood such processes as registering land or obtaining passports, they were more likely to feel that local government was not a complex entity serving only people with special connections. The importance of creating simple ways for people to re-engage after a long period of mistrust was a significant lesson learned.

Early in the program, NTI noted that youth could influence the stability of communities both positively and negatively. The program implemented several activities that encouraged youth to work positively. The peace

network of thousands of peace volunteers, local youth clubs, and community development activities all encouraged large numbers of youth to take responsibility for engaging in the peace process and improving their communities.

The program also recognized that women played central roles in creating stability in their communities. Typically less political than men and focused more on local issues, women were more likely to share information among themselves and their neighbors. Through Nepal's large network of women's microcredit groups and community health volunteers, the program disseminated information about the peace process and mobilized women for positive change within their communities.



Women in Mahottari district attend training in their local language on the writing of the new constitution. To attract larger female audiences, trainings were often held near fields where women were working.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# ELECTIONS

### CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

A key provision of the CPA was a national election for a Constituent Assembly that would write a new constitution. Nepalis viewed the election as a significant milestone in the peace process, and many hoped the new constitution would address a multitude of grievances. There was broad consensus that a successful election was essential to Nepal's transition. However, this critical process did not proceed smoothly or follow the anticipated timetable. Several postponements, increasing political violence, and major logistical challenges marked the period before the election. By mid-2007, citizens' hopes had been tempered by fears that the election would be seriously flawed — if it took place at all.

The prolonged run-up to the election included postpone-

ments, violence, and major logistical and technical challenges. The postponements forced the NTI team to retool or cancel some election grants. In some areas, threats by Maoist leaders created safety concerns that led grantees to cancel their activities; in other cases, grantees and community members withstood these pressures and carried out their programs, demonstrating the importance of the elections for many Nepalis. Frequent *bandhs* affected planning. The election's organizers faced enormous logistical challenges registering voters, delivering ballots and supplies, and performing other tasks.

Nepal's Constituent Assembly election finally took place on April 10, 2008, in a largely peaceful process that was generally seen as free and fair. The successful election promised major changes to the political status quo.

In remote *terai* villages, NTI-supported peace volunteers disseminated information on the CPA and voter education in local languages. In many districts, NTI was the only program that had reach into these areas.



## METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Recognizing the importance of a successful election to the peace process, the NTI program included election support under its program objectives. Election grants were consistent with NTI's overall approach of disseminating information broadly and encouraging more inclusive debate and discussion. The NTI program used grants to print materials and distribute them to millions of Nepalis. In addition to almost 600,000 brochures, posters, handbooks, and other materials, NTI printed personalized invitations to the polls that were delivered to 5.2 million registered voters by Nepal's Election Commission, the official body tasked with organizing and managing the election. The invitations helped recipients feel that they were being asked to participate. NTI grants also funded information campaigns that used television and radio PSAs, films,

print media, street dramas, and other methods to inform and motivate voters, many of whom were casting ballots for the first time. NTI grants helped increase the transparency of the voting process by facilitating broad, objective, and accurate media coverage; providing journalists with training, logistics support, and recorders and other basic equipment; and supporting election-day observation.

NTI's support included 10 grants totaling \$544,086 for technical assistance and material support to Nepal's Election Commission. The NTI program provided equipment, facilities, and personnel support enabling the commission to establish, equip, and maintain Nepal's first media resource center for an election. The center provided national and international media representatives with official information from the Election Commission.

## BRINGING ELECTION INFORMATION TO EVERY VOTER

OTI election grants funded the production of 146 radio and television PSAs in Nepali and more than a dozen local languages with voter education information.

PSAs were aired thousands of times in all parts of the country, reaching citizens nationwide with easily understood messages explaining voting procedures, encouraging participation, and helping to manage expectations.

The NTI program focused considerable time and resources on providing information about the election to citizens in the eastern *terai*. The *terai* was still smoldering from a major civil uprising, and the Election Commission had limited reach into rural areas. The NTI program's network of peace volunteers and local partner organizations distributed essential information about voting and the election in these areas. Programs were established in several districts to facilitate local-level dialogues on voting and its importance.

