THE ROLE OF LOCAL MEDIA IN PEACEBUILDING IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

LUISA RYAN: The Role of Local Media in Peacebuilding in Nepal (Under the direction of Dr. Lucila Vargas).

Journalists are often severely impacted by armed conflict: they may be the victims of targeted violence or co-opted by one side or another to spread partisan propaganda. In protracted conflicts, journalism training, financing and infrastructure may dry up completely, impacting the ability of community members to access information. Media development in post-conflict settings has become a priority of funding bodies, as an independent fourth estate is believed to strengthen democratic mechanisms, and guard against a return to violence. The Nepal case study serves to explore how local media may interact with an evolving peace process, and what support the international community may be able to offer. Drawing upon grounded theory, this thesis presents the findings of fieldwork conducted in Nepal from December 2010 to January 2011. Thirty-three in-depth interviews were conducted in three key geo-political locations. Core findings of this research reveal that the Nepalese media sector needs continuing support.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES........................................................................................................................................vi

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.........................................................................................................................vii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................................1

II. REFLEXIVITY......................................................................................................................................3

III. SETTING...............................................................................................................................................6

Media in Nepal........................................................................................................................................10

IV. MEDIA, PEACE AND CONFLICT.....................................................................................................17

Peacebuilding..........................................................................................................................................17

Media in conflict....................................................................................................................................18

Approaches to media interventions......................................................................................................20

Media in peacebuilding..........................................................................................................................23

V. METHOD..............................................................................................................................................27

VI. FINDINGS...........................................................................................................................................41

Impact of partisan media history............................................................................................................42

Maoist insurgency period.........................................................................................................................43

Security situation today............................................................................................................................46

Professionalism......................................................................................................................................52

Media finances.......................................................................................................................................61

Bribery and extortion.................................................................................................................................68

Social inclusion......................................................................................................................................70

“Politics, politics, politics”....................................................................................................................85
LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Dimensions of exclusion in Nepal.................................................................7
2. Abridged list of participants........................................................................28
3. Abridged informal member check list.........................................................29
4. Detailed list of participants........................................................................116
5. Detailed informal member check list...........................................................118
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration

1. Map of Nepal........................................................................................................111

2. Media sector mapping..........................................................................................120
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA: Constituent Assembly

CPN-M: Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist

CPN-UML: Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist

IMS: International Media Support

INGO: International Non-governmental Organization

NC: Nepali Congress

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

OHCHR: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

SPA: Seven Party Alliance

UCPN-M: United Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist

UNDP: United Nations’ Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNMIN: United Nations Mission to Nepal

VDC: Village Development Committee
**Introduction**

If you want to establish peace here, media role is a big concern here. If the media people want to stop the peace, only one news, two news it can destroy everything here. So, it is big role, big power.¹

Nepal suffered a ten-year Maoist insurgency from 1996 – 2006. Upon the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Maoists and the main democratic parties, a second wave of conflict erupted along Nepal’s southern border with India and in the eastern hills. Traditionally marginalized ethnic groups such as the Madhesi and the Limbu violently protested what they saw as their continuing exclusion from political processes. Four years after the signing of the CPA, Nepal’s government remains unstable, and the relationship between the Maoists, democratic parties, the army and marginalized groups remaining fraught. As Nepal emerges from conflict, it has vibrant media and civil society sectors supported by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. As such, it is an ideal case for exploring how media may interact with peacebuilding processes. Thus, the main question to be explored in this study is: What is the role of local news media in peacebuilding in Nepal?

Media are assumed to influence peace processes: media are the main conduit of public information on peace and conflict processes (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Many types of media may influence peacebuilding, from targeted communication for social change initiatives to independent blogs. Although “the media” is a broad term, this

¹ Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
thesis will focus only on news media produced by local journalists. Basic news reporting skills are vital in countries emerging from conflict: independent, accurate, balanced news reports can help to fulfill the right to information, can serve humanitarian functions, and can support the democratic process by facilitating the population’s ability to make informed decisions. In this research, I have concentrated mainly on radio and print, as these seem to be the two main information sources in the country. Much of the rural population is illiterate, or may speak a language other than Nepali as a mother tongue. They may also live in areas difficult to access by road. These factors ensure that radio dominates village-level media. New social media has only gained a toehold in Kathmandu, but does not appear to have spread further due to a lack of infrastructure, and crippling power cuts which last up to 18 hours per day.

Media can play a role in all stages of conflict, from pre-violence to post-conflict reconstruction. While there is a significant amount of academic research investigating the relationship between media and conflict, there is little exploring the relationship between media and peacebuilding (Bratic, 2006; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Media development practitioners in particular assume that interventions in the local media sphere can support peacebuilding, although little academic evidence supports this (IMS, 2006). This study aims to contribute to the further understanding of news media’s role in the peacebuilding process.
Reflexivity

The roots of this project go back to my work in Nepal from 2005 – 2008. I began as a research assistant with International Crisis Group and lived in Kathmandu with a Nepali friend. When the Jana Andolan and curfews began, I was evacuated to my mother’s house in Malaysia. This was not because of the threat of physical danger, but because of the very real possibility that I would run out of food or water, especially as the phones and Internet access had been blocked by the Royal government. There was a tank stationed on the main street outside my house, and when my embassy (I am Australian) told me to evacuate, my boss had to agree. I spent my time in Malaysia closely following the BBC reports and watching events unfold in Nepal without me.

I returned to Nepal as a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In this position, I lived in Gorahi in western Nepal, the main town in Dang district. UNFPA was assisting local health offices re-establish services after a decade-long government absence. I was the only international staff posted to the region and was able to learn much about the local culture. My local colleagues had been unable to visit remote health posts due to the Maoist threat, and, threatened by violence and extortion, local health workers had often abandoned their posts. My colleagues had seen decapitated bodies by the side of the road during the insurgency.
As a young, single white woman, I was always on the outside. I was an honorary man, invited to men-only events with government officials and other dignitaries, but at the same time as a young woman in a patriarchal culture, I often struggled to be taken seriously. Additionally, Western women are often thought of as having loose morals, so I had to be very careful not to become too friendly. It was also often difficult to form friendships with local women, as language was more of a barrier than with men. Even those women who did speak English or were patient with my fledgling Nepali had a life experience limited to their homes or village, so we did not have much to base a friendship on.

After the peace accord was signed, I moved to Biratnagar in eastern Nepal to monitor the peace process. I was a Civil Affairs officer with the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) and was in the east when the Madhesi uprising gained momentum. There were many reports of violence against journalists, local officials, or anyone perceived by the Madhesi movement as being affiliated with the government. Indigenous groups also began campaigning for cultural rights in this period, often breaking away from former Maoist affiliations. The Maoist Young Communist League was particularly active in the hills and mountain districts, clashing with their former allies. There were several bombings, frequent strikes and UN staff had strict security protocols. We traveled regularly to the field, interviewing villagers, media workers, NGO staff, and members of political groups. Many of my colleagues were local journalists hired en mass by the UN. They played a pivotal role in UNMIN analysis.
I left in 2008 exhausted. I had seen so much caste and gender discrimination that I began to judge high-caste Brahmin or Chhetri men upon meeting them. I grew extremely frustrated with the indirect nature of Nepali communication, and the slow, fractious, personality and nepotism-driven politics. As a relatively young person, the isolation of Dang and to a lesser extent Biratnagar, had a great impact on me. Field research for this thesis will be the first time I have returned to Nepal.

My previous experiences in the country have informed this project. I am aware that they are likely to color this research.
Setting

There are still some conflicts in the villages, the conflicts should come to an end. There are different issues that the political parties raised during the conflict or during the peoples’ movement. Those political commitments should be fulfilled, what they said. There should be a guarantee that there should be no more conflict. If this is done, there will be peace. Do you have peace yet? No.¹

Nepali society is highly unequal and is dominated by high-caste Hindu men. The power distribution in Nepali society is outlined in Table 1, below. Nepal’s 2001 Census identified 103 distinct social groups based on caste, ethnicity, religion and language (DFID/World Bank, 2006). High-caste Brahmin and Chhetri account for around one third of the population, as do the disadvantaged indigenous Janajati peoples (DFID/World Bank, 2006). A massive 86% of Nepalis live in rural areas, with almost half the population living in the Terai plains along the border with India (DFID/World Bank, 2006). Women are also traditionally marginalized, exemplified by less than 1% who report owning a home, land and livestock, according to the 2001 Census (DFID/World Bank, 2006). Rural and marginalized groups have long been isolated and ignored by Kathmandu elites.

¹ Interview with staff from women’s radio station, 28 December 2010, Biratnagar.
Table 1: Dimensions of exclusion in Nepal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Category Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Geo-political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Brahmin Chhetri</td>
<td>Caucasoid</td>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dalit</td>
<td>Mongoloid/Janajati</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Non-Hindu</td>
<td>Terai (Madhes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Unequal Citizens (DFID/World Bank, 2006).

Historically, Nepal’s governments have been authoritarian, from before the hereditary Prime Ministership of the Rana family (1856-1951), to the party-less Panchayat system (1962 – 1990) (Savada, 1991). These structures excluded many social groups and consolidated national power in the hands of the monarchy and other elites, causing widespread, popular frustration. The 1990 Jana Andolan (Peoples’ Movement) created a democratic government with a constitutional monarchy. However, the unsteady transition from authoritarian to democratic governance allowed space for the Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist (CPN-M) insurgency to grow.

Led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (mainly known by his nom de guerre, Prachanda), Nepal’s Maoists launched their insurgency in 1996. Maoists seized control of much of the country, restricting government services and influence to the capital, Kathmandu, and a small surrounding perimeter. The Maoists called for an end to the official caste system of the Hindu Kingdom, the promotion of ethnic cultures, and the corresponding “federalization” of the Nepalese state along ethnic
lines. This platform gained them significant popular support among traditionally marginalized caste, ethnic and rural groups (Thapa, 2008).

The Royal massacre of 2001 saw power pass to the more hard-line Prince Gyanendra. After a failed first round of peace talks, the newly installed king dismissed the elected government in October 2002 and declared a state of emergency in 2003. He branded the Maoists terrorists and gave the security forces extraordinary powers to arrest and detain (Farasat and Hayner, 2009). The government also deployed the armed police force and army in response to the perceived failure of the police to contain the Maoist movement (Farasat and Hayner, 2009). Farasat and Hayner (2009) write that “[h]uman rights violations increased significantly after the deployment of the armed police force, and intensified further after the army was brought in” (p. 10).

The deployment of the armed police force and army radically escalated the conflict. The state is thought responsible for the torture and “disappearance” of many labeled Maoist sympathizers, including children (Farasat & Hayner, 2009). Both sides have been accused of extra-judicial killings and the use of child soldiers, among other human rights abuses (Farasat & Hayner, 2009). In 10 years of war, more than 13,000 people are believed to have been killed, 8,000 of them (mainly civilians) by state security forces (Farasat & Hayner, 2009). The displaced are estimated at 100,000. King Gyanendra seized direct power in 2005.

After the second massive popular uprising (Jana Andolan 2) in 2006, the Maoists signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the seven party

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2 In this hierarchy, Dalits are the lowest, "untouchable" caste, as Brahmins are the highest caste.
alliance, democratic parties which had been marginalized by royal rule. Maoist cadres were then restricted to cantonments supervised by international arms monitors with the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). The Maoists gained a majority of the seats in 2008’s Constituent Assembly election. In its first sitting in May of that year, Nepal was declared a republic and the 240-year-old monarchy bought to an end.

The end of Maoist insurgency led directly to the beginning of Madhesi uprising in the eastern plains that border India, also called the Terai. Approximately half of Nepal’s population lives in the Terai (DFID/World Bank, 2006). The Madhesi have been historically marginalized due to accusations that they are Indian, rather than Nepali. Other Terai groups (Muslims and the indigenous Tharu for example) have also been excluded from Nepal’s power structures. After the signing of the 2006 CPA, the Madhesi and others hoped that the Maoists would fulfill their promises of political equality. When the Madhesi were again excluded from the process by their former allies, they turned to violent protests. In the eastern hills, traditionally marginalized ethnic groups such as the Limbu and Khumbu have also launched systematic protests, calling for their own state. Many such groups are calling for autonomy within a federal structure based on Maoist promises made during the insurgency. This overarching environment must be taken into account when considering peacebuilding programming or other initiatives.

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3 Nepalganj and Biratnagar, two locations selected for this research, are economic and political centers in the Terai.

4 The Limbu and Khumbu are Janajati, indigenous groups who have Mongol features, their own languages and religion.
Nepal remains unstable. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement called for integration of Maoist cadres into a new Nepalese Army, but this has been blocked by the military with the support of other parties. Some four years later, 19,000 Maoist cadres are still languishing in cantonments. While Prachanda was sworn in as Nepal’s Prime Minister on 18 August 2008, he later resigned when integration attempts failed (*The Kathmandu Post*, 14 October 2010). The Nepalese government tried and failed 12 times to elect a Prime Minister to replace Prachanda before finally selecting the Unified Marxist Leninist candidate, Jhalanath Khanal, in February 2011. They had also failed to meet the May 28, 2010, deadline to draft a new constitution (*The Kathmandu Post*, 14 October 2010). In this fractious context, the media may play a role in continuing, or restraining, the conflict environment.

**Media in Nepal**

Nepal’s media sector is growing rapidly. It includes both private and government-operated television, radio, and press. It also has a small film industry referred to as “Kollywood” (BBC Nepal Profile). In 2009, International Media Support (IMS) Nepal reported that there were 4,500 registered newspapers and magazines, most published irregularly. Of Nepal’s approximately 8,000 media workers, around three quarters are employed in print media. Radio mainly serves rural populations, which are inaccessible to regular print delivery and have high rates of illiteracy. These populations also often lack electricity and may speak languages other than Nepali. Radio has strived to serve this community; with community radio creating programs to target particular gender, caste, ethnic and

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linguistic audiences. However, the sector has not always been so diverse.

When Nepal was under the party-less Panchayat system (1962 – 1990), Nepali reporting was weak and featured many opinion pieces, as opposed to fact-driven news (Dixit, 2006). Opinion pieces were the only dissidence possible at the time and were restricted according to the mood of the royal regime (Dixit, 2006). Journalists could work for the government or be considered a Panchayat sympathizer; those not toeing the government line were labeled “partisan.” Many journalists instead chose to report on non-political subjects such as entertainment and travel stories (Dixit, 2006). After the first mass peoples’ movement ushered in democracy in 1990, Nepali journalists quickly became more professional (Dixit, 2006). However, media workers remained inexperienced and failed to perform watchdog functions and romanticized the Maoists’ political platform (Dixit, 2006).

During the Maoist insurgency (1996 – 2006), official censorship and self-censorship due to physical threats by armed groups and political factions posed challenges (Dixit, 2006). Both the government security forces and the CPN-M committed abuses against journalists, with approximately 24 killed in the 10-year conflict (Adhikari, 2008). While Nepal’s warring factions signed a peace accord in 2006, journalistic space in the post-conflict context remains fraught. The continuing impunity of perpetrators of violence has contributed to an ongoing environment of insecurity for media workers, as a lack of prosecution has been interpreted as a green light for further abuse (Article 19, 2010; IMS Nepal, 2009). Social exclusion, lack of adequate pay and competition, low journalistic standards and a lack of investigative journalism also remain problematic (Dixit, 2006).
According to Adhikari (2008), Nepal’s journalists were relieved when the 2006 Jana Andolan swept the suppressive royal government from power, but he said, “the worst was yet to come”. The new Maoist-led government dismantled restrictions on the press imposed by the Royal regime (IMS Nepal, 2009). However, the ethnic movements that erupted throughout the country put further pressure on journalists, with several threatened or beaten to force them to provide positive coverage of the ethnic movements. Groups who speak languages other than Nepali pressured media workers to publish in their native tongue. Special interest groups and parties in government also put pressure on the editorial process, testing journalistic independence (Adhikari, 2008). According to Adhikari, “Covering peace has proven far more difficult than covering the blatant drama of war” (2008, p. 80).