NTI capitalized on its rapid-response capacity, strong relationships with key national-level and grassroots organizations and such partners as the comedy team of MaHa Sanchar, and its proven information dissemination mechanisms. NTI coordinated closely with the rest of the U.S. government country team and other donors, providing support to fill critical implementation gaps where resources were lacking or NTI's rapid mobilization capacity filled an urgent need.

Dissemination of information and support for debate and discussion activities aimed to accomplish three goals:

1. Maintaining broad public support for the election to motivate political parties' continued commitment to the election as many political parties threatened to withdraw from or impede the process
2. Mitigating the potential for violence, particularly in remote or volatile areas of the *terai*

3. Providing accurate information on the voting process — from registration to counting of ballots — to help ensure maximum participation

## IMPACT AND SUCCESSES

NTI's election support highlighted the program's ability to respond quickly to emerging needs. The team's rapid procurement capacity was tested repeatedly. NTI grants were used to obtain 12,576 hats for election observers within a few weeks, print and disseminate 5.2 million voter invitations, and quickly renovate and equip the Election Commission's media resource center. The team also worked with trusted partners to develop messages in multiple formats and languages, obtain the Election Commission's approval, make adjustments as circumstances changed, and then reproduce and disseminate materials broadly and quickly.

The election process required the team to respond to or adjust scenarios that sometimes changed several times in a day. Postponed elections required the NTI team to work with partners to change deliverables and schedules. Several grants were canceled when an election was postponed and then reinstated when the election was rescheduled. PSAs and other messages required careful review and adjustment to reflect current situations accurately, provide timely information, and avoid inflammatory content in a highly sensitive context.

NTI's comprehensive geographic coverage allowed some of Ne-

# SUCCESS STORY

## Fast, Targeted Support Aids Election Commission's Efforts

### Innovative presentations and events foster national consciousness in Nepal



*A USAID delegation visits the Election Commission's media center.*

**NTI's support enabled the creation of the Election Commission's media resource. The center, the first of its kind in the country, served as the official government voice during the election.**

Following the signing of Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the country's Election Commission was tasked with organizing an election in a highly sensitive, post-conflict environment. Political parties twice forced postponements — each time only a month before the scheduled election. The international community poured money into the election process, placing immense pressure on the commission to ensure a free and fair election. Throughout the process, the commission needed fast, flexible assistance to support the most important election in Nepal's history.

As it prepared to update voter rolls in Nepal's 75 districts, the Election Commission realized it needed help to tackle the complex assignment and called on the NTI program. Only four days after an urgent request for essential equipment, NTI delivered 50 printers and 85 toner cartridges, enabling the Election Commission to register voters without interruption.

NTI continued to work closely with the Election Commission and supported several successful initiatives. The program's support was essential to establishing and maintaining the commission's media resource center, which provided journalists and media representatives with official, timely, and accurate information before, during, and after the Constituent Assembly election. During this period, approximately 300 journalists (60 percent Nepalese and 40 percent from other countries) used the media center. The center also accredited 1,200 Nepali and 128 international journalists. The center was the first of its kind in Nepal. A similar, scaled-down media center was established by NTI for Nepal's Constituent Assembly in the months following the election.

The NTI program also assisted the Election Commission with public service announcements about voting and the election. NTI partners developed 11 announcements in 16 languages, the commission approved them, and NTI broadcast them thousands of times throughout the country.

**“The USAID/OTI program supported the Election Commission of Nepal for the preparation of Constituent Assembly election in April 2008. We highly appreciate the support. OTI also supported the Election Commission for development and operation of Media Centre and Media Monitoring activities during the elections. Literally, OTI and the Election Commission worked together even in odd hours to achieve what we were looking for.”**

**NEEL KANTHA UPRETY,  
CHIEF ELECTION  
COMMISSIONER**

pal’s most remote and vulnerable populations to receive critical information about the electoral process. NTI supported the Election Commission in the eastern *terai* by printing and distributing commission materials when ongoing violence and unrest made it difficult for commission staff to travel to the area. NTI voter outreach activities often were the only ones these communities participated in when government representatives could not travel safely.

#### **BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Two postponements of the Constituent Assembly election posed challenges for activities focused on specific, time-sensitive messaging. New election dates required some modifications to PSAs and other media products, although information about the overall process did not usually change. In a few cases the required adjustments were not possible, making products unusable. The team learned through these experiences to work with partners to develop content that could be modified easily or did not need adjustments if the election date changed. This strategy was later tested with support for the April 2009 by-elections. NTI provided grants to past partners to develop and air messaging based on the original November 2007 timetable for these follow-on elections. However, when the by-elections were postponed, the grants were modified to remove date-specific messages and airing provisions. Once the

by-election date was finalized — well after the original grants had closed — NTI issued grants to other media partners to broadcast the prepared content. The program also used innovative umbrella grants to facilitate rapid procurement of printed materials needed for specific activities. This strategy was highly effective in producing mass informational, educational, and communication materials as the election process evolved.

Even complex activities sometimes had to be developed on a rapid timetable that did not allow for full needs assessments. NTI’s rapid and efficient procurement and support to the media resource center, Election Commission, and journalists were major successes despite short time frames. However, in evaluating each grant’s success after the fact, the team identified needs that had not been adequately considered, such as translation services for foreign journalists. The team also realized that other resources, such as Internet connectivity, had been underutilized. Although it was possible to modify some grants in progress to incorporate unanticipated items, it was not as easy to eliminate goods or services that later were determined to be unnecessary. Overall, the program’s support for individual activities was overwhelmingly successful as their ultimate impact assisted in everyone’s goal — the successful election.



**A man in the remote mountain village of Barpak in Gorkha district breaks into dance as he listens to radio in his village for the first time. The NTI program believed using the media to expand access to information — especially about the peace process — helped encourage people to stay engaged in the peace process.**

## CHAPTER SIX

# MEDIA AND MEDIA STRENGTHENING

### CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Since the first People's Movement in 1990, the media has been an active and integral player in Nepal's progress toward multiparty democracy and peace. Access to the media — by citizens seeking information and by politicians and others wanting to make their positions and actions known — also has had a fundamental impact on the political situation. Media access and utilization also have influenced the NTI program's approaches to media programming during the three-year program period.

Two significant factors have affected access to media: state control and Nepal's difficult terrain. Until the 1990s, the government controlled all radio and television stations; privately operated stations did not exist. However, as of August 2008, at least 290 operators were licensed to broad-

cast; more than 160 stations were broadcasting regularly. Improved access to information has been accompanied by an increase in the number of new — and often untrained — radio journalists and station managers.

Nearly 98 percent of people in Kathmandu own televisions, but only 50 percent outside the Kathmandu Valley do. An NTI-funded media assessment found that more than 80 percent of Nepalis had access to a radio, and 50 percent claimed radio as their primary source of news and information. However, the country's extreme topography limits access. Newspapers do not regularly reach these areas and, even with satellite and wireless technology, large areas of Nepal do not receive radio signals. Nevertheless, despite the lack of consistent and universal coverage, Nepalis have much better access to informa-

NTI's media support included increasing access to radio in Nepal's remote mountain regions.



tion sources than they did even 10 years ago.

The Nepalese media blossomed and cemented its role as a watchdog for the country's fledgling democracy during the 1990s. During the Maoist insurgency, the government attempted to control the information the public received, and the Maoists targeted journalists who spoke out against their activities. Each side used the media to attack the other. In this proxy war, journalists were caught in the middle and had little incentive to report accurately on either side.

A sea-change occurred in early 2005 when King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament, seized full executive powers, and began a new military offensive against the Maoists. Government censors were assigned to major media outlets, which were barred from

criticizing the government or the monarchy. After experiencing some freedom in the 1990s, the media now chafed against new restrictions. Newspapers began publishing editorials on freedom of the press without mentioning Nepal or the king. Political cartoonists derided Gyanendra and his rule. The media thus became a major factor in the period leading to the second People's Movement in April 2006, which brought the fall of the monarchy, restoration of multiparty democracy, and the eventual ceasefire agreement between the government and the Maoists.