Despite these challenges, the Nepali media have been widely credited with contributing to the end of the Maoist Peoples’ War and the country’s return to democracy (IMS Nepal, 2009). Journalist organizations, privately owned newspapers and FM radio in particular played a role in coalescing public opinion against violence and in support for peace (IMS Nepal, 2009; Adhikari, 2008). However, reporting on the process of peacebuilding remains “haphazard and superficial” and often lacks context or background (Adhikari, 2008, p. 80).

According to Adhikari (2008), although politics and the peace process receive coverage, it is little more than “he said/she said” (p. 80) and largely excludes the voices of victims and minorities, despite public commitment to social inclusion (Article 19, 2010). Adding to this void, most journalists are based in Kathmandu and only travel to the rural regions when conflict flares (Adhikari, 2008). Further, news
executives may be hesitant to follow-up on or investigate stories due to economic and safety concerns (Adhikari, 2008). Inaccuracies such as an exaggerated report of mass graves during this time also inflamed tensions, disrupting the peacebuilding process (Adhikari, 2008). A lack of recognized industry standards can leave journalists creating and relying on their own methods (Adhikari, 2008). With half-hearted coverage of the consequences of war, Adhikari worried that lessons from the ten-year insurgency will be lost.

Political rhetoric is the “mainstay of the nation’s journalism” (Adhikari, 2008, p. 80). Many journalists themselves may be considered partisan (Adhikari, 2008). Party politics has a strong influence within the media community, and the low (and often intermittent) pay also plays a role in this loyalty to one side or the other (IMS Nepal, 2009). Media feature open and vibrant opinion pieces, but these are regularly inflammatory and biased, excluding opponents or divergent points of view (Adhikari, 2008). Nepal’s political landscape is personality-driven, and this is reflected in media, which focus on the three main alliance leaders who compete for headlines (Adhikari, 2008). When the Maoists formed government, the government news media was reduced to a Maoist mouthpiece and Maoist-affiliated violence went unreported (Adhikari, 2008). According to media freedom advocacy group Article 19 (2010), Maoist leader Prachanda has openly supported threats to the media.

Because of threats from armed political and criminal groups, the Madhesi conflict drove journalists out of the southern Terai plains (IMS Nepal, 2009). Combatants put pressure on media workers to cover their protests positively, to
publish in local languages and to join the armed groups themselves (Adhikari, 2008). Killings, abductions and assaults forced many journalists to leave the Terai, and many perpetrators have gone unpunished. The violence has not been restricted to the Terai but has been found throughout Nepal (IMS Nepal, 2009). Some reports indicate that groups may attack journalists in an effort to bring attention to their cause (IMS Nepal, 2009).

Violence against media workers has had a chilling effect (IMS Nepal, 2009). It has led to self-censorship, which is at a record high and affects both content quality and the public’s access to information (IMS Nepal, 2009; Article 19, 2010). Even when the police have evidence indicating who is responsible, the perpetrators are often protected by political patronage (Article 19, 2010). This impunity has encouraged further violence (IMS Nepal, 2009). Media companies are also coming under regular attack, with political cadres burning copies of newspapers reporting stories portraying them in a negative light (Article 19, 2010). Trade unions affiliated with the Maoists have also caused violent disruptions (IMS Nepal, 2009).

In addition to political pressures and unprofessional reporting, the media sector is let down by an inadequate legal framework. The 2007 Interim Constitution provides for freedom of expression, but provisions fail to meet international standards (Article 19, 2010). Freedom of expression and the right to information is only extended to Nepali citizens (excluding substantial groups such as Tibetan refugees and many Madhesis), in contravention of international standards, which dictate that such rights and freedoms are extended to all (Article 19, 2010). The Nepali culture of political secrecy also feeds into this: with few formal government
press conferences and little direct access to government meetings, journalists often must rely on press statements (Adhikari, 2008). They may also restrict themselves to covering ceremonial events as an act of self-censorship (IMS Nepal, 2009). This lack of information has led to increased corruption, with Nepal now seen as South Asia’s most corrupt country (Article 19, 2010). It also compounds vulnerable groups’ marginalization; surveys demonstrate that there is a pervading belief that local elites maintain control over information flows (Article 19, 2010). The media sector itself is not inclusive, with few female or marginalized group journalists (IMS Nepal, 2009).

Journalists require government registration, which can be withdrawn if the government disapproves of coverage (Article 19, 2010). The Ministry of Information and Communication, rather than a transparent, independent body, regulates broadcasting, thus opening avenues for government abuse (Article 19, 2010). According to Article 19, the Constitution also outlines special protection for the media, prohibits censorship and protects against closure, seizure or cancellation. In 2007, two laws were introduced to protect journalists and media freedoms: the Working Journalists Act and the Right to Information Act (IMS Nepal, 2009). However, these have yet to be enforced through a lack of corresponding regulations (Article 19, 2010; IMS Nepal, 2009). Finally, restrictions on freedoms and access to information are not sufficiently tailored (Article 19, 2010).

Since April 2006, data collected by the Federation of Nepali Journalists indicates that press freedoms have deteriorated significantly (IMS Nepal, 2009). According to IMS Nepal, attacks on the media further intensified after the 2008
Constituent Assembly elections (2009). In 2010, Article 19 named Nepal one of the most violent countries for local journalists. From factional infighting in Kathmandu to ethnic uprisings around the country, the current political instability means that this insecurity is increasing. Article 19 reported at least five serious assaults on media workers in the month after the constituent assembly elections in April 2008. In all instances, people with ties to the leading political parties or security forces were suspected (Article 19, 2010). Nepal’s government is still unstable and has yet to deliver the new constitution. According to IMS Nepal (2009), journalists could be at increased risk as political conflicts around how to shape the country’s future intensify. Within this environment, the media’s ability to support peacebuilding may be limited. However, as these circumstances are not unique to Nepal, an examination of the interaction between media and peace in Nepal may contribute to a greater understanding of media’s role in peacebuilding in general.
Peacebuilding is a relatively new concept (Schirch, 2006). It must be distinguished from peacekeeping, which is the deployment by the UN of security personnel seconded from member nations in addition to civilian UN staff (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Peacebuilding is not peace making. Peace making processes bring conflicting parties to peace negotiations, whereas peacebuilding focuses more on addressing the unseen effects of conflict (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008).

Peacebuilding is generally used to describe a multi-disciplinary approach to effect social change, improve the local capacity to non-violently negotiate conflict, and support the ability of people to meet their basic needs (human security) (Howard, 2002; Schirch, 2006). According to Lisa Schirch, peacebuilding “prevents, reduces, transforms and helps people to recover from violence in all forms while at the same time empowering people to foster relationships at all levels to create structural justice” (2006). This approach uses both human rights and conflict transformation approaches and can be described as supporting a positive peace.

Peace can be either positive or negative. A negative peace means simply the absence of direct violence. Positive peace requires an active attempt to restructure the society in a way that promotes equality of opportunity and access to resources. While negative peace may quickly retreat into renewed violence, positive peace is seen as more sustainable. Peacebuilding supports the creation of positive peace by
improving the local capacity to prevent violent conflict, and promoting post-conflict community healing (Schirch, 2006).

A sustainable, positive peace is only achievable with public involvement in reconciliation efforts (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Without the support of the majority of the population, peace “remains tentative and fragile” (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Media can play a vital role in both informing the public and mobilizing its support for peace processes. Similarly, public good will and associated pressure can keep parties at the negotiating table when obstacles to dialogue occur (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008).

Post-conflict policies designed to support a society’s transition to sustainable peace cannot ignore the media (IMS, 2007). Media can support peacebuilding in multiple ways, including by: creating a safe space for inter-party dialogue, fostering public support for peace processes and supporting democratic norms. Broadcast media may be particularly influential, as they may be more immune to obstacles such as illiteracy and social divisions (Spicer, 1994). They are also less likely to be affected by transportation and distribution issues that may impact press circulation during protracted conflict (Spicer, 1994). However, media will play a different role in each conflict and the peacebuilding process associated with it. Therefore, there can be no standard approach to supporting media in countries emerging from conflict (IMS, 2007).

**Media in Conflict**

In order to more fully understand the role of media in peacebuilding, the media’s place in conflict processes must also be explored. There has been much
research published on how media, both local and international, can influence violent conflict and the international community’s response to it. Media can be used to build a domestic constituency for war, to “sell” the war to the voting public (Bratic, 2006; Schirch, 2006). The “CNN effect” dictates that the conflicts seen prominently on CNN will mobilize the Western public (particularly in the US) and put pressure on their governments to “do something”. At the local level, several studies have demonstrated that media can directly incite violence, the most prominent case being the Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines radio station in Rwanda, which broadcast the signal for the massacre to begin (Bratic, 2006). However, according to Bratic (2006) the relationship between media and conflict is complex and cannot be taken for granted.

Civilians need access to reliable, timely information. This is often chronically lacking in conflict contexts (Hieber, 2001; Sigal, 2009). Media can facilitate decision-making and help to create a sense of agency in chaotic contexts. Armed groups may restrict media access or use media to gain support for their positions (Sigal, 2009). Thus, the conflict environment creates a news vacuum; people only have access to rumor or partisan slogans (Dahinden, 2007). Conflict can also restrict the media’s ability to reach their audience: it can affect financial resources such as advertising revenue, and it can damage infrastructure and supply and delivery mechanisms (Sigal, 2009). The presence of international media may not be a remedy. While international news outlets inform their domestic audiences, local populations often have little access to such reports (Dahinden, 2007). A balanced, accurate local media sector is crucial to meet the needs of citizens.
In conflict contexts, media systems can be poorly developed, threatened and monopolized (Bratic, 2006). Journalists can lack professionalism and be easily manipulated by conflicting parties or other special interest groups. Inaccurate reporting and the reflexive suppression of free expression by authorities can further inflame tensions (Sharpe, 2001). Media workers are also often among the first to be targeted in violent conflict, as parties try to gain control of the information disseminated to the public (Howard, 2002).

Access to information is necessary in conflict-affected societies. However, biased or partisan reporting can further escalate conflict. In contrast, independent, accurate and balanced reporting can promote genuine communication, and contribute to peacebuilding (Hieber, 2001).

Approaches to media interventions

There are three main approaches to the role of media and peacebuilding: communication for social change, peace journalism, and interventions for improving the professionalization of the local media sector. This thesis focuses on the latter.

As part of media development initiatives, aid agencies and NGOs have supported basic journalism training, infrastructure/technological improvement and the establishment of basic legal protections for journalists to encourage a reliable, diverse and free news media (Howard, 2002). The underlying assumption of media development work is that a strong and independent media contributes to peacebuilding (IMS, 2006). Media development can be divided into two distinct programs: interventions that support media training and infrastructure, and those that depart from journalism to create content that promotes a specific agenda, for
example a soap opera with characters from different ethnic groups to foster reconciliation. This latter is often referred to as communication for social change.

The media development field evolved quickly after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s (Mosher, 2009). Media can be political and social change catalysts, and have been seen by the development sector as a tool to promote good governance and the reduction of conflict (Panneerselvan and Nair, date N/A). Like all development interventions, media development programs are devised with a specific goal in mind (DANIDA, 2007). Programs generally consider the following context when assessing the viability of an intervention: the independency of the media, media coverage (e.g. amount of media, size of outlets and target audiences), style (e.g. debate or propaganda?) and content (e.g. what content is offered, and who does it appeal to?) (DANIDA, 2007). Media development interventions should be socially, institutionally and financially sustainable (Jallov, 2007). They should invest in human resources, training and media infrastructure (Puddephatt, 2007).

Basic journalism training to address unskilled, inaccurate, conflict-obsessed or highly partisan media is the primary media-based peacebuilding tool, educating local media workers in impartiality, accuracy, balance and democratic practices such as election coverage (Howard, 2001). Building on this, more sophisticated training develops journalism skills beyond the basic, including specialist skills such as investigative reporting, “to create a media that serves society as a conflict resolution process and upholds democratic governance” (Howard, 2001).
Peace Journalism

Building on the premise that media can influence peace and conflict processes, peace journalism proposes that media take an active role in facilitating or advocating for peace, rather than merely creating a professional atmosphere conducive to balanced reporting. According to McGoldrick and Lynch (2001), “Peace journalism seeks to minimize the rift between opposing parties by not repeating ‘facts’ that demonize or set the stage for conflict. Therefore, the basic question a peace journalist would ask before crafting any story would be “What can I do with my intervention to enhance the prospects for peace?” They conclude therefore that the peace journalism approach is a “broader, fairer and more accurate way” to frame and analyze stories, using a conflict transformation framework (McGoldrick and Lynch, 2001).

Peace journalism is considered compatible with news reporting. Advocates of the peace journalism approach state that the processes around the creation of traditional media content emphasizing conflict are not compatible with reporting on or fostering peace. Wolfsfeld, Alimi and Kailani (2008) state that there is an “inherent contradiction between the processes associated with the construction of the news and the needs of a peace process.” News media are famous for their prioritization of content: “if it bleeds it leads.” Stories on slow, complex peace negotiations require patience, while news reporting prioritizes those stories that grab urgent attention, and be explained simply (Wolfsfeld et. al, 2008). Further, while positive peace requires willingness to understand the other, media tend to project a simplified stereotype of the “Other”. Peace Journalism advocates that, if
journalists can be framed as war correspondents, why can there not also be peace correspondents?

The peace journalism approach brings a news perspective to the role of the media in peacebuilding. However, according to International Media Support (2007), in the initial post-conflict phase the focus must be on the development of an independent, professional media. Peace Journalism may complement a diverse, robust local media, but as reported by Hieber (2001) “While a broadening of reporting angles may help promote peace, it will be the professionalism and balance of solid reporting that will make the difference” (p. 132).

**Media in peacebuilding**

The problem with peace is that the journalist instinct is always to look for the negative. ¹

While there has been extensive attention paid to the role of media in the instigation, support and reaction to violence, there has been comparatively little work done on the role of media in peacebuilding (Bratic, 2006; Howard, 2002). There is an argument that the influence of media on peace should be obvious, as the public receives almost all of its information about peace processes through the media, the framing of which can affect perceptions of the peace negotiations, and of the Other (Wolfsfeld et. al., 2008). The assumption has been made in the media development field that if media can fuel violence, it can promote peace, but there have been few studies to support this (Bratic, 2006).

Media’s role in facilitating conflict can be directly related to their role in reporting on peace processes: if the media have played a significant role in

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¹ Interview with international media expert, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
mobilizing public support for conflict, it may be difficult for those same outlets to begin to advocate for peace. “No peace process begins with a culturally blank slate, but rather a slate filled with terrible images of death and destruction that remain an important element in collective memories” (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008).

According to Howard (2002), independent, professional media “ha[ve] an almost innate potential for contributing to conflict resolution.” They can counter misperceptions, rumor and propaganda, they frame the conflict, and they analyze the combatants, among other functions (Howard, 2002; Dahinden, 2007). According to Schirch (2006), media can be specifically used in peacebuilding measures to do the following:

- Tell victims’ stories, aiding in informing the public and victim catharsis
- Mobilize public support for peace
- Catalogue a relatively objective record of the past, necessary for community healing. This can also mean establishing a record of human rights abuses
- Create public pressure on parties to come to the negotiating table in good faith, and
- Act as the public conscience, and help communities to maintain a culture of peace.

Widespread public support for peace is necessary for a sustainable peace process. However, this public support must be based on knowledge of the political reality (IMS, 2007). Support for peace also depends on the public’s trust in the media: a pluralist, independent media environment will be more conducive to peacebuilding than one controlled by the government (IMS, 2007).

The consensus among peace media scholars is that accurate, independent and balanced news reporting continues to be a crucial peacebuilding tool because it can serve as a safeguard for democratic processes (Howard, 2002). Professional
media can provide a diversity of viewpoints, aiding the public to make informed decisions (Howard, 2002). A free, independent media might serve as an early warning system, helping societies to avoid violent conflict (Howard, 2002). Media have a watchdog function, holding public figures accountable to their constituencies (Howard, 2002). Media facilitate the working of civil society, including the monitoring of human rights abuses (Howard, 2002).

After the cessation of violence (negative peace), media might be used to rebuild relationships between communities by facilitating the positive peace described above. The absence of violence does not mean the absence of social injustice, and media can help highlight social inequities. In this way, media may also help a community emerging from conflict from returning to violence, or play a preventative role before violence breaks out. Media help to create an atmosphere conducive to peace by presenting information that is reliable, respects human rights and showcases diverse views (Howard, 2002). In order to fulfill this role, media must have access to information in the public interest rather than be reduced to providing opinion as opposed to information (IMS, 2007).

Attempts to use media as a peacebuilding tool face multiple challenges. Underpaid journalists are more vulnerable to being bribed to produce biased reporting, which can undermine a free media sector (Howard, 2002). Restriction of editorial freedoms, security risks to media workers and content quality also affect the influence of the media (Hieber, 2001). For these reasons, the public may no longer trust the media, so the sector must rebuild credibility (Howard, 2002; Hieber, 2001). Some peace negotiations may fare better away from media scrutiny, and the
media spotlight may endanger peacebuilding in this context (Jakobsen, 2000; Hieber, 2001; IMS, 2007). Censorship of conflict-supporting media is also controversial, with some arguing that free media are essential no matter the content (Bratic, 2006; Spicer, 1994). Finally, misunderstandings of the role of media in peacebuilding may jeopardize support for media interventions: traditional Western concepts of journalistic values dictate that journalists report the facts, and that peacebuilding implications ought not be considered (Hieber, 2001). However, critiques of peacebuilding do not take into account basic journalism training, which is perfectly in-line with conventional Western media standards.

The role of media in peacebuilding processes remains under-researched. While the above demonstrates that the field is gaining an understanding of media’s influence, it is still evolving and remains complex (Howard, 2001). Media interventions alone are not enough to promote peace; media projects must work in tandem with other peace building initiatives to bring about change (Howard, 2002).
Method

This is an exploratory, qualitative interview study informed by grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory is a qualitative research design that allows for specific research questions to form during study. It allows the participants and the data gathered to inform the direction of the study. Therefore, it lends itself well to research into areas that are not yet adequately explored, such as the role of media in peacebuilding.

To investigate the current state of local media in Nepal and how it may be interacting with the peace process, grounded theory was applied through in-depth interviews. The data gathered during these interviews provided a framework for further research (Creswell, 2007). The grounded theory approach to in-depth interviews helped to generate a theory of media and peacebuilding, which could be applied to other countries emerging from conflict and help design governance/media development programs (Creswell, 2007). However, as grounded theory is more interested in individual perspectives, findings may not be generalized.

This research consists of 33 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and nine informal conversations with local media workers, non-governmental organization professionals and United Nations officers (see Tables 2 and 3 for participant details). To conduct this research, I traveled to Nepal for one month, beginning on December 10, 2010. I interviewed participants in Nepal’s three main cities -
Kathmandu, Nepalganj and Biratnagar - to gain maximum geographic and ethnic reach. To get a more complete understanding of the peace process and the related role of the local media, it was essential to interview participants from all three locations. I began in the capital, Kathmandu, in the center of Nepal before traveling to Nepalganj in the west (center for Nepal’s indigenous Tharu and local Muslim communities) and Biratnagar in the east (the hub of the Madhesi uprising). I then returned to Kathmandu for one week to conduct member checks to consolidate my understanding of the current media context, and its relationship to the peace process.

Table 2: Abridged interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Type</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
<th>Caste/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kathmandu</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Janajati</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International media expert</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local journalist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local media expert</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>All Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Political Analyst</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International journalist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local media researcher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit community and media activist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nepalganj</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local journalist</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 For full table, see Appendix
To recruit participants, I began by reaching out to former colleagues who were still in Nepal for recommendations of who would be helpful to talk to about Nepal’s media landscape and the media’s effect on peacebuilding. I contacted these colleagues through Facebook and email, and compiled a preliminary list of people to contact once I arrived in Kathmandu. I also contacted people who had written scholarly and journalistic articles, which I had read as part of my background research, on the topic as well as national media organizations I knew from my

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2 For full table, see Appendix
previous work in Nepal. Per the snowball sampling method, preliminary contacts in Kathmandu recommended others, who in turn recommended more potential participants. As it is more difficult to locate potential participants outside of the Kathmandu valley, I specifically asked every participant I spoke to if they knew of anyone I should contact in Nepalganj and Biratnagar, and in particular those from traditionally excluded groups.

In Kathmandu, I contacted most potential participants through email. I introduced myself and asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. I also said that I had worked in Nepal for different organizations and named the cities where I had worked. I felt that this gave me some legitimacy, especially as I was contacting some very senior people who may not have otherwise had time for a student researching her thesis. I gave people the option of appointments in mid-December or in early January, the two weeks I would be in Kathmandu. Due to the holiday season, many respondents opted to arrange a time in January. (This precluded the original intention of interviewing participants once in Kathmandu in December before I made my field trips and again in January after my field research to do member checks of my findings.) I had decided not to ask for two interviews at the outset, as colleagues advised against it; those whom I was approaching for interviews were extremely busy and would likely hesitate to agree immediately to two interviews. I had to contact some organizations via telephone, as there was no email address available. Due to language barriers, I settled for scheduling an appointment over the phone as a media researcher and explained myself and the study more in-depth in person.
Interviews generally took place in participants’ workplaces, which was their choice. Once I arrived at the meeting, I introduced myself and gave them my business card with my Nepali mobile telephone number on the back. Collecting contact details seems to be very important in Nepali culture, and exchanging business cards seemed to add to the ceremony of the interview. I explained who I was and my work history in Nepal. I then explained the purpose of the interview and that all responses were completely confidential. I asked permission to record the interviews and explained why I was using two recorders (one was a back up). Two participants declined, and I took only hand written notes. I informed the participants that they did not have to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with, and that we could turn off the recorder at any time. Most participants were very comfortable with this, and a few offered to waive the confidentiality agreement. Some, however, especially in the districts, were particularly concerned about confidentiality and asked frequently throughout the interview if their answers would remain anonymous. Some also reacted guiltily or were more quiet when other people were in earshot, such as when a colleague knocked on their door. This indicated that they considered their responses sensitive information. Although some participants may have waived confidentiality, it has been maintained for all interviews.

After introducing the study, I asked questions based on the interview guide I had prepared before my arrival in Nepal (see appendix). Starting with “easy” territory, I asked the participants about the situation for journalists during the Maoist insurgency. This is well-established ground and leads easily into the next
question about the current context. As themes began to emerge from my preliminary analysis, the interview guide evolved to reflect my understanding of the current media environment. For example, questions on corruption and the influence of political parties were not included in the original interview guide but featured prominently later. Because these were semi-structured interviews, I had the flexibility to follow interesting themes that emerged during the course of an interview. I stressed that I would forward to all participants a copy of my thesis or of the abridged policy document I am planning.

Throughout the course of my interviews, it became very clear that some journalists had felt used by previous researchers and international aid workers who, from the local media workers’ perspective, had extracted information while giving little back. This excluded journalists from learning from the process and often, researchers did not acknowledge their contribution. Given this context, it is particularly important that I distribute my findings to the participants. I also reiterated that they had my contact details and were welcome to contact me at any time with any questions or further information that they may be willing to share. As per custom in both Kathmandu and the districts, I was often offered Nepali tea. The tea is very sweet, lightly spiced, generally milk-based and made by the office tea boy. I conducted nine interviews in English in the first week in Kathmandu. In an effort to be inclusive, I interviewed one male ethnic minority NGO worker (Janajati), one male Muslim, and two international female media professionals. The remaining six participants were high-caste Hindu men.
Most media and aid professionals in Kathmandu speak English quite fluently, but it is more rare for those in the districts. I speak only limited conversational Nepali. My comprehension improved the longer I was in Nepal, and my Nepali came back to me. I was aware that a translator would have to be acceptable to my participants and so might have to speak local languages in addition to Nepali. The ethnicity of the translator was also a consideration. For example, Madhesi journalists may have felt uncomfortable speaking about ethnic issues in front of a Pahadi translator. Gender was also originally a concern, as female participants may have felt uncomfortable with a male translator, and male participants may not have taken two women (including me) very seriously. Money was another factor; I could only afford to pay NPR 1,000 per day (approximately USD$14). This is what colleagues recommended. It is well above the average salary (the new minimum wage for journalists is NPR 5,200 per month) but is well below what a professional translator would be paid by an international organization, and many translators may expect to be paid much more. In the end, I only had one option each in the two regional cities I had selected, so necessity overcame all other considerations. I employed two male translators, one Madhesi Muslim (“Rasheed”), and one Pahadi Hindu (“Bishnu”). The ethnicity and gender of the translators does not appear to have influenced the type and substance of the data collected, especially as minority journalists were very difficult to find. Still, this should be a consideration for future research.

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3 I have changed the translators’ names for confidentiality.
In total, we interviewed nine participants in Nepalganj. Only one participant was from a minority (a Muslim male), and all others were male, high-caste Hindu. Unlike interviewees in Kathmandu, those in Nepalganj did not volunteer potential participants (as hoped with snowball sampling), perhaps due to the security situation. Rasheed, my translator for Nepalganj was a young, Madhesi Muslim male who is studying his master’s in international relations in Kathmandu (this was his third career option, after modeling and international cricket star). He speaks a non-Nepali local language with his family, and sometimes spoke of Nepalis as though they were from a different country. Nepalganj is a hub for Nepal’s Muslim community, and has been a center for inter-communal tension. Perhaps illustrating this, due to the security threats, local media personnel often did not pick up the phone when they did not recognize the number calling. Journalists in Nepalganj were particularly concerned with confidentiality, and could at first be hesitant to be recorded. However, more so than in Kathmandu or Biratnagar, interviewees in Nepalganj expressed thanks that I had taken an interest in their profession and experience. They seemed to feel ignored by both the centralized media sector, and the international community.

A participant now based in Kathmandu, but who is originally from Nepalganj recommended Rasheed. The participant used to teach Rasheed in high school, and they appeared to have a mentor-mentee relationship. This relationship perhaps led my participant to recommend someone he wanted to help, rather than someone suited for the position, as Rasheed had limited previous experience in this capacity. While his resume was impressive (previous work with an international organization
and corresponding understanding of confidentiality was a prerequisite for the position) his English was at a conversational level, and he struggled to translate during interviews, to the point where several participants switched into English themselves to avoid translation. We developed a routine where he would summarize a response during the interview, and then take his time to do a full translation using the recording at the end of the day. Obviously, this had major drawbacks as I was not fully aware of a response during the interview and so could not explore interesting leads, and even when he had more time, he was unable to fully interpret nuances as his vocabulary was limited. At night, I would try to transcribe as much of the day’s interviews as possible. We sat together on my last day in Nepalganj to check spelling of, for example, place names in my transcripts, and to clarify any points I was unclear about.

However, as a local community member and who has worked in a local newspaper for a short time, Rasheed was able help me identify media professionals to approach for interview, and to find their offices. He made all initial contact with potential interviewees over the telephone, and once my snowball sample based on recommendations from Kathmandu ran out, he was able to suggest further potential participants. We averaged about three interviews per day, and most interviews had to be organized on the day they were held, due to local custom. Additionally, he was a very pleasant person to work with. Having a local translator who was interested in showing me his town also gave me a better “feel” for the environment. He showed me the best local places to eat – helping me get out of the foreign/wealthy rut it is so easy to fall into, and also giving me a basic idea of the local economy, for example a
cup of tea cost NPR 5, while dinner cost about NPR 30, or about US 40c. He invited me to eat with his family, giving me a window into Nepal’s Muslim community with which I had had limited previous contact. He also pointed out prominent – and sometimes feared – Madhesi leaders when we saw them on the street, again adding much to my understanding of the political or social context.

In total, I interviewed ten participants in Biratnagar, including one woman (although she bought a male advisor who did the majority of the talking), two male Madhesi Hindus and one male journalist from the Rai indigenous community (janajati). All other participants were high-caste Hindu males, although I made an effort to be as inclusive as possible. Biratnagar in the east is an economic hub, and a major political center. Journalists here seemed more confident than those based in Nepalganj. The media in general, as well as the political context, seemed to be more robust. A former colleague recommended Bishnu, my translator in Biratnagar. In contrast to Rasheed, Bishnu had a lot of experience working as a professional translator for the international community, and was a professor at the local university. He is high-caste Hindu, and was used to being paid significantly more than I could offer. He took time off work to work with me. Consequently, the quality of the translations was much higher, and all translation was done during the interview. Again, I did transcription at night, and checked spelling and other queries with the translator the next day. Bishnu was very professional, and so, while we had a collegial relationship, he did not make an effort to show me the town. This had an impact on my understanding of the eastern context, which was mainly based on my time working in Biratnagar three years previously. I stayed in Eastern Star Hotel,
where I had lived when I worked in the city, and where the staff remembered me. This is outside of the downtown area, and so is a little isolated. I conducted most interviews in a meeting pagoda in the garden of my hotel, and was able to offer most participants the customary tea.

Bishnu called the contacts collected in Kathmandu and arranged a preliminary round of interviews. Again, these contacts quickly ran out (phone numbers were wrong, people were out of town etc.) and other methods had to be used: for example, Bishnu saw one journalist leaving a radio station on his motorbike, and literally flagged him down. A further complication was that there were several high profile visits to Biratnagar while I was there, which commanded the local media attention, and making it more difficult to access their time. The local representative for the Federation of Nepalese Journalists was able to recommend potential interviewees, particularly those few from minority backgrounds.

When I returned to Kathmandu for my final week in Nepal, I concentrated on key informants that would help me to “plug gaps” in my understanding. I targeted major professional media organizations and media researchers, as well as international organization staff, who would be able to help me crystallize my ideas of what was happening in Nepal’s media sector, and how this is interacting with the ongoing peace process. This concluding stage consisted of five in-depth interviews (all high-caste Hindu males), and nine member check informal conversations. These member check discussions included three male and two female international experts, and four male Nepali media professionals, serving as a part of my interpretive community. I knew two of the international informants through my
previous work in Nepal, and all other participants in this final stage were those whom other interviewees had highly recommended. As I felt that I had reached saturation with the data I had already collected, I chose to discuss my finding and interpretations with this group, rather than to interview them.

I finished transcribing all formal interviews conducted when I returned to the US. It took over one month to transcribe the 35 formal interviews. The longest interview was 18 pages long, and the shortest was three pages long. The total interview data numbered 328 single spaced pages. As I transcribed, I made memos to myself of important points, connections between interviews, and clarifying statements if the English in the interview was not clear. I interpreted the meaning of points made in some interviews where the English was not clear. Where I had “polished” the English used, I made a note of this in the transcript. Even when a translator was present, some participants switched between Nepali and English, and I made it clear in my transcripts which English came directly from the participant, and which was translation. I made a note of the themes as they emerged.

After transcribing all the interviews, I felt that I knew my data well enough to begin writing. I spent two days writing my findings. I then went back to my interview transcripts, and began to open code. Additional themes evolved through the open coding process. I analyzed the data and wrote memos about it while I was coding. I then integrated this, in addition to revealing quotes, into the findings I had already written.

This methodological approach had several limitations. Time was a major factor, as I only had one month in country. This was particularly problematic when
it came to finding journalists from minority communities. Had I had more time, I could have visited villages, or more remote districts which may have had a larger minority-journalist presence, and would have given me a greater “grass-roots” perspective than I was able to gather. I may have also been able to establish better contact with local female journalists. I was only able to find one, in Biratnagar, who ran an all-women radio station. While she agreed to speak with me, she invited several young female colleagues to listen, and a senior male station advisor who did most of the talking during the interview. I invited her to talk with me at my hotel, but again she brought a friend with her. If I had been in Biratnagar longer, I could perhaps have made her feel comfortable enough to speak with me alone, and to share her perspective. Given the political upheaval in the area, I would have like to have conducted research in the eastern hills, home to the Limbuwan and Khambuwan movements, to gather their perspectives. I might have found more statistics too on, for example, the number of media outlets to obtain a more holistic picture of the Nepali media sector.