Although the media played an integral role in Nepal's two major democracy movements, its coverage and focus were still primarily limited to events in Kathmandu and for residents of the immediate area — a situation that has been changing gradually during the last decade. The number

of media outlets beyond Kathmandu (specifically, FM radio stations and some television stations) has increased significantly. Print publications at the district and regional level struggle to generate enough revenue to stay in business. Commercial and community radio stations (which require relatively low initial investments and can easily obtain licenses) flourished before and after the signing of the CPA. Political parties have financed radio stations throughout the country as a way to reestablish influence in areas they lost during the insurgency. Although more information is available to more Nepalis than ever, it often reflects the ideology of a political party.

Journalism is an established profession in Kathmandu but is still a nascent (and often part-time) occupation beyond the capital. Many national and local newspapers pay by the article rather than employing salaried journalists. Some who publish news articles are full-time teachers or members of civil society who write to augment their incomes. The lack of formal training is one reason for lapses in professionalism. For example, many journalists in the *terai* have become involved in extortion cases, serving as intermediaries between an armed group and the victim and then taking a portion of the payment as their “fee.”

## **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

The NTI program surveyed media outlets and studied the role of the media during the first year of the program. Through this initial

assessment, the team determined that the media should be an essential pillar of the overall programmatic approach, providing the public with accurate and timely information about the peace process. Building on this finding, the program formulated a media strategy to address three broad activity areas:

1. Increase access to media in underserved regions and populations
2. Improve the capacity of journalists and media outlets
3. Enhance the two-way flow of information between Kathmandu and other regions

The media assessment reinforced the understanding that strengthening the media would be a key activity focus and that the media could disseminate critical information about the peace process and build awareness of key political transition agreements and processes.

Large areas of Nepal do not have regular access to media, particularly in radio-blind areas. During the political transition, the NTI program recognized that all of Nepal’s citizens must participate in the peace process. To address this gap in the remote mountain regions, NTI introduced mobile *doko* radio units. A *doko* is a basket that rural Nepalis use to carry fodder, firewood, and food. For this activity, each *doko* unit brought broadcast equipment — an FM radio transmitter, power supply, laptop computer, microphones, and sound mixer — to

**“ One thing for sure is that no other donor would have funded radio programs or projects which are not tested or sure of success. I would like to thank OTI for trusting in us and believing that we can do it...This has been proved through programs like *Doko*, *Nepal Chautari*, and *Mero Jindagi*, *Mero Biswas*. All three are milestone programs that use unique programming methods and are super hits. Without the support of OTI I do not think this would have been possible. ”**

**MADHU ACHARYA,  
ANTENNA FOUNDATION**

radio-blind areas throughout Nepal to initiate dialogue and transmit local voices within these areas. *Doko* units spent approximately a week in each location to set up and provide guidance on using equipment, publicize activities to surrounding communities, and then record and broadcast local information. In the context of the transitional Nepali socio-political climate, *doko* units were lively and immediate tools for developing community cohesiveness; introducing radio as a communication tool; and motivating thought, action, and understanding at the local level.

The program sought to increase the transmission strength of three radio stations broadcasting into areas where media access was limited. The reasoning behind this initiative was that the peace process could not move forward if some segments of the population did not understand the ceasefire and other agreements between the Maoists and the government. Each station received equipment that enabled it to produce additional types of programming and a larger transmitter to expand its listening areas. With this support, the stations began to broadcast call-in shows and educational programs on the CPA into areas that might not otherwise have had access to the information.

An important approach the NTI program took was providing equipment support to radio stations. In nearly every case, the support was in conjunction with an activity to expand the stations' programming capabilities, extending outreach into their

listening areas. For example, the program worked with local FM stations to develop programming encouraging local-level engagement in the peace process. A survey of local stations in the Morang and Sunsari districts found that they usually broadcast music and entertainment in local languages and news programs in Nepali (in many cases, relaying news programming from Kathmandu). NTI support included such equipment as telephone hybrids and field recorders that allowed the stations to host live, call-in programs and record shows in remote locations of their districts and often in local languages.

Focusing on issues around the peace process and the upcoming elections, the *Peace Traveler* radio show broadcast discussions among people in rural areas. Participation was broadened through the use of multilingual journalists who could interact with many non-Nepali speakers. The program format encouraged villagers to express their views on a specific topic related to the peace process. Their edited comments were played to a panel of decision-makers in the station's studio during a popular weekly call-in show. Numerous villages and local political leaders sought to participate. This model was enhanced and expanded during the program period. In addition to obtaining the equipment and expertise to conduct call-in shows, local stations understood that their listeners wanted to discuss and hear about local issues in their own languages — not just the debates of political leaders in Kathmandu, in Nepali.