My previous Nepal experience greatly helped me in my research. While helping me to build rapport, I was also able to understand linguistic nuances that others may have misinterpreted. An example of this is the Nepali use of the word “torture”. The International Committee of the Red Cross defines torture as “existence of a specific purpose plus intentional infliction of severe suffering or pain”, and North American, Australian and British English-speakers generally infer
this meaning when the term is used. However, in general Nepali English (those educated overseas may use it differently), “torture” means to embarrass or humiliate. This is a crucial difference. Interviewees used “torture” frequently to describe the actions of the Maoists, government forces and new underground groups. Whenever it was used, I double-checked what exactly the participant meant. I knew to do this only because I had lived in the country before.

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Findings

In Nepal, basic journalistic skills and professionalism seem to be under-developed, and media professionals chronically underpaid, if they are paid at all, leaving them open to bribery. Politicization appears rife, with most journalists affiliated to a political party and using their media position to further the agenda of their side. Further, journalists continue to be drawn from the country’s dominant ethnic groups, and are overwhelmingly male. Perhaps consequently, stories from traditionally marginalized groups seem comparatively rare. These factors and more may have led to little public trust in the media. Violence and threats against journalists too remain chronic. The vast amount of donor-funded journalism training appears to have had little impact, for a variety of reasons. These data suggest that Nepal’s media sector struggles to be an asset to on-going peace. In order to be successful, any peace initiatives need wide public support, which media coverage may offer. Without a well-functioning, independent media, the success of Nepal’s, and indeed any, peace process may be under threat.

Before travelling to Nepal, I believed from my research that the biggest obstacle to accurate, independent reporting would be the continuing insecurity in the Terai belt. As I have continued to read Nepali news over the Internet sporadically since I left the country in 2008, I believed the English papers to be independent and relatively professional. I was aware, however, that I am unable to assess the Nepali-language media, which obviously dominates the sector. After
beginning my research in-country, I quickly discovered that the journalists themselves could be dismissive of or down-play security concerns and instead cited a lack of professionalism and rampant politicization of the press as the two primary constraints.

**Impact of partisan media history**

Many of those interviewed expressed concern about the professionalism and partisan nature of Nepali journalists. Several ascribed this to the history of the sector. Journalism in Nepal is relatively new, with most respondents dating the beginning of a (relatively) free press at only 20 years ago. Print media began before radio, in the party-less Panchayat era (1962 – 1990).

The aim of media in the Panchayat period was to rebel, to put forward the views of the banned political parties through the highly partisan weekly tabloids that made up the mainstream media. As one Nepali editor put it: “So the political mission of the political parties and the media was the same.”

This trend has continued, with the partisan legacy leaving its mark on even the most professional papers. All media and media professionals are, or are believed to be, affiliated with one political party or another. The same respondent said that, even in the more professional papers, “again then the manpower was the same, the pattern was the same, and those manpower was very politicized, and that reflection is seen also in the newspapers.”

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1 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
2 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
When radio transmission began, the state-run broadcaster, Radio Nepal, allocated airtime to different “stations” but all on the one frequency. According to a local media specialist, all radio programming, therefore, was broadcast from Singha Durbar, the seat of Nepal's government. This did not serve to create an environment for the growth of independent media. Private radio multiplied after 1997. The Maoists too became deft users of the radio during the 1996-2006 insurgency.

Many respondents said that Nepali journalism is in its infancy, and will take time to grow. Participants seemed to think that many problems facing the sector were due to its immaturity, and that with time more sophisticated practices would develop. However, it remains to be seen what - in a heavily politicized and corrupt environment with only a small market for sophisticated media - would drive this development in media practice.

**Maoist insurgency period**

During the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), journalists faced pressure from both the Maoist rebels and the government forces. Each side wanted journalists to

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3 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.


5 “An example is the prostitution report that many well dress college girls were working as prostitutes. The media said that the evidence for this was that the police found condoms in their rooms. This was an anti-women report, men in the street are now suspicious of all college girls [think they are all prostitutes – eye them up and down etc]. But also sensational reporting. Before, the media and society never mentioned condoms, so its good that they do now, but if carrying a condom can get you arrested [is evidence that you’re a prostitute], people will ask themselves if they should carry them. Millions have been spent on encouraging people to use condoms to prevent against HIV – and this is the reporting we get?” Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
report positively on their activities. A local political analyst said that both sides suspected that the media were spying and put pressure on the media to gather information for them. A local political analyst said that journalists had no support from the authorities but were instead suspected and blamed. According to the same participant, authorities said to the media “you know information, and you hide it from us.” The authorities also censored the news produced: “In some of the regions, the media needed to use the army’s fax machine to send the news to Kathmandu There was no privacy or secrecy, so the army checked their news, and if there was any news they didn’t like, they would throw the news away.”

An NGO worker said that the government suppressed stories showing the Maoist point of view, or those showing government losses. A Nepali media expert said the government also lied to minimize troop losses or claimed that civilians killed were Maoist combatants. This led to public distrust of state broadcasts. A television journalist who reported on government losses during a battle while embedded with the Maoists was fired, and the television station “yanked off air,” according to one respondent. Another said that there was a lack of government

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6 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

7 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

8 Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

9 Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

10 “during this conflict period, the state-owned radio acted as the mouth piece of the government, and in such cases they broadcast wrong information such as the army killed this many Maoists in this village but that was wrong, and local people were very angry about that. Innocent people were killed by the government and labeled as a Maoists...the people didn’t trust the state-owned media.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

11 Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.
transparency at the time; government official wouldn’t speak openly with journalists.  

This fractured relationship with government authorities seems to continue to impact the media today, with most journalists forgoing investigative techniques when reporting on government issues.

Conversely, one respondent who worked for a radio station during the Maoist insurgency said that journalists were very scared of the Maoists. They were very careful about reporting on Maoist activities, as they had killed journalists.  

As the Maoists often controlled remote areas, journalists’ access to those populations and events was also restricted.  

The local people too were scared to speak to the media, for fear of retribution.  

The politicized nature of the media at the time (and to the present day) also fed into this. As one respondent explained: “Not only were people trying to be aware of which political party the journalist they were speaking to was affiliated with, but also which particular faction of that political party.” This reduced the ability of the media to tell the stories behind the conflict and to report accurately.  

Media who avoided reporting on the conflict or politics did not seem to be threatened by either side during this time.

12 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

13 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

14 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

15 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

16 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

17 One very renowned journalist, Kunda Dixit (editor of the respected English-language weekly, The Nepali Times, has produced three photojournalism books on the conflict, and has organized a
Violence against the media was a fact of life during the insurgency, from both sides. There has been very little, if any, action taken against perpetrators. This may have contributed to the current-day context of impunity for those who threaten the media sector. Consequently, the self-censorship that dominated the media sector during the Maoist conflict continues today, and indeed some respondents claimed the security environment and corresponding self-censorship are worse. Such a situation both hinders and distorts the role of local media in peacebuilding across Nepal.

**Security situation today**

But if I write something, my family may get pressure in my village because of my work. The pressure may be in a multi-way sometimes they even damage our crops just to take revenge on the issue that we cite something against them.\(^{18}\)

Most respondents agreed that, for journalists outside the Kathmandu valley, the current security situation is worse. However, physical threats to journalists within Kathmandu have generally subsided.\(^{19}\) During the Maoist insurgency, pressure came from only two groups; now there are hundreds of armed militias and individuals who threaten media workers. Journalists cannot identify groups’ cadres, and this uncertainty creates a great deal of fear.\(^{20}\) One participant said “there are so

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\(^{18}\) Interview with local journalist, 29 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\(^{19}\) See for example interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\(^{20}\) Little more worse. Because at the time, if we were clever, if we separate Maoist and security personnel, we could be safe before. But now, we cannot know who are they.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
many underground groups that we can’t count them on our fingers. There are ethnic
groups, underground groups, and cultural underground groups or political groups
as well as criminals. So it is hard to recognize them now days.”\(^21\) This also includes
the youth wings of the mainstream political parties. A local journalist said that:

> The political pressure to the journalists is through the youth wings of the
political parties. In different issues they are involved but we can’t write the
news. And if we do write, then again they will pressurize [sic.] us. There may
be a lot of irregularities where their involvement is there, but we can’t report
the things. For example if there is an issue of tender, and someone bids a
tender and other group give a pressure, that unauthorized pressure news
comes to us and we need to publish. But immediately after that they will start
to put pressure on us, why did we write against them. That type of pressure
is there from the youth wings. \(^22\)

This quote demonstrates the pressure journalists are under, even from groups
closely connected with the political parties.

In Nepalganj, for example, journalists explained that they did not answer the
phone if they did not recognize the number calling. As one journalist explained,
“Directly they send email, send fax, send SMS, they call them by telephone.”\(^23\) The
desire for caution was also perhaps communicated through reporters’ hesitancy to
recommend other media professionals for me to interview. Similarly in Biratnagar,
one journalist said, “…we get telephone threats. There are telephone calls asking
‘Don’t you have any children? Don’t you want to survive?’ So family members will be
worried, asking us whose call was that, threatening calls.”\(^24\)

\(^{21}\) Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\(^{22}\) Interview with local journalist (a), 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\(^{23}\) Interview with local editor/publisher, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\(^{24}\) Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
Before 2006, those who did not report on politics were able to avoid threats, but after the peace process journalists do not know what issues they can safely address. Journalists described being threatened not only for reporting negative news about particular armed groups but also for not covering particular events. As one violent incident (a beating or a kidnapping, for example) could be claimed by several groups, it is very difficult for the media to cover the event without getting threatened by those groups not credited in the media for the attack. Powerful people who do not like the coverage they have received may also use these groups to pressure media workers. Criticism of elites does not seem to be well tolerated: “...people do not like any criticism. You can’t criticize anyone through the media. So, still this profession is not serving much.” Individuals claiming to be from underground groups sometimes demand money from journalists, even though media is widely known to be a poorly paid profession.

These threats are taken seriously, especially given the background of the Maoist insurgency, when 24 journalists were killed (Adhikari, 2008). “Within the past 2-3 months [late 2010] about six journalists have been threatened by these

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25 “In the insurgent time, some journalists were safe to write the Maoists news and the security news, the conflict news. Some journalists were safe because they did not write the conflict news, so they were safe. But now days we do not know what is dangerous, what is not dangerous.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

26 “Even by the powerful group or the government group about whom we write, if we write about them they will not directly threaten us but will use these other groups to threaten the media sector, so it is hard to know who is going against the media or against me, because they are unknown.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

27 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

28 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
underground groups. They say that they will cut off your head and throw it away. That is exactly what they said."  

However, some participants also said that when some journalists were threatened, or even attacked, it was their fault for reporting incorrectly and for not checking their facts.  

Just as the government and the Maoists used the media to their advantage during the insurgency, so too do the new underground groups recognize the importance of media influence. They appear keen for publicity: “they want us to write huge stories, front page story, about them”. Journalists in the Terai, both in Biratnagar and in Nepalganj, reported that the underground groups pressured the media to give them coverage. The stories pushed on the journalists were not always newsworthy, leaving the journalists in a difficult position. Either the media promote the activities of the underground groups and remain safe, at least for a time, or they refuse and face potential repercussions: “And some of them, the underground groups, who are not responsible for anything, would also like to be highlighted in the newspaper. And they threaten the newspaper over why their name isn't in the paper.” Indeed, in addition to punishing the media, some underground groups appear to think that if they attack a journalist, it will directly result in more

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29 Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

30 “Because of the misconduct of a few journalists, they have gotten threats, or are even attacked because of a few people”. Misconduct means “They report biased reports, and also they do some bargaining, blackmailing. Like, if you give me money or any benefit, I’ll write in your favor, otherwise I’ll write against you. Blackmailing.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

31 Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

32 Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.
attention for their cause: “There has been a concept that once [the journalists] are threatened, only then will they publish the news.”

The media sector appears to get little support from state security forces or elected officials: “If we talk with the government people they say we are working for the journalists, we are always helping journalists, but in practical [practice] we cannot see.” Even if the security forces had the resources and capacity to protect the media sector more effectively, there may be a lack of political will. Impunity remains a grave problem. Many attacks on the media sector have a political tilt: the coverage was not to the liking of one group or another. Therefore, when a suspect is arrested, the political group to which he (it is unlikely to be a woman) is affiliated may put pressure on the police to release their cadre. A local journalist in Nepalganj said:

   We have lots of cases. Lots of cases. Sometimes some underground group or even open group they give the threat to journalists, if we complain to a government officer, they call the party leader, they talk each other and then at last the government officer says sorry we can not do nothing, you go your way.

This is not only an injustice; it also sends the clear message that violence against journalists is tolerated. This lack of state protection and prosecution may carry over

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33 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

34 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

35 “If you have a link to a political party then you’ll be freed, you’ll feel secure being associated with a political party. That’s the main problem, in most of the cases it happens.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

36 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
from the insurgency. However, many respondents linked widespread impunity to the instability of the current political environment and opined that once governance systems had stabilized, impunity would wane. One reporter noted sadly that “… in Nepal, the only way of working, only way of being safe is the power of the gods. Just power of the gods. Nobody knows what happened with the government, with the journalists. Just we are here till today with the help of the god.”

The current security situation, especially outside of the Kathmandu valley, has led to widespread self-censorship among media professionals. Similar to the insurgency period, local people are still hesitant to talk with journalists for fear of repercussions. One village-raised journalist based in Biratnagar reported that:

Some people are interested to share the stories, but in general the situation is scary. Even myself, when I go to collect some information on a particular issue, my family says do not get involved in this issue because we may have problems in the days to come. Similarly when to record something, some information the people any moment they may agree but the next moment again they come and say please delete because we are scared.

This quote provides a snapshot of how security pressure can inhibit information gathering. Even within Kathmandu, where security may be more stable, the strong influence of political parties and private business means that journalists self-censor to safeguard their career: “We can’t write what we could or what we should. There is always a risk for our career too - if we write something, it may hamper our career, so we can’t.”

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37 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

38 Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

39 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
only negatively hampers how effectively they can communicate about the peace process but also seems to render the media impotent as facilitators of the peace process in any meaningful way.

**Professionalism**

Nepal’s media sector has yet to mature. The recent explosion in the number of media outlets has contributed to this situation, as the demand for journalists has outpaced the number of professional media workers available. The absence of professional ethics and skills came up frequently in interviews and was seen by most respondents as the main challenge facing the media sector. Many respondents described a basic lack of journalism fundamentals such as verifying stories and investigative journalism practices.\(^\text{40}\) Important but controversial stories seem to be hidden, for example, alleged political party ties to organized crime and other corruption stories rarely receive attention.\(^\text{41}\) There is also an absence of basic infrastructure, with journalists lacking tape or digital recorders, computers, cameras and travel funds. This greatly impedes their ability to research and write

\(^{40}\) Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu. Also, “some of the journalistic values: the idea of precision, authenticity, the idea of trying to be precise, factual. That is not taken seriously. Even with very good journalists, it’s not there. It’s like verification, you have to verify, how many people died, oh, maybe 20. It has happened hundreds or millions of times...you just make some estimate, you just calculate on your own, you just make a guess, you just make it up from whatever comes in your mind. They won’t verify it...You can give an interview to someone, and the next day, even in the best of the best newspapers, I guarantee, won’t be a precise as what exactly you said.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu. Also, “Sometimes our editors get news through the fax machine or by the telephone calls, if they want that news it would appear in the newspaper. But sometimes that news was not true, and actually it was given for their own personal profit. Such type of disturbance is also going in the local media sector in Nepal. Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\(^{41}\) For example, interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu; and interview with international journalist, Kathmandu, 17 December 2010.
accurate, informative stories. Fundamentally, a shift in mindset has to occur. Many people within the media sector appear to become journalists to get close to power rather than to inform the community. This lack of appreciation for the role media can play in society may have a profound impact on the peace process. One local journalist explained how some view media work:

Some have taken this profession just for time pass. They do not have much interest ... in journalism. Journalists’ role is very important. They work as the image of the issues, positive or negative in the society. Most often there are issues which are negative issues in the society but those are brought into light by journalists.\(^{42}\)

This passage perhaps demonstrates how the current mindset many Nepali journalists seem to have may inhibit important social issues being openly discussed, which is crucial to establishing sustainable peace. This type of professional drive will take many years to develop, because the media sector cannot be separated from the larger culture, where patronage networks remain crucial and it is important not to upset benefactors.\(^{43}\)

Prestige factors into this in two ways: first, judging by salary, a media career appears to have little prestige in itself; and second, a journalist can have access to influential circles, and therefore a media career may often be recognized as a possible way of improving one’s social status.\(^{44}\) Consequently, stories that might

\(^{42}\) Interview with local journalist, 29 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\(^{43}\) Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\(^{44}\) “It used to some extent, but after this conflict, journalists don’t have any prestige. They have been chased by Maoists, criminals, so many have died, almost 24 journalists were killed in the conflict, so they are on the run in that sense. Journalists in the local communities have a certain amount of influence. You have a certain power, you have access, the access gives you power, and power gives you prestige in the society. They say here, no matter how much money you have, even rich people,
agitate benefactors will not be showcased. Nepal seems to still be very much a society where patronage and connections to power centers remain the key factors affecting success. Employment or promotion may have very little to do with merit. As one media professional recalled “I have been called by a minister to say ‘Oh he reads the morning newspapers to me, make him a newsreader,’ and even funnier is a situation where someone has said, ‘Appoint me him as a singer.’ Can you appoint someone as a singer? So that’s how things have been working.”

This emphasis on patronage networks downplays the importance of professional skills, bypasses journalistic ethics and suppresses negative stories about elites. This, in turn, may affect the greater public interest and dampen citizens’ ability to make informed decisions. In short, the importance placed on pleasing members of personal networks inhibits the media’s ability to do its job as a watchdog on power, and as the voice of the people.

Participants said that if one can get no other job, one becomes a journalist. This indicates that the best and brightest, with keen analytical and investigative skills, are not finding their way into the sector. One respondent, a media trainer himself, said that many of the journalists he sees cannot write in their mother tongue because they don’t have that much power compare with people who have access to the prime minister, or to the army officer, the police officer. This is a very different society, so people identify themselves, their association, mostly with the power centers. So a local journalist has access to the district officer, the police, he can have anytime, he has the number he can dial any time, the rest of the people they can’t. They don’t even dare to talk to a police officer, or go to the CDO officer. So all of this I think it has mostly to do with the access issue.”

44 Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

tongue.⁴⁶ Compounding this, there are few institutes providing journalism training. According to respondents, the courses offered at Nepal’s universities are not in-depth and provide only a surface overview of what it means to be a journalist. Current textbooks in Nepali are scarce. In addition, according to one respondent who is engaged in the training sector, courses emphasize theory, with students given little chance to practice skills. Universities also do not appear to encourage cross-disciplinary learning. Consequently, one media professional who has a degree in commerce, said he struggled to understand the coverage of business news, as the journalist writing the report did not understand the subject matter.

In the past few years, private training institutes have proliferated, with some offering training in journalism. However, those running the courses are rarely professional journalists themselves, according to those interviewed. There do not appear to be specific, enforced regulations or guidelines on what constitutes a journalist, and who can offer journalism training.

There is also a lack of specialization. Especially outside of the Kathmandu valley, journalists are expected to cover all topics, so they rarely learn enough about one particular subject to cover it adequately. Journalists who do not read English may not be able to conduct extensive research over the Internet, which may be a limited tool anyway in a country with current daily power cuts of more than 14 hours.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ Interview with local media expert, Kathmandu, 17 December 2010.

Issue-based training provided by international and local non-government organizations (I/NGOs) may exacerbate this. I/NGO-sponsored workshops may train journalists on HIV/AIDS sensitivity, or the importance of women’s and children’s issues, for example. This type of training, however, does not address the mindset of the journalist who may not think such issues are particularly important. Interviewees said that they could see through this type of training; it was more about transmission of information according to constantly changing donor interests, rather than geared to support the country’s media sector. As a local media specialist commented:

There [are] multiple issues in our society, there is the issue of the HIV/Aids program running, so NGOs want to give training on HIV/Aids issue training. Peace organizations want to give peace-messaging training, so always there is lack. Environmental people want to give environmental training. Sometimes we say, training is like fashion.48

This perhaps demonstrates that media professionals may view training as related to an NGO’s agenda, rather than being designed to support the media sector itself. It also provides insight into the constantly changing priorities of the aid community, and that it may become difficult for their audience to take training seriously.

To get coverage, some I/NGOs may pay journalists to feature stories about their project or key message. Yet again, this does not necessarily create genuine media interest in the issue. When asked if journalists, who remain mainly upper-caste males, would continue to report on these issues without financial incentive, many said they would not. The mindset of the media – what it means to be a

48 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
reporter – must be discussed, rather than merely the content produced. As a local publisher said:

[Journalists] want to go and collect features news, for which they are paid by NGOs and INGOs. In which cases we are also paid for our...petrol for our bike. We prefer to go to...VDCs [village development committees, the smallest division of local government]. Sometimes the NGOs say you go to Rangali VDC or Kalmar VDC, you collect this information. So now we are emphasizing more of the issues of child labor, the children picking up litter on the street side or children working with bricks for construction works. So we feature those news, those information because we are paid.49

Again it seems that for many reporters, the main priority is not to cover social issues, but to cover the stories that offer financial reward. The journalists do not appear to cover what they think might be newsworthy but instead appear very much directed by the I/NGO involved. Such direction undermines the development of journalistic skills, and hinders the practitioners’ appreciation of professional endeavors. This problem is not limited to the districts, as a local journalist described:

There are some people in Kathmandu who think we should raise these issues because INGOs pay us. As an example, Nagrik Daily, in the front page comes news related to children. Because UNICEF or Save the Children provides some funds to the journalists and on the basis of that reporting they get some money. Two days ago in Biratnagar almost all the major papers gave coverage to news about children, child labor and so on, because Save the Children is paying them.50

This may show that while the Kathmandu media sector is generally thought to be more professional than the district publications, their news choices too may be influenced by financial reward.

49 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

50 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.
Some participants critiqued this practice as “fluff pieces.” They said that reporters who travel with I/NGOs to their projects or who report on specific issues due to funding from I/NGOs do so uncritically. This was the major objection. Payment for stories was not considered unethical in itself, but the abandonment of journalistic inquiry seemed to be thought more problematic. As one media professional commented, it is not a problem that I/NGOs support journalists who have very limited resources to travel to more remote areas to seek stories on marginalized groups. The problem arises when a) the journalists involved are only reporting on these issues due to the payment, and to promote the public interest and b) when the journalists feel beholden to the I/NGOs and do not report critically. If the journalist is paid to give uncritical, positive coverage of I/NGO activities, it may be seen as bribery. As a local media specialist put it:

...it depends on what that local NGO is telling that journalist to do, and how high is the sense of free spirit and independence does that journalist have. The journalist often does not ask, look I will accept this 20,00, 40,000 rupees from you for this series of articles but I will write as I see it, is that ok with you? ...It should be given, or else it is bribery, it is a blatant case of corruption.51

This demonstrates that it is not necessarily the financial help that may be problematic, but rather the way financial incentive may affect the journalist’s judgment. Even if the I/NGO invites the journalist to cover their activities fairly, he or she may self-censor so as to be considered for future support.52

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51 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

52 “But often journalists will not write...sponsored article that is critical of the paymaster...Maybe there is nothing critical to report about, but I doubt it. When a journalist has accepted a fellowship and is going on a sponsored trip, perhaps in the vehicle of the local district coordinator of that
The importance of prestige appears to greatly influence why some people join the media sector. Some interviewees joked that this was “dais journalism.”

Nepali communities hold many presentations and speeches, and the most important community members are invited to sit of the dais. Those considered most important can include media publishers and politicians. In this way, publishers can have direct access to the political power brokers and be seen by the community to have these links. One international participant said that local colleagues had told her that:

...a job in journalism has been a route into an NGO or a UN type organization ... perhaps that suggests that there isn’t such a dedicated [workforce], it’s not seen as ... a prestigious career path in itself, it’s seen as a route to go on and earn more money, a route to something completely different. So there isn’t perhaps this sort of commitment ... to the ideals of journalism.

This may be indicative of the mindset of some entering the media: that they may not have a passion for journalism, but may only see it as a path to a more illustrious career. Similarly, journalists may see the media as a stepping-stone into the political arena. This has an impact on the news reported, as they may be loath to upset their political benefactors. As a Dalit community and media activist said:

[Journalists] don’t want to be the editor of a newspaper in the future. If you interview a good journalists, they want to be a member of parliament, or on propaganda committee of a political party, or a political appointment somewhere else. They’re working in a newspaper, their motto is something different. They want to get support from a political party, for the betterment of them. This is their motto.

NGO...then you lose your sense of critical faculty completely. And you are also fearful of, you do not want to write any negative story about it because you also expect such fellowships to come your way in the future from that NGO.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

53 For example, interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

54 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

55 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
Again, this passage seems to indicate that people may not enter the media profession because they are committed to the ideals of journalism. Instead, they may only view it as a step in a political career, and a chance to demonstrate political allegiance. They may not be committed to informing the population, but are rather looking out for their own interests, and the interests of the party to which they are affiliated.

As in other cultures, it seems to be very important in Nepali society to be seen. Many local papers seem to be mainly comprised of content written for free, by those who wish to heighten their profile. These opinion pieces may not be talking about a pressing local or national issue, but may be instead on a topic echoing the author’s interests, literature for example. According to participants, the editor of the paper does not exercise control over the content of these contributions, and is rather grateful to have free content to fill the pages. This means that many newspapers may not contain much news, or other useful information that would help a community member to make informed decisions. The practice of cutting and pasting stories from the internet to fill pages also dilutes the impact of the media.56

Free content and publishers creating newspapers to gain access to political elites rather than to provide community information, feeds into a saturated media market. One publisher in Biratnagar, whose family members are his editorial board, publishes 5,000 newspapers per week and is only able to distribute (often for free) a few hundred. His newspaper does not make money through sales (at 2 rupees each,  

56 Interview with local journalist, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.
his newspaper costs less than half a cent); he instead survives on government
subsidies, and does not pay for content. The goal is to fill the pages, not to provide
quality content. This is not unusual, not is it rare for publishers to also be the
marketers, delivery personnel and chief – or only – reporter. There are over 35
newspapers in Biratnagar alone.

Media finances

As an international journalist noted, “it’s fairly clear that you can’t make a
profit from running a newspaper in this country, so there must be another reason
why people are doing it”.\textsuperscript{57} The Biratnagar publisher described above, who prints
5,000 copies but sells very few, when asked how he made money said:

\begin{quote}
There’s a system of government categorization of the newspapers. The
newspapers...fall in categories either of A, B, C or D. A newspaper that is in
category of C [like his paper], gets 11,000 rupees from the Government of
Nepal per month, promotion support. The municipality provides 1,400 per
month for his paper, [the District level government] provides 500 rupees per
month. Besides that we get some advertisements.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

This is an attractive amount of money in the Nepali context, particularly in the
districts. To put this in context, UNICEF posits that 55\% of Nepal’s population lives
on less that US$1.25 per day, the international poverty line.\textsuperscript{59} This equates to
roughly 90 Nepali rupees per day. Eating at a local restaurant cost me an average of

\textsuperscript{57} Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{58} Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

30 rupees per meal outside of Kathmandu. It is clear that running a newspaper and collecting government subsidies is an appealing prospect.

Advertisements do not net much: “Due to the presence of a lot of radios and FMs, print media doesn’t get much advertisement. The local newspapers get advertisement of only 200 rupees [about US$2.70] or 400 rupees [US$5.40], very cheap it is.” The government provides subsidies intended to support a diverse marketplace of ideas. These subsidies appear to work in two ways. The first appear to be generic subsidies, such as for the purchasing of printing equipment. The second, as described above, is a more complicated system of ranking regular newspapers (from A for the largest through to D for the smallest distribution) to determine how many government-sponsored public service advertisements they will receive per month, with special advertisements on national holidays. This is the main way in which the government subsidizes the print media sector. However, there is little screening as to who may qualify for subsidy support, and many smaller newspapers appear to be little more than one-man shows.

Subsidies alone will not support the growth of a professional media sector. Participants noted that the only qualification needed to receive a subsidy is that you publish regularly. Sending a copy of your paper to the Nepal Press Institute in Kathmandu proves this. There is no verification as to whether more than this single

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60 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

61 “...in print media there is some generic subsidy. If you want to buy a press in the name of a newspaper, you can get customs free, that’s the duty free things, that’s a type of subsidy. And the other one, if that press is in the name of a newspaper, electricity subsidy. And another one is a small amount, monthly or one issue, outside of KTM might get 6-7,000 rupees, which is publish the public service information which the government advertises. That’s a direct support. Out of that [besides that], all the things are generic subsidy, not direct support.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
copy is produced, and it is widely acknowledged that this system may be affected by significant fraud.\footnote{“This is a very big problem since so many years...there are 35 newspapers, but there is no market, it doesn't come. Nobody buys them...the Press Council, as long as you regularly publish the newspaper and send them a copy, they give the newspapers some subsidy...because it is government subsidizing the newspapers, thinking that they are doing a great job, most are not.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.}

The subsidy system appears to be encouraging people to enter the media to make money and earn some social capital, rather than to inform the public. The market is saturated, but not competitive, given that everyone may access subsidies. This does nothing to ensure the survival and development of the best reporting. Instead, a viable market, a demand for high quality reporting, is required to improve the sector, and it must be eventually supported by advertising and the readership or listenership financially supporting the outlet. This will take a long time, as much of Nepal is inaccessible to the daily delivery of print, and has few economic ventures in the community to support advertising.\footnote{“Nepal going through what it has in the past so many years, it doesn't have much industries to talk about, the economy is not doing well, so the things that sustain any media venture are not there.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.}

In contrast to the subsidies received by print media, radio seems to receive little government support.\footnote{“But in radio, there is no subsidy. If they want to buy the equipment they have to pay all the customs or duty, as well as the electricity. The radio has to pay the renewal fee to the government. It is very different in the radio sector.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.} Like newspapers, FMs have suffered from an explosion of stations which has saturated the market, and diminished their bargaining power with what few advertisers may be available.\footnote{Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.} Like print reporters, radio workers
frequently work unpaid or for very little, and many of them work at multiple stations to make ends meet. They also frequently work without any sort of contract or other employment documentation, making job security a major challenge. The sheer quantity of radio stations, according to one participant, has made it very difficult to distinguish a station for branding or advertising purposes. Instead of cultivating a loyal following, listeners twirl the radio dial until they find a program or song they like, with little awareness of which station they have landed on.