With the growth of radio stations outside Kathmandu and the number of untrained journalists entering the profession, capacity-building through training and other methods became a key approach for the NTI program. New radio stations often lacked the technical knowledge to present programs other than music or news broadcasts. In one case, radio journalists were trained to moderate call-in shows. The NTI program also funded workshops during which experts would teach local radio station managers to produce such new kinds of programming as call-in shows, interviews, and moderated talk shows. NTI also funded workshops that taught journalists about the CPA, the role of the media in a democ-

racy, and a code of conduct for Nepali media.

The NTI program also funded activities that sought to ease growing tension between population groups while strengthening local journalists' capacity. In one activity, Madhesi (plains) and Pahadi (hill) journalists traveled together to an equal number of hill and *terai* districts, accompanied by two senior journalists from Kathmandu. At each destination, the group received training on reporting and feature-writing techniques. Pairs of Madhesi and Pahadi journalists collaborated on articles that were published by their respective newspapers. The activity itself was featured in the country's most popular English-language newspaper, the *Nepali Times*.



Porters carry radio equipment to remote districts in bamboo baskets (*dokos*). The equipment was used to establish temporary local radio stations where communities could record and air programs on which their questions about the peace process were addressed.

**Shanti Batuwa (Peace Traveler)** was the first local-language radio program outside Kathmandu that encouraged dialogue on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The program allowed communities to ask questions about the Constituent Assembly election and peace process, which were recorded and played to panels of experts during live radio broadcasts. The NTI program supported the first live, call-in radio show outside Kathmandu.



Not surprisingly, Nepal's tumultuous political situation affected the performance and challenged the ethics of its journalists and media outlets. The problems were compounded by increased numbers of untrained journalists and protests by various ethnic groups or political parties against perceived negative or biased reporting. These

included vandalism, attacks, and the murders of journalists even after the CPA was signed. In most cases, the perpetrators were affiliated with the country's ruling political parties. In response, the NTI program conducted workshops on a media code of conduct throughout the country to reinforce journalists' understanding of their professional

## **JOURNALISTS BUILD HARMONY FROM THE TERAI TO THE HILLS**

An NTI program organized inter-ethnic exchange visits for journalists from the Madhesi and Pahadi groups. Ten journalists from each area traveled together to sensitive areas of six eastern hill and *terai* districts. The objective of the activity was to increase coverage of Madhesi and Pahadi issues in regional and local media while promoting social harmony by mobilizing journalists from these areas.

Many journalists from each group visited the other group's region for the first time. Madhesi-Pahadi pairs cowrote articles on current issues. The activity helped to promote tolerance, reveal common problems in both communities, and strengthen relationships between the regions. A Madhesi journalist noted that the interactions "allowed [Pahadi and Madhesi journalists] to exchange views and helped build healthy relationships between us."

Bridging differences and providing increased, accurate coverage of the groups and issues promoted harmony and encouraged the media to engage positively in the peace process.

**“ OTI-sponsored programs have been overwhelmingly positive and effective. The OTI initiative inspired new optimism and courage in Nepalis who were too frightened to speak their mind during the monarchy. Many spoke of paralyzing fear of the police and sense of detachment from such public officials as politicians — emotions that limited political activity and increased distrust in the government. The OTI programs have helped to replace these feelings with a new sense of empowerment and largely eliminated the fear that prevented the public from taking ownership of their political situation. ”**

**ASSESSMENT BY NEW ERA AND MACRO INTERNATIONAL OF OTI-FUNDED MEDIA PROGRAMS, AUGUST 2009**

responsibilities and educate the public about the media’s role in a democracy.

As the center of Nepal’s political, economic, and social activity, Kathmandu tends to be the country’s media hub. Because little information from other areas reaches the capital, its residents often are unaware of the events or trends outside the Kathmandu Valley — a situation that the NTI program sought to correct through activities to increase the flow of information from outlying areas.

In late 2006, soon after the signing of the CPA, the NTI program worked with a media development partner to create Nepal’s first nationwide call-in radio show, *Nepal Chautari*, which 53 FM stations transmitted. The program began with stories of conflict mitigation and peace process initiatives at the local level; over time, it discussed the most pressing issues of the peace process. A toll-free line allowed anyone with access to a telephone to make on-air comments and put questions to decision-makers in Kathmandu. Guests on the show have included the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General and Nepal’s deputy prime minister and chief election commissioner.

An NTI-funded media assessment conducted during spring 2009 revealed that the two-year-old program remained popular. Stations around the country have replicated its format.

The NTI program also supported the purchase of digital audio

broadcast receivers to expand 22 FM stations’ access to information on Nepal’s transition. The equipment helps ensure that all communities can participate in the transition. Using the digital receivers, stations can access an open channel that streams radio broadcasts, thereby linking to national programs that debate and discuss the transition and the new constitution.

## **IMPACT AND SUCCESSES**

Perhaps the most significant impact of the NTI program’s support to the media was the focus on challenging media partners to reach their audiences in new ways. For example, several Kathmandu talk shows featured politicians discussing political events and responding to written questions from local listeners. The NTI program advanced this common format by supporting establishment of the first national toll-free line, which allowed callers throughout the country to talk to their representatives in Kathmandu. The NTI program supported similar programs for smaller, local FM stations that broadcast talks with local government officials. The call-in shows became important forums through which local residents could connect to local government officials in districts where lack of security had limited both provision of government services and government officials’ access to areas away from district headquarters.

The NTI program also used new media to present information on the peace process — for example, it created cartoon

**“ Nepal faces multiple challenges, but as Nepali citizens we believe that the presence of a strong and responsible media will lead us through the current crisis. With USAID/OTI support, we have been able to train radio station-based journalists on the skills to conduct live, studio-based talk shows in a neutral and participatory manner. A large number of radio stations are [now] able to conduct live studio-based talk shows on issues around peacebuilding, governance, and strengthening of democracy and democratic practices.... Likewise, the development of a code of conduct for the broadcasting sector has been a milestone achievement made possible through collaboration with USAID/OTI. While the code of conduct acts as a self-regulator for all the organizations that participated in its development, it also serves as a guideline and training resource for use by the broadcast media. ”**

**NIRMAL RIJAL, EQUAL ACCESS**

characters that appeared in PSAs. Only a month after PSAs featuring the unique characters were aired, 50 percent of people surveyed recognized them. Because they were so well known, the characters appeared in several PSAs over the program period.

The NTI program also recognized that the media was essential in connecting voters outside Kathmandu to members of the Constituent Assembly and helping them to understand the assembly’s work. Local radio stations received equipment that enabled them to connect members of the assembly, in the studio, with voters in their districts. This direct contact helped make representatives more ac-

countable to their constituents. The NTI program also provided support for female journalists from districts outside Kathmandu to visit the capital, use the media resource center, and meet with Constituent Assembly representatives. The journalists published articles and interviews in their newspapers. These simple activities were entirely new in many areas.

The NTI program’s work also was integral to encouraging a higher level of professionalism by journalists and media outlets throughout the country, but especially in the eastern and central *terai*. The program trained hundreds — often including women and those from marginalized communi-

“ The media strengthening sector accounted for the second-smallest expenditure in FY 2008, but perhaps leveraged some of the greatest results. OTI has invited and supported grantees to do cutting-edge, innovative, and risky programming, such as the first toll-free call-in radio show, which enabled rural Nepalis to connect with Kathmandu. Similarly influential was the...radio code of conduct, which most radio stations in the country have accepted. Through its relatively small investments, OTI has helped professionalize media coverage of politics through the elections and now with coverage of the Constituent Assembly proceedings. With small efforts, OTI appears to have fundamentally changed the way journalists interact with politicians during press conferences. ”

#### OTI PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REVIEW

ties — in basic journalism, feature writing, and journalistic ethics. The program supported development of and provided training on a code of ethics for broadcast and print.

The NTI program challenged Nepal’s media outlets and practitioners to think about their roles in a democracy and how to reach different audiences creatively and effectively. NTI’s support allowed media outlets and journalists to take risks and expand the way they think about and contribute to Nepal’s transition to peace.