Several participants, assert that FMs have not been victim to corruption to the same extent as newspapers. Some thought it is harder, with real time listener call in facilities and breaking news, to hide emerging stories. However FMs remain vulnerable to being run simply for the prestige of the owner, who may not emphasize quality content. Free news or programming distributed by I/NGOs and music are the cheapest way to fill airtime. Radio stations seem to try to cover a wide geographical area for prestige, instead of concentrating on their own vicinity, which might attract local advertisers. One respondent said that he knew of several owners who had regretted buying into the radio sector, as it was too expensive to maintain. However, as a local media specialist explained:

...if you don’t have money, but you still want to somehow continue to keep the radio alive because so much social prestige, so much of your own stakes

66 “…why people were still running weekly newspapers when it is not doing financially well is because you need for social prestige, you do it to have some political sponsorship from this or that, or to be close to the power center or that. Somehow they would want to run a weekly newspaper even if this was not financially doing well…What you see with radio, when licenses became so easy to obtain, is that in a place if a group of people went for establishing a radio, it has prestige value in a social setting, another group would want to start, without any regard for how many radio stations can a certain market sustain.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

67 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
have already been, so much that you do not want to part with the prestige that you earned, you want to continue but you want to cut down corners, how do you cut down corners, then we’ll just play music, canned music.68

Again, the emphasis does not seem to be on serving the community’s information needs. As another put it, “they are running for running”.69

This lack of sufficient pay in all media sectors, in addition to the media being seen as a stepping-stone, seems to have led to a high-turn over of staff. Conversely, media houses also use the influx of rookie-journalists to justify the low rate or absence of wages. Some journalists may leave the media sector to enter the I/NGO world or politics; others may simply leave to enter a career with more stable pay. This staff movement has also impacted on the efficiency of training: if there is a high-turn over of beginner journalists, many rounds of basic training may need to be conducted. As skills do not get the time to develop and mature, journalistic quality suffers. The lack of adequate pay is currently being addressed in part by the national government, which has imposed a minimum wage. However, many participants expressed doubt that this would be systematically implemented, or that the wage designated was sufficient.70 As one local journalist explained:

Recently there has been a draft bill, a proposed bill, for minimum wages of the journalists where it said that a full-timer will get 5,200 rupees per month and part-timers will get 4,200. This is the minimum of the minimum. In the present context, if you see in Biratnagar onion cost 125 per kg. So how can one survive with 5,200 rupees for being engaged in the media sector?...In

68 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

69 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

70 “[The] government has just made a new act, I don’t know exactly what the name it is given but it is journalist act, journalist support act. But it is not in practical, just government has made, has formed, but it is not working in practice.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
some cases the family will support for some months, but the family doesn’t support forever. I have been working here for the past four years and my family has been asking me what I have earned since last four years. I have nothing.\footnote{Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.}

This seems to indicate that the government specified minimum wage is not enough to support an independent, well-functioning media sector. While a minimum standard is an improvement, it may be unlikely to attract the best and the brightest to the media sector. Nor is it likely to change the culture of viewing media as an attractive career in itself, rather than as a stepping-stone to a more prestigious position.

This limited market, restricted financial resources and lack of professionalism has an impact on the staffing of media houses. Media cannot attract and retain the best and brightest to the sector while wages remain so low. Once journalists acquire the skills or status they were searching for, most move on. Some may leave burnt out, or to seek better employment opportunities. For those who are committed to the ideals of journalism, the low wages are compounded by high job insecurity: they are rarely given employment contracts, and in a sector which does not greatly value expertise and quality content, senior journalist may be fired to make way for younger, cheaper workers.\footnote{“Here it is seen that the media houses themselves try to fire those people who have been working for a longer time because they need to pay more for them, rather they will hire the fresher. And a fresher may come there and can work for six months without any pay.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.} Media professionals frequently work in
multiple roles or for multiple outlets in order to make ends meet. As one local journalist said:

If I am not paid well, I have to search for other work. Here in Biratnagar hardly you will find someone who says I am fully engaged with this media sector. He will give you three or four names or six names if he gets 2000 rupees from this it means 12,000 rupees per month. I may be the only person who is involved in only two. Many of our friends are engaged in many media or many newspapers. And because of that our output is not good. Once if I publish an article in a newspaper the same cannot be published in another and to create another one I need another time and another cost. So, had there been some organized way of producing our outputs obviously we could have been giving quality outputs, only being involved in one sector.73

This illustrates that when journalists have to take many jobs in order to make a living wage, it may reduce the quality of content produced. This in turn reduces the quality of information researching the community, and their ability to make informed decisions.

With the market so saturated, a limited advertising culture in place and the low price of print media, it is difficult to see how Nepali media could afford to pay their staff even this minimum wage. While this gap persists, journalists will seek other ways to earn money. Additionally, while there are other journalists or community members willing to work for free or provide free content, media houses have little incentive to respect pay or other employment demands.74

73 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

74 “One of the journalists from one television station, he wrote a letter to the editor where he has raised the problem in his television station, that they are not getting well payment at the end of the month. Just because he wrote that letter to that newspaper, he had to resign form his television organization...I remember one of my friends who was working in a daily newspaper, he started writing in the blog, and one time he wrote the condition about the payment, he was not getting payment for 3 months that’s what he wrote in his blog. That was the reason he also had to resign from his newspaper. I think these two examples, they give the kind of scenario of the Nepalese journalists.” Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
different perspective, one participant maintained "a private media organization will be willing to give only to a person they have faith in, who has the necessary qualifications." This demonstrates the vicious circle currently trapping the Nepali media sector: journalists who do not meet a certain professional standard may find it difficult to demand adequate wages, but it may be impossible for them to become professional journalists without greater investment.

**Bribery and extortion**

Participants claim bribery and extortion in the Nepali media sector seem to be fairly common. At one end of the spectrum, it was accepted that to get media coverage of a workshop or event, the organizer would have to throw a party for the media, or take them to a good restaurant, and pay for their food and drinks. Without this entertainment, the consensus was it would be very difficult to get coverage. At the other end, some participants reported journalists being paid to cover up negative stories for special interest groups, highlight their good works without disclosing payment, or write negative pieces about the competition.

Some reported blatant black mail of businesses by media professionals. There were also several stories of media houses encouraging the practice to avoid paying their staff a wage. As a local newspaper publisher said:

75 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

76 “They generally do not write that this [paid positive coverage] is an advertisement...and this is also creating some confusion among the people, because they are presenting it as the news, but it is in support of someone or something.” Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

77 “There have been different cases, one from [an eastern district], where it is said that there have been about 10-12 journalists which formed an organization called Press Club and they are demanding for money, issuing their letter page and asking for money. In [another eastern district]
In Nepal there is to a great extent a trend of bargaining. If someone gets some news about someone – some bad news – immediately the news does not go to the press. Before that there is a dealing. The person is called and there is a talk in between they might say the issue with certain conditions, this amount of money...79

This may again demonstrate that the task of informing the community is not always the priority of some journalists. A media position may be seen as a vehicle to make money through extortion and other illegal dealings.

A couple of participants defended the practice of rewarding journalists for positive coverage using euphemisms such as “voluntary donations,” but believed that hiding negative stories should be stopped. One local media specialist said that it might be easy for the journalists to justify extortion or bribery to themselves, given the criminality and general corruption that pervades Nepal today:

These businessmen, they are all crooks, they are perhaps making money through all the illegal means, they are [inaudible] smugglers in the Terai area...so what is the harm in getting a few bucks out of them is perhaps the mentality that works. So I have heard of some people in Biratnagar for instance, which is close to the border, where the journalists, some prominent journalists in the area...were getting monthly payments from the customs. So customs officials were paying them a monthly remuneration of 6,000 or 7,000 rupees just to keep quiet. Just not to report on the flow of good, illegal contrabands from Indian to Nepal, and Nepal to India...The police would too, the reporters demanded 2.5 lakh rupees [250 000 rupees] from the contractors. Such type of news comes, so this needs to be investigated to see how far it is, how deep rooted.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

78 “One example from [an eastern district], one reporter who used to work for [a prominent daily Kathmandu-based broadsheet], he worked for them for nearly six months and then he went to Kathmandu to ask for his remuneration. At that moment the reply was that we have already issued a card for you, you can use that card for collecting money. An identity card as a reporter, so go to different sources [to get money from them – through blackmail etc]...there are also some newspapers who tell their journalists to go and collect advertising from the companies, they tell them to go and collect them and what money you earn from there you can get a share from it. In such a situation they go, but they are not paid from their office so they need to go and if they do not get anything, whatever products the factories or industries give them, they receive it.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

79 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
throw a party for journalists once in a while at a certain restaurant, a restaurant who is perhaps already paying that police officer for allowing it to open until 12 instead of 11 or 10 as the practice is in that town. So there is that nexus.\textsuperscript{80}

Not only does this quote perhaps illustrate the role of corruption in the media, but it also may demonstrate that corruption currently affects many of Nepal’s institutions. It would not be realistic to expect the media to be immune. However, given the media’s general role of community watchdog, the involvement of the media may be particularly problematic.

Several participants argued there was no excuse for extortion or bribery, and that media houses unable to pay journalists a living wage should not be allowed to operate.\textsuperscript{81}

**Social inclusion**

At one point the non-minority journalists, they will prevent this [social and political] progress, and many things of the society. Because they have the pen, they have a very big instrument.\textsuperscript{82}

The Maoist insurgency gained traction outside of the Kathmandu valley in part because they said they were fighting to abolish the caste system and to install broad equality. Now that the Maoists have joined the mainstream, their struggle has been taken up by a variety of ethnic groups who demand their own homeland within a federal state. At this time of flux, it is crucial that social issues receive press attention. Nepali journalism in general appears to only skim the surface of issues,
rarely investigating or analyzing in-depth. Social issues are a prime example of this.

The voices of common people are rarely featured in the media, as one local journalist explained:

It is a big lack, between people and media houses, people and leadership, people and CA [constituent assembly] members. It is a very huge gap. Because we are thinking that in our media in our newspaper, common people are hidden, there is not seen common people. We [can find stories on a] leader, business man or any union leader, but we are not searching common people, common professional, it is a huge problem for us, and we are realizing this, but we are going to improve on this also.83

This quote illustrates the absence of the voice of everyday people in the media.

Without more attention to the issues people outside of the political sphere feel are important, it may be difficult for a lasting peace process to progress. In particular, without airing victims’ stories and local perspectives on the conflict, community healing may be difficult to achieve.

While there are a vast number of media outlets, they do not seem to be providing the information the public needs to make informed decisions on crucial issues including the peace process. Not do they give all sections of society a voice.

There seem to be two main reasons for this: one is that these types of stories are not prioritized, and second, the media workforce itself is not sufficiently inclusive.

Interview participants uniformly said that social issues were gaining more

83 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
prominence in the media, but that there was still much more to be done.\textsuperscript{84} An example is the increasing (but still not sufficient) number of stories about ethnicity-based unrest, such as the Limbuwan movement in the eastern hills. However, stories continue to be surface-level reporting, and people outside the affected districts do not understand what the movement was calling for or the impact the movement is having on daily life. A prominent human rights advocate in the east said:

\begin{quote}
At the present Limbuwan/Khumbuwan situation in Ilam, Panchtar or in Taplejung. We go there and we see the different situation but as reported from the center they give very less importance or what they report there is not the actual situation here. Here the situation is much more worse than what they write there or much more different than what they write there.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

This quote perhaps demonstrates that the media may be out of touch with what is happening in areas that continue to be affected by community tension. Whether due to a lack of resources or interest, minimal or inaccurate coverage of the demands of marginalized groups may reignite conflict in the future.

One participant from a minority group said that ethnicity-based movements such as the Madhesi and Limbuwan protests want space in public dialogue, “they want their issues heard, but the media is not working in that direction, they project issues in a negative tone.” Another said that “the other conflicts are not getting any media attention at all, none at all … I think it is one of those conflicts that a lot of people are not really understanding right now and it has the potential to really

\textsuperscript{84} However, little research seems to have been done on this: “it has to be measured, we don’t know, we just assume most of the time in Nepal, that’s the problem.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{85} Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
escalate later on and become really violent.”\textsuperscript{86} This lack of attention has resulted in threats against media houses and staff.\textsuperscript{87} Similarly, there may be more stories on Dalits, but they still tend to be negative stories, such as Dalits being denied access to temples due to their low caste status. A Dalit community and media activist said:

If you look at the number of the stories published in the media in the same days, it is very high, women, Dalit, but if you look at the content of the story, it is very difficult, it is different. There is one phenomena in Dalits, if some Dalit girl was raped, they publish the story, if some Dalit gets beaten, they publish the story, if some Dalit was killed because of the hunger, they publish the story. We meet with some people in the village, and they say, we have to be killed to appear in the media. We have to be killed to appear in the media. [...] This is the thing. It is hard, the Dalit voice, the media make a significant contribution, to make the Dalit voice louder, they publish the case of atrocity, this is also necessary, if someone is killed, this should also be in the media. But only this is not should be, there are other images also, this should be in the media, which is lacking.\textsuperscript{88}

Such reports do little to give these communities a greater, equal voice in society, or promote understanding of their issues. Thus, such surface-level reports do little to support peacebuilding. As the Dalit advocate put it:

Their capacity to give a voice to the voiceless in the mainstream media is still very low, they have no strengthened capacity in the mainstream media to include those voices, even today. They present only the negative stories very well. The movements, they projected very negatively.\textsuperscript{89}

Coverage of only negative aspect of a group may continue their victimization. In order for marginalized groups to be viewed as equal, they must be portrayed as

\textsuperscript{86} Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{87} Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{88} Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{89} Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
such, particularly by opinion-makers in society. This is part of establishing a positive peace, and the media can take a lead role in this.

The vast majority of Nepali participants in this research were high-caste Hindu men. This social group continues to dominate the media sector. One participant referred to the sector as a “‘Bahun-baat’ which is Brahmin-ism. It is a Hindi word in fact – Big Brother rules are in media.”90 Those I spoke to were unanimous in their declared support for more inclusion among in media sector personnel. As one participant described the sector, “[marginalized groups] do not have access to media, so they do not get much coverage. For instance in [the Federation of Nepali Journalists in the eastern district of] Morang there are 150 members but only one Dalit member is there so far. They are discouraged, they are not encouraged to come to this field.”91 Two participants said that their publication was making an effort to promote social diversity in its staff, but that is was difficult. One local journalist said:

they are trying...many person[s] coming in this sector, but not staying a long time... temporarily, they start, and then go away. It is more important problem for us – why women or ethnic groups person not staying here, they join but leave because they have more opportunity in NGOs, INGOS.92

Several reasons were given for this absence of journalists from traditionally marginalized groups from the media workforce: 1) the media has traditionally not

90 “The Brahmins have been at the front foot, even since the Rana period, because the Ranas gave special protection to the Brahmins, and they had a sentiment that the Brahmins should not be killed even though they commit crimes because killing a Brahmin is a sin. But other people might have gotten that penalty too. The Brahmins they got opportunity for education, they went to Banares, they got a higher education and they have been publishing since that time, and that influence is still there.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

91 Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

92 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
been a sector that marginalized groups would even try to enter, lower-caste people or women have traditionally had prescribed positions within the society; 2) as the wages are so low, only those who have families relatively wealthy enough to support them can afford to enter; 3) again due to low pay, journalism was not a desirable career; and 4) the generally lower education level of marginalized groups may not enable them to compete for jobs. 93

Even when marginalized groups are employed in the media sector, they may only be employed to represent their group’s issues. One local media specialist said:

Now days we can see a little bit of inclusiveness, especially in radio, if there is no staff within the radio station, they find someone for women program, women are appointed, they appoint Dalit for Dalit programs. They appointed disabled people for disabled programs. At least there is someone who can represent, but that is not enough. They are involving their issues programs. Like Dalits are involved mainly in Dalit issues, they are not involved in news, they are not involved in other society-focused programs. That also creates some barriers... 94

This trend appears to exist mainly in radio, with radio stations or programs for women, Muslims, Dalits and other excluded groups growing in number. This may be a result of donors prioritizing minority rights. 95 It also means that the marginalized are speaking to their own audience rather than communicating with the rest of the

93 “The people themselves don’t want to come in the media sector due to the lack of awareness. They don’t think being a journalist is a good profession...The placements of minority journalists is the most important part to raise their own questions by their own people. If such type of backward caste people will come in the media sector, it will improve their reporting [reporting on them].” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

94 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

95 “It’s a big thing, that’s all the donor community care about. The donor community only care that you give the Dalits a voice. It’s about almost negative discrimination. You can almost give that too much attention.” Interview with international media expert, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Nepali community. It reinforces social barriers, and may contribute to “ghettoizing” of marginalized issues and media.