#### **BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The difficulties Nepal experienced during its transition and significant political shifts were not

unexpected. The country’s linguistically diverse population and limited infrastructure complicated the communication of accurate and balanced information. The NTI program used a variety of media strategies to address these problems and recognized early on that it must target messaging to specific audiences. Radio programs attract more listeners if presented in the predominant local language rather than Nepali and use vocabulary appropriate to audiences’ level of understanding. Programming created at the local level for local audiences is more likely to attract and be meaningful to those audiences.

Radio and television audiences often care less about a show’s participants than about how



**TOP:** Former Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari takes questions on a live, NTI-supported radio program. NTI assumed that the more connected people were to their representatives, the more inclined they would be to support the peace process.

**CENTER:** Residents of a remote hill community gather for a live radio dialogue about the peace process. The NTI program provided equipment and support to 22 radio stations across the country. In several cases, this support allowed radio to penetrate to radio-blind areas.

**BOTTOM:** A woman in Humla district asks a question on a radio show produced with equipment brought to the area by doko baskets.

**“ Because *Chiya Chautari* (a humorous radio program set in a tea shop where patrons discuss political events) is presented in a satirical manner, I didn’t care about it that much in the past, but over time I started listening more. Because of this, I know about the issues.... I like programs that include people of all backgrounds. Today, most programs include the public. I listen to events and the latest news around the country. ”**

**A YOUNG SURVEY  
RESPONDENT**

information is presented. By far the most popular shows that NTI supported were those that brought levity to serious subjects. For example, NTI helped a local radio station in Janakpur (Dhanusha district) develop a satirical current affairs program; because of strongly positive listener feedback, the station rebroadcast earlier shows several times weekly. In contrast, shows that presented the sophisticated subjects debated in the Constituent Assembly had limited audiences.

The NTI program also recognized early on that, although all Nepalis were interested in the peace process, most were more interested in local issues that affected their daily lives. Radio and television stations had to find ways to include information on the peace process in programs that presented topics of broader interest. District-level shows that hosted local government officials and allowed residents to discuss government service issues instilled the feeling that the government was listening during this transitional period.



Citizens in Makwanpur district march to show support for the peace process. The NTI program used such rallies to increase awareness of the peace process.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# OVERALL PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Operating in a fragile, fast-changing, and sometimes tense post-conflict environment made the success of the NTI program, particularly in the *terai*, even more impressive.

Insecurity and the lack of an effective state security apparatus were constant challenges as the NTI program worked extensively in a region overrun by armed groups and along the open border with India. The program worked effectively in this environment by hiring local staff who understood the nuances of operating in the region. All programming was conducted transparently and in close consultation with communities. The NTI program quickly became a trusted operator in the region and largely avoided interference with or obstruction of activities by political or criminal organizations.

Nepal's infrastructure was damaged extensively during

the conflict, and structures not directly harmed often were not maintained properly for many years. A case in point is Nepal's rural roads, which are largely in a state of disrepair. Whether maintained or not, many roads are washed out during annual monsoon rains. Therefore, careful scheduling was necessary to ensure that materials for infrastructure activities could be delivered within the required time frame. For community mobilizers and staff, the program used a fleet of motorcycles — often the best way to travel on Nepal's rural road network.

The conflict also affected Nepal's electricity grid and power production. Power plants and distribution centers were popular targets for Maoists attacks. As a result, the country's power supply infrastructure is inadequate for Nepal's growing demand. Scheduled power outages (“load-



The NTI program used street drama widely for its ability to convey information to audiences regardless of their literacy or access to radio or television.

shedding”) of up to 20 hours per day in the dry season hindered the program’s daily operations and extensive media programming. Many radio and television stations do not broadcast during certain hours because they cannot afford to run generators during power outages. The NTI program planned media programming around load-shedding hours to enable radio broadcasts even during long periods without power, thereby ensuring larger audiences.

Nepal’s political transition brought major civil disturbances and periods of violence. During the program period, *bandhs* might last for days and often caused shortages of commodities and fuel needed for NTI offices and activities. The program responded by stockpiling such essential goods as diesel fuel for its generator and identifying local vendors who could supply materials even during *bandhs*.

The NTI program worked on the frontlines of the transition for much of the program period. Opportunistic politicians, mistrustful communities, and armed groups seeking easy money created daily challenges to NTI staff and partners. Communication and transparency were keys to keeping staff safe and ensuring that partners and the communities they served understood the objectives of program activities. Program staff coordinated with local officials and visited activity sites often to learn what community members said about the work. Sharing information about NTI procurement processes and utilizing only in-kind support lessened opportunities for bribes and corruption.

Flexibility and innovation ensured that NTI activities were effective and timely despite numerous operating challenges.



PHOTO: NEPALAYA

In May 2007 Madhav Kumar Nepal (now prime minister of Nepal) visited the **A People War** exhibition, which documented Nepal's 10-year conflict. NTI's activities brought information about the peace process to the country's leaders as well as underserved segments of the population.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# WAYS FORWARD

Nepal's peace process stalled in October 2009 in the face of the Maoists' demand that the interim constitution be revised to ensure "civilian supremacy." The Maoists have obstructed legislative proceedings since July 2009. Leaders of all parties seem unwilling to compromise, and Maoist rhetoric about a third People's Movement implies a threat of violence.

Delays in the writing of the new constitution have led to continued frustration among citizens. Ratification by May 2010 seems unlikely. In nearly every region, ethnic groups continue to organize or threaten large-scale protests to press for rights and representation in the "New Nepal." Several militant groups threaten armed revolution resembling the Maoist insurgency.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed nearly three years ago. In the interim, the

CPA's major tasks — including reintegration of Maoist combatants — have gone uncompleted, and the agreement is seemingly all but forgotten. Commissions to investigate disappearances and explore truth and reconciliation have not progressed beyond vague plans. Animosity among political leaders and incessant political infighting have affected the future of the peace process. Nevertheless, political leaders are still talking, and some progress has been made on the writing of the constitution. The international community is still engaged, and the CPA outlines the universally accepted path forward.

Reintegration of Maoist fighters must remain a priority for the Government of Nepal and the international community. Until the threat of resumption of war is eliminated, the peace process will falter and citizens will view the Maoists as a military force



**TOP:** Audience reacts to a street drama in the *terai*.



**BOTTOM:** Youth in Makwanpur district participate in a city clean-up on International Youth Day. Targeting youth, NTI promoted civic responsibility through social work, rallies, dialogues, and cultural events in areas where government service was weak.

rather than a mainstream political party.

If handled properly, the new constitution's promise of better representation for Nepal's ethnic, caste, and religious groups will be advantageous. The government and political leaders have promised autonomy or local revenue generation to some agitating groups. However, because most agreements conflict with one another, promises to many groups will not be met. Avoiding a potentially violent mix of broken promises and unmet expectations requires better understanding about what a constitution means to citizens — and vastly better communication between Kathmandu and Nepal's rural peoples.

Local economic development and job creation are essential to lessening frustration and stabilizing regions outside the capital. Most Nepalis — especially youth — outside Kathmandu and other urban areas lack good job prospects. Those who can afford to leave the country often migrate to India, the Gulf States, or Southeast Asia to find work. Economic development is critical to ensuring a sustainable peace.

Because state control is absent, corruption rampant, and impunity widespread, some analysts consider the eastern and central

*terai* an emerging failed state within a state. Other regions, including the far west and the eastern hills, follow a similar path. The Government of Nepal and the international community must increase programming in these regions to help citizens feel part of the peace process and make local government active and effective. Prospects of long-term peace will be limited if regions of Nepal remain outside the process.

Despite significant challenges, Nepal has made considerable progress in the past three years. It ended a 10-year civil war; created an internationally recognized peace agreement; held a successful election; and embarked on writing a new, more inclusive constitution. Now, Nepal's prospects for peace hinge on political compromise and a concerted effort by the Government of Nepal and the international community to ensure that all Nepalis are included in the process.

In October 2009, the NTI program was officially handed over to USAID/Nepal. The program will continue to operate in the same way — through small grants and flexible programming to support the peace process. The continuation of the program is one of many indications of success for the NTI program and its ability to work in Nepal's challenging transition to peace.

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