Some participants from traditionally marginalized groups said that they strove to highlight the stories of their own community. One participant from a janajati group said “if an issue of janajati comes I always tried to prioritize it when I present.” A Madhesi journalist expressed a similar sentiment. This may mean that the work of journalists from one group may not be trusted by others. As one local journalist explained:

A news quoted by a Pahadi journalist is not taken in trust by people in the Madhes. Or a news quoted by a Madhesi journalist is not taken in trust by the Pahadi community...And in KTM valley too, if a Madhesi journalist goes there to work, they do not take it easily. There has been some type of discriminatory attitude towards the Madhesi journalists in Kathmandu.

This quote may demonstrate continuing inter-communal rifts. More inclusion in both media personnel and in media content may help to bridge these gaps, and to help to foster positive peace.

The dominance of higher-caste males in the Nepali media has an impact on how social issues are reported. It may be more challenging for them to recognize the value of covering stories about traditionally marginalized groups, and it may be

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96 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

97 Another example: “...we have more difficulty with the journalists of the Terai region, especially the Madhesi community. First of all they don’t have that many journalists, and they are more politically biased. So we have difficulty having independent reports from the Madhesi community.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

98 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.
difficult for them to access these communities." Several participants felt that the dominance of high-caste men in the media meant that coverage of marginalized or rural groups received lower priority. One participant from a minority group said that they were also often excluded from training opportunities, as currently, trainings are done in partnership with elite-run local organizations.

In a country in flux, the position of high-caste men at the top of the social ladder is changing. As several participants pointed out, they may be journalists, but they are human beings first. This means that high-caste journalists may have a vested interest in preventing a restructured state that is believed to reduce the power of their ethnic group, i.e. federalism. One local political analyst said:

Traditionally marginalized groups are in favor of federalization, which was a commitment of the peoples' movement and the Constituent Assembly. But who will be the losers? The elites. This is the perception – it may not actually lose anything. They are saying everyone else will get a state, and what about us? These are the people who control the media and other institutions; they are using the media to advocate against a federal system. They are creating terror, havoc and fear. They could also play a balanced role; they could also resent the pro-federal side. This type of balanced media is not there.

Again, this may show that the importance of the identity of media personnel, and of their place in Nepal's traditional power hierarchy. Greater social inclusion in the workforce may help with this. For a peace process to progress, it has to be supported by the public, and this support has to be based on accurate, balanced

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99 "Even the involvement in the news sector, there is a lack of janajati, Dalit, Muslim, Madhesi groups, which play an important role in the news. Here also, like everywhere, Brahmin Chhetri have a huge amount of reporters, manpower. It is also the fault of the minority people because they don’t like to share their problems, their issues with us so we are unable to write as much news as they want." 99 Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

100 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

101 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
information. Thus, the media can play a significant role in either supporting or destabilizing the peace process. As another participant commented “some media are playing a type of destructive role to break down the peace process also. That type of trend is emerging ... [a]gainst federalism, against the state restructuring.”

Several high-caste participants expressed confusion at, or rejected the demands of marginalized groups: “they are demanding for their rights, but sometimes their demands are too much.” As another said: “... their demands are uncontrolled, it is difficult to publish ... they are demanding too much. If journalists are aware people, we have to understand the national situation. If they demand we need a different country how can we write? There will be problems.” This indicates that journalists are censoring the content they produce, instead of reporting on potentially explosive social and political issues. This type of censorship does not allow for the airing of grievances crucial to conflict prevention and necessary in a healthy democratic society. Several respondents thought that this perception had influenced the negative coverage of both the federalism debate and the negative coverage of ethnicity-based movements such as the Limbuwan. This clearly influences the media’s ability to play a peacebuilding role, as negative coverage may fan tensions rather than provide a space to air opposing views.

One international participant said that the lack of attention to social issues was symptomatic of the larger political priorities, as the bigger parties have a “fairly

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102 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
103 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
104 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
superficial” interest in minorities and *janajatis*, with the probable exception of the Maoists. She commented that “if you’re a newspaper and politics is your focus, then that is going to be to the exclusion of those groups ... there is a definite gap there. If I were Nepali I would want to see more - a lot more - coverage of those issues.” Further, she said “These people were native to this country but were sort of almost viewed as outsiders by the media.”

Respondents felt that this lack of adequate coverage extended not just to ethnic groups and women but also to the community outside of the Kathmandu valley in general. According to the 2001 Census, only 14 percent of Nepalis live in urban centers (DFID/World Bank, 2006). Participants said that the national newspapers devote very little editorial space to news from the districts. One participant said he believed they generally carried as little as 10% of coverage for non-Kathmandu-based stories, including international news. Participants also said that radio mainly re-broadcast news from Kathmandu instead of focusing on local issues. One Nepali media specialist said that he had conducted a study on the news interests of Nepalis living outside of Kathmandu and found that they appeared to have very little interest in national news. He said that when given a national newspaper, they quickly scanned it until they found an article on their local area and ignored the rest of the paper. Similarly, he played a radio segment with Kathmandu-based news, and one local news segment and asked people how many stories they

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105 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

106 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

107 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
remembered. He reported that they retained substantially more information from the local reports and showed little interest in the national news.108

A local media expert said that there were now a lot more journalists working for the rights of certain groups, such as Dalits, janajati, people with disabilities etc.109 The use of this advocacy language is interesting. A Kathmandu-based NGO worker also used advocacy language “they ... take a stand,” to describe the reporting of a newspaper he seemed to view favorably.110 A local journalist said that during the 2006 peoples’ movement, Kantipur daily newspaper was considered an “eighth party” of the democratic seven party alliance.111 The media in general are given a lot of credit for beginning the peace process, which may be a continuation of their role as political advocates during the party-less Panchayat period. As one participant said: “journalists ... sometimes act like militants themselves”.112

It seems evident that the divide between the ruling high-caste elite and the traditionally marginalized groups is not the only rift affecting balanced coverage. The major discrepancy between Kathmandu-based news and views from outside of

108 “...to show the effect to the radio operators and producers, I produced one bulletin, local issues right there with the local perspective. And the same day I recorded one bulletin from Kathmandu...I played first the Kathmandu bulletin, it was a ten minute bulletin, and in the 11th minute I asked them, how many news do you remember now, tell me. They hardly remember two news. And then again I played this local bulletin. They remembered more than 80%...And I also asked them to take a national newspaper and read it. And once they find in 5 pages, they found one news in the name of their district. They start to read that one. I asked them, on the first page there is the news with that much big font and four columns, but you didn’t care this one, but you read thoroughly that [local] one, what does that mean?” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.

109 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

110 For example, interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

111 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

112 Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
the Kathmandu valley is another factor diminishing the role of the media in the peacebuilding process. As one respondent said, “Media is kind of island. When they break this island, then they will make greater influence in Nepali politics. But now they don’t want to even break their island...People out of this island, they think differently.” As mentioned above, only 14% of the population lives in urban centers (DFID/World Bank, 2006), meaning that this emphasis on Kathmandu excludes the vast majority of Nepal’s people.

In Nepal, there appear to be two peace processes. The first is the official peace process, which takes place at the national political level between the Maoists and the State. The second is taking place at the popular level, between different ethnic communities as well as caste and gender groups. The mainstream print media in particular seems to be placing significant emphasis on the political peace process, to the detriment of the social. The daily Kathmandu-based national papers prioritize the daily machinations of the political parties, engaging in he-said/she-said journalism. They appear to be written by the political elites, for the political elites. One international participant said she thought the “obsession” with Kathmandu was “shocking.” There is very little sense of engaging with the wider Nepali community or including issues that concern those outside of the national political sphere. Reasons for this include that district-based journalists felt safer reporting on central-level news, it is more prestigious, and it may be more stimulating for them. It may also be because of logistical access, language barriers

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113 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

114 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
and illiteracy, rural people seem to get more information from radio, rather than print. There is very little analysis in the newspapers or alternative views or solutions given in the media coverage. According to participants, this is changing but very slowly.

Prestige is a major factor influencing this politically driven coverage. One participant, a media trainer, commented that covering social issues, especially in the district, will not get a reporter noticed. As many journalists seem to greatly value recognition by local powerbrokers, they aim to write stories that party leaders will appreciate, and that may lead to a social promotion of the journalist. For example, a journalist might be invited to a meal or a party with local leaders. As such recognition will not result from coverage of social issues or rural/marginalized communities, it is more difficult to get a journalist to cover these stories.

However, district-level voices need to be heard in the peace process. Rural people were the main targets of both sides during the insurgency, and are most affected by poverty and a lack of resources. They also make up the bulk of the Nepali population. As one local journalist said:

Until and unless the local issues are given priority there wont be a good or sustainable peace process in the country. The peace process will not get any hope or will not be sustainable until the people know what is going on over there. To get the logical end to the peace process, people should also know what the constitutional committees are doing there, that should come to the people, and what the people are doing there that should go to the national media. Maybe there they may have less space to give coverage to these issues and local media is covering them, but they should not avoid the issues of regional level.115

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115 Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.
This quote clearly speaks to the importance of local voices in a sustainable peace process. The media can play a vital role in communicating the interests of the population to the political elites, and in communicating the political process to the grassroots level.

Journalists in the districts can feel ignored by their Kathmandu editors. They also feel like they are neglected by training initiatives, and overseas exposure opportunities. Several district-level respondents seemed to feel that they worked harder than their Kathmandu-based colleagues, but received little recognition or perks. As a local journalist said:

I cannot say the journalists that are working at the national level are the good journalists. They have less responsibility than those working at the local level, because the national-level journalists only have to work for one newspaper, the local journalists, I have to give 12-15 pieces of news per day and work in the FM too. So it is hard to work in the local level, but they are capable to be the national level news reporter too. Local newspaper journalists have a lot of awareness, and I think the national level don’t have that responsibility. We have to write a lot of news, they only have to write one. And we have to sit in the press up to 1 or 2 a.m., so it is harder to be a local reporter. 116

They also seemed to feel that they worked very hard during the insurgency period and put themselves in danger to do their job, only to be ignored once the danger had past: “In war time we were important also. Reporter out of valley were important, because they make the important catchy news, in war time, but this [peace] time we are ignored.”117 They also seem to believe that if a Kathmandu-based reporter filed

116 Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.
117 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
the same story, it would be published. They appear to feel unappreciated, overlooked, and job satisfaction seems to be low. As a local journalist said:

Nepalese media person getting opportunity – means in Kathmandu. Out of Kathmandu we are feeling nobody seeing us, nobody reading us, nobody listening us. So here is very discrimination...They work in insurgency time, in which time journalists are in very risk to reporting...They get opportunity to study to go to international seminar, workshops, training but nobody is from outside Kathmandu getting so. It is very discrimination, we are feeling. So there is not the debate of discrimination on ethnic group, gender or other issues, other forms, other society, but it is discrimination from out of valley, or in valley.

This speaks to the dissatisfaction and under-appreciation journalists at the district level seem to feel. Unless there is a motivated media workforce investigating local-level issues, it will be difficult for diverse voices to be heard on the national stage. The peace process needs this input to be inclusive, sustainable, and ultimately successful. A Nepali media expert said:

But at the same time, even if the peace process...is assigned by heads in KTM in some five star hotel, it is the people on the ground who make it possible or impossible. So we are working with the grassroots people, in media and otherwise...These are the people who make it successful or unsuccessful.

This quote demonstrates the need to involve the general population in the peace process, and to give space for their stories in the media.

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118 “If the journalist from Kathmandu comes here, their reports will publish in high priority. Same issues, same place, but same media, the priority depends on the reporters, is from main office or district reporter, it depends.” Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

119 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

120 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
“Politics, politics, politics”

...we sometimes joke also that is the three P [of Nepali media]. Politics, politics, politics.\textsuperscript{121}

The political peace process in Nepal seems to have stalled, and UNMIN left on January 15 of this year. There seems to be a tremendous sense of frustration, as the news carries story after story of bickering among the political leaders. As one local media specialist explained:

...there is no news, because everyday, in newspapers and these local stations, they always cover the same line, same event, same quote, same dialogue from the political elite, there is no alternative views. That’s it. The disagreement between the Maoist leaders, Buburam and Prachanda. If you go through the whole newspaper, for a week you can find that kind of information. And UML leaders’ disagreement in between, what does that mean? Everyday. And we send that kind of message to the people, how do they perceive that news? There is no news exactly, everyday the same line. Same line, same thing. There is no other real information. There is not a blank page, or blank space in the radio or newspaper, but there is no news. More or less no news. That is the reality.\textsuperscript{122}

This quote perhaps demonstrates that while many newspapers are published and there are many radio stations on air, there may remain an absence of accurate, quality news. Nepal’s media appears to specialize in daily digests of the soap-opera-esque antics of Nepal’s political elite, which may not equate to informing the public on issues of public interest.

\textsuperscript{121} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
Nepal’s new constitution has yet to be drafted, even though the deadline has now been extended twice. The political process in Kathmandu seems very far from the villages, where people seem more interested in news about issues affecting their daily lives. While national politicians fight for power, the voices of the people at the district or village level are often lost. Rather than improving, the situation seems to be getting worse, with some in the Maoist camp talking of a return to war. While this is highly unlikely, it does little to stabilize the country. Violent ethnicity-based movements are also receiving little national attention, which minimizes the chances of those conflicts being resolved. As one human rights defender described the current situation:

Two years and a half have been wasted in the peace process and nothing has been done. The common people have not had any benefit from the peace process, neither they have any loss. So they are getting depressed as the time passes. Sometimes they are forced to come to the political meetings, they are hired, they come but they pay no interest. There are also many issues of people getting exploited because of different political activities or different issues.

This perhaps illustrates a disconnect between what the political elite prioritize in the peace process, and what matters to the average Nepali person. The general population appears to be disheartened by the lack of progress in the peace process, and the lack of any real benefit to citizens. Instead of picking up on this and holding the political establishment accountable, the media appears to be exacerbating the situation by focusing on political reporting.


124 Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.
Many Kathmandu-based media professionals stress that the media can say whatever they like about politicians. While this may be technically true, it seems that a combination of the need to curry political favor, the need to secure financial support and, especially for those in the districts, physical threats, conspire to keep many controversial stories out of the papers, or at least off the front page. As a prominent editor said “if one newspaper, one media is close to one political party or a certain political leader, they can report properly about others, but not that particular side where they themselves are associated.” Some participants felt that the competition between the broadsheet dailies kept them from being too openly biased. Indeed, while I was in Nepal the English-language papers carried many stories of corruption and scandals involving relatives of prominent politicians.

Participants said that if a negative story about a political party was published in all the papers except the one affiliated with that party, it would be too embarrassing for the paper concerned. An active readership writing letters to the editor and commenting on media websites from around the world also performs a watchdog function. However, according to participants, stories not of party interest could be minimized, buried in the back pages or left intentionally vague to

125 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

126 “The dailies have to write freely, they have to report on everything...maybe it is still possible for a businessman, but it will be impossible for a politician to try to shut up a newspaper. Because...of the sheer number of the broadsheet dailies, it is simply not possible to ask all of them not to report on that. Because one of them will report, and if one of them reports, and that doesn’t appear in all the newspapers, the readers will question. And there is also an active readership...So it will be shameful.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
protect the affiliated political party. Inversely, positive coverage can be highlighted. The media also appear to be highly aware of the influence their coverage may have on the political stage “…the friends in [a prominent daily paper] they say that if we wish, we can change the government, alter the government, we can make a new government, we carry that capacity.”

Newspapers are believed to cover a story in a way that is advantageous to the political party to which they are connected. Weeklies, given their political history, more blatantly barrack for one political party or faction. The daily broadsheets are considered more professional, although participants felt that they could identify which newspaper supported which party. A local newspaper publisher in Biratnagar explained:

Papers are close to parties, so whenever any news comes if it is against the party interest they may hide the information. There is very less fact-based news come. They highlight the things related to the opposite parties, but their own parties issues, if it is not in their favor then they do not publish it…But I am not affiliated with anyone, that is why I am still on a bicycle.

This illustrates that for some journalists, the interests of their party might be more important than producing balanced reports to inform the public. It may also speak to the importance of political connections for career advancement.

127 “There is an example of the killing of two reporters, one Birendra Shah and another Prakash Choudhary. Birendra Shah was a the central committee member Chautari close to UML, so his killing got the coverage of all the media, but Prakash Choudhary was close to RPP [Royalist party], there was not much news about him or his killing, they still say that it is unidentified, his [killers]. There is not any pressure even from the ministry level for investigation or news coverage, so there is influence, political influence even in the news.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

128 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

129 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
One respondent noted that journalists must cultivate these relationships to gain access.\textsuperscript{130} He added that small houses cannot become neutral, they have no money, no resources, so they need patronage to survive asking, “When the big houses are not neutral, what can you expect from the smaller houses?”\textsuperscript{131} Radio stations were described no differently.\textsuperscript{132}

While media houses or publications could be identified by participants as supporting one political party or another, so too could individual journalists. Politics, and proximity to influence, is a key motivation for people to enter the media sector. Both journalists and owners/publishers seem to use media as a stepping-stone to a more influential position within politics, according to respondents. Every person within the media sector, and media organizations as a whole has, or is believed to have, an affiliation to a political party.\textsuperscript{133}

There are three main media unions in Nepal, and each one is affiliated to a different political party: Press Chautari (Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist-Lennist), Press Union (Nepali Congress) and Revolutionary Journalist.

\textsuperscript{130} Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu

\textsuperscript{131} Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu

\textsuperscript{132} “Now, after observing the relevance and impact radio can make, people from all walks of life have registered radio stations in their own name, so political parties own radio stations. So the story of partisan media in Nepal is something that everybody knows. Radio stations, newspapers and television stations are aligned to one political party or another, so that’s where they compromise the credibility and the balance part, the basic tenants of journalism, to talk in favor of a certain political party, and that’s the worrying part.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{133} “[Journalists] have no capacity. Some journalists they have no good education, they have no good knowledge. They are supporters of the parties. They are not independent, they are not the peoples’ journalists. So it’s our problem...If I am a supporter of one party, blindly I support. I forget my professionalism, I support blindly. Even when my supporter party has done wrong, I write that it is doing good.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
(United Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist). Even the umbrella organization, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, was described as highly political.\textsuperscript{134} Affiliation seems to be necessary to advance a career and for protection.\textsuperscript{135} Journalists may cover issues selectively to benefit their chosen party, but may also keep this affiliation quiet if it conflicts with the allegiance of the publisher or owner. Journalists open about their opposing political affiliations may not be promoted. However, participants felt that this happened rarely, as people of the same political ilk tend to band together.

Not only are the media organizations and personnel perceived to be highly political, the content is also very focused on political coverage. As one interviewee said: “Nepalese media are following the leader, their nonsense type speeches. Somebody says something, that makes the first coverage, the first main news.”\textsuperscript{136} Some participants said that the public was very interested in political stories, while others, as noted in the “Social inclusion” section above, thought that the majority of the more rural population took little interest in the political intrigues that dominate

\textsuperscript{134} “...they get together only for politics, like the [Federation of Nepalese Journalists], and they get together because they get to be elected, and they get to be elected means they get to be close to one party of the other. And throughout the time they’re in power, they’re elected, they’ll get a lot of opportunities for different things, whatever they deem to be important, and those are some of the things they work for.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{135} “If they are involved in the political party protects them, the political party will also invest money and also security, like social security, and also other chances they can get, attached to the political party. If they want to be fair, professional, they have no good opportunity, no good facility. They have already mind made up, I am a cadre of the Maoists, and now I will go reporting. I will be a journalist, but I will be a journalist of Maoists. I will be a journalist of NC. Publically they never say... I am fair, they say. They always speak, I am fair, I have no any biasness, but who are their news sources? Publicly they always say I am fair, I am neutral, I am impartial, everyone says.” Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\textsuperscript{136} Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
Kathmandu. This may be related to whom they see as their main audience: the general public or the elites. Indeed, non-political events may be given a political spin merely to attract media attention, as the following quote demonstrates:

...they think that issues do not become news until [they are] linked with politics or get some political influence. An example is a recent program organized for Darshain [festival], while inviting the people it was said this is completely not political, please raise no political issues here, make jokes, laughter, songs, it should be a quite interesting program but there should not be any type of politics. But in the course of the program the announcer said that, thinking that the program would get less importance, we are trying to invite the representative from UML here to give us all a speech. To make it to the news, so they make it political.

This politicization of the workforce and coverage is affecting the peace process. Not only are the voices of the general public ignored and ethnic or cultural movements reported on negatively, but the media seems to be taking a position against issues such as federalism as discussed above. Problematically, they also seem to be taking a stance against the Maoists, a party to the peace process and the one with arguably the greatest popular support. While the media are credited for supporting the partnership between the Maoists and the seven-party-alliance (of democratic parties) that led to the peace process, now that there are rifts and competition between the parties, the media appear to be reflecting that. In the lead

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137 “People also like to read such political news, hard news, breaking news, which politician is giving a speech. So the editor is compelled to write such type of news...Journalists are also involved with the politician, so they like to write their news. For the readership, it is also more exciting or they take more interest in the news about politics or politicians...It is the news which is sold in the market, so people are used to reading this type of news, and they want it.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

138 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

139 The Maoists won the most seats in Constituent Assembly election, although now popularity may be waning, it is difficult to tell.
up to the Constituent Assembly elections, the media were reporting that the Maoists would win very few seats, which was very much out of touch with the reality outside of Kathmandu.140

The Maoists do not appear to have the same representation in the media sector as other prominent parties. Only one journalist I spoke with was identified as a member of Revolutionary Journalists (the media union affiliated with the Maoists). One other Kathmandu-based participant said “I think if we go to the number, there are very less number of the journalists who write in favor of the Maoists, because many journalists they are in favor of NC or in favor of UML.”141 A local media specialist said:

A lot of broadsheet newspapers, they are unhappy with the way the Maoists are doing politics. Most of them are behind UML or Nepali Congress. And now, the Maoists want to keep UNMIN...So there is this aggressive tone against UNMIN. And if it was the other way around...if Maoists were in government, if they wanted to kick UNMIN out, and UML and NC were in opposition and wanted to keep UNMIN in...the newspapers, would also toe the lines of NC and UML to keep UNMIN in, now, they want it out.142

This quote may demonstrate the significant impact political influence in the media may have on the continuation of the peace process. UNMIN has since left the

*140 “[Political] influence is there and it seems real because how the media present the issues, they just see the favor of the time and they do it...they published that the Maoists will not get a strong position, they would get even not the second or third position. They could not present what the real situation was. It’s not the point that we are supporting the Maoists or that we should not always be against the Maoists...their influence is there at the newspaper and the ground reality does not come. We went to places and we met many people and they support [the Maoists]. But media against them - the Maoists. This was about the situation at the time, the elections. Their analysis is different, ground reality is different.” Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.*

*141 Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.*

*142 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.*
country. This perception that the media is against the Maoists is dangerous for the continuation of the peace process. As one journalist in Biratnagar noted:

The issues related to the Maoists, or their PLAs or the cantonment, the integration of PLAs is only not a part [is not the only part] of the peace process. That can be the political part, but there are so many social issues to be addressed, issues of social conflict. These are also an important part of the peace process...Not only political issues are a part of the peace process.143

This quote speaks to the need for the media to cover issues other than politics. While the political peace process is obviously crucial, peace at the social level, at the grass roots level, may be considered equally important.

There was some disagreement as to whether the wider Nepali community was able to tell which media outlet was affiliated with which political party. Most respondents felt that the educated Kathmandu population were aware of which media are affiliated to which party, but there was uncertainty as to the degree of awareness of those at the district headquarters or village level. Many politically savvy people seem to read multiple sources in order to get a more complete understanding of a story, and make up their own mind as to what actually happened. The newspaper-reading public may be more sophisticated in this than the radio or television audience.144 As print has a longer history in Nepal, one respondent felt that the print audience was more mature.145 However, he also said

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143 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

144 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

145 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
that the sheer volume of low quality media may result in confusion. One Kathmandu-based journalist disagreed, saying:

Even in the cities, most of the people they just scan the front page, and they throw the newspaper, they do not read the articles and they do not make their mind or idea reading the articles. I have seen extremely few people they read those articles and they can distinguish and they can make the difference of who is writing for whose favor.

This quote may demonstrate that it is essential for the media to be accurate and balanced, because people may not have the time, inclination or sophistication to analyze what they are reading in order to make up their own minds. People outside the valley seem to fare even worse. A local political analyst felt that this lack of awareness was a risk, that this made them more vulnerable to manipulation and persuasion and lobbying.

146 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

147 Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu. Similarly, “Only people who are related to the political parties can understand what the peace process, or federalism or democracy is about. It is the same for the cities or the national level.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalgunj.

148 “You’re talking about the average Nepalis, so no! No...people know a lot, because of the radio stations, they know about...the price of vegetables.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu. “Most of the Nepalese out of, especially cities, either they don’t read newspapers, or they just rely on FM radio and television. That means they don’t make any idea just reading the articles and news that has been published in newspapers. Rather they make their idea through local mobilizers, like teachers or the party cadres who are working in the local areas.” Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.

149 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Business

And before this, growing number of the Nepali media, Nepali media was with the Nepali people, now, with the businessman. Previously, it worked for the people, now, it works for making money.¹⁵⁰

While it may be more difficult for the daily national broadsheets to cover up political missteps, they do appear to cover for business leaders.¹⁵¹ Similar face-saving is also afforded to those at the district level. Many who own shares in media houses also have other substantial business interests.¹⁵² This appears to discourage journalists from covering negative stories related to the business interest of their owners, or of their owners’ friends. Several participants said that some invested in media only to control their public image, and to provide cover for illegal dealings.¹⁵³ Political recognition also appears to be a prime motivation.¹⁵⁴ In the regional center of Butwal, one participant described the seven daily newspapers as each being

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

¹⁵¹ “Businessmen, because of the sheer power of money, and their power to affect the newspaper’s finances, and the newspaper’s revenue, they may be able to do it” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

¹⁵² “…having a newspaper is a relatively small part of their business, and perhaps in a lot of cases its so that they can gain the political influence that will help them in other areas of their business.” Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

¹⁵³ “…people are coming in the media to protect themselves, criminals are coming to make money in the media sector or to use the journalists, or to protect themselves from the police department or the government” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj. “Another situation is that there have been so many people who invest in the media sector, but they do illegal business. Just to protect themselves, they are investing for media.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

¹⁵⁴ “What happens is, if you want to be recognized, say you are running a fairly successful business, say in import-export, or if you are running industry, printing machine, then you may have made money, but you are still a small fry, you are just a business man, and you want to associate with and you want to be seen to be associating with some of the power centers, and the power centers are, in Nepali, in our setting the power centers are politicians, political parties, in that community. In order to be a little visible, then you will start a newspaper.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
owned by, on average, 20 businessmen. Therefore, 140 businessmen are owners of the media. He questioned the medias’ ability to write critical stories of business in this environment: “If I write, next day, I have to resign or I have to go out. That is the reality.”

Extortion too, appears to have a role in this. Most prominently at the district level, journalists may be paid for positive coverage of a business, to hide negative coverage, or to promote a negative story about a business competitor. Advertising also seems to be both a revenue raiser, and a method of extortion payment. Some participants said that journalists may receive a percentage of the revenue from the advertising they attract to the paper. I heard reports at the district level of journalists approaching a business, and demanding that they advertise with the publication, or receive bad press. Recently, and infamously, an Indian juice company got substantial negative press in the national newspapers. The company alleges it was approached for advertising, which it refused, quickly resulting in a smear campaign.

Not everyone interviewed saw this as an intrinsically bad way of approaching business. And again, it cannot be separated from the wider culture. For example, the Terai area on the border with India is known for rampant smuggling. It is well-known that police can pay a lot of money to be posted there, so that they can

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155 Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.

156 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
earn money from taking bribes at the border. The media sector is not immune, and cannot be expected to act differently from the rest of society, particularly when wages are so low, or non-existent.

**International intervention**

The arrival of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), did little to help the broader media sector. This is not surprising, and is not the Mission’s fault, as the media sector was not a part of UNMIN’s mandate. However, its presence had unintended consequences. UNMIN recruited some of the best and brightest in Nepal’s media sector. Those who were bilingual in English and Nepali, with good analytical skills, applied for positions with UNMIN. Considering the wage differential, and future potential career that this opportunity afforded, journalists cannot be blamed for applying. Nor, considering the value of the addition of these journalists to UNMIN’s staff, can UNMIN be blamed for selecting them. However, this did leave a hole in the local media sector. In particular, those with excellent English may have been the ones to access and analyze UNMIN’s management had they stayed in the media. Participants said that those how had left to join UNMIN, had not returned to the media sector, instead being hired by other UN or international organizations. Again, financial and career considerations may explain this.

Not only did they become key staff members, media personnel became key informants during UNMIN’s stay in Nepal. When conducting field trips in the Eastern region, local journalists were among the first people we spoke to about the local context. They quickly became tired of speaking with us, however, as we were

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continually extracting information, without being able to give much back to the media community. I also found this in my research, as one human rights professional said that he had only met with me because he felt obliged to. Although I believe we quickly developed a rapport based on my previous Nepal experience, it was clear that he felt beholden to share information with an international researcher, rather than enthusiastic about doing so.

Participants were unanimous that more media training is needed in Nepal, and that systematic training should have been introduced to support the peace process at its inception. The media sector, both at the Kathmandu and district level, clearly felt that the international community were not serving their interests. For the amount of money spent, participants did not seem to feel that there had been sufficient impact. While training is being provided, it has so far failed to address the mind-set of many of journalists who may see media as an avenue to money and political prestige. Rather than tackling professionalism, training seems to have been issue-based, ad hoc and without adequate follow-up or demonstrated

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158 For example, interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

159 “...the important thing is, focus on ethics, focus on morality, and then focus on training of journalists to make them more responsible. So that good quality journalists remain, and these party cadres, party workers, they quit carrying their party flags and go back to their parties. That is the situation we have to create somehow, if we cannot do that our journalism sector will really go haywire.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu. “I think its not a problem of money, it’s a problem of understanding and attitude of the media persons.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
commitment.\textsuperscript{160} As one participant put it “just training is not enough if they don’t use it in their work, it is useless.”\textsuperscript{161}

Participants seemed to feel that the international community was not connecting well with the local media sector, especially outside of Kathmandu.\textsuperscript{162}

Little research into the Nepali media context seems to have taken place, according a local journalist:

The NGO, INGO they have to plan they have to design course and then they come here and conduct the training, but I think that should be planned by our side, and that should be for us. They did not understand the training they needed, but they come here and give the training and just went on – they didn’t matter what about the training or what was the scope of the training. They didn’t know what is the need of the local peoples, the local media people.\textsuperscript{163}

This may illustrate the need for development agencies to conduct due research before designing interventions, to ensure that the training devised meets the needs of the target community. Participation of the target group in project design is also paramount. Elites (English-speakers) may be consulted, rather than a more representative sample of local journalists.\textsuperscript{164} The same people are regularly selected for training opportunities, which one participant described as “just like watering in

\textsuperscript{160} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{161} Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{162} “...the training from BBC can be in the context of UK, USAID can be in the context of USA. They should catch our context, in what context we are running.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\textsuperscript{163} Interview with local journalist, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\textsuperscript{164} Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Having been through so many similar trainings, attendees no longer appear to listen to the instruction given, but rather come “just to see what these people say. So they’ve just been trained, it’s the attraction of the airfare or the bus fare, the per diem, the hotel and networking for which they come.” Attendees rarely pass on the knowledge gained through external training to others in their organization.

Participants also criticized international actors for competing with local production houses. The BBC World Service Trust and UNMIN itself were both criticized for creating their own programming and distributing it through local broadcasters, rather than working with local production houses to support local content production. The reason given, that local production houses did not have the capacity to make quality programming, was thought to be hollow by local practitioners, as the international bodies hired the same production staff who were employed by local houses. Some participants felt that, while these internationally-backed productions helped to train those they work with, for the money spent to produce these interventions, may more locally-employed media.

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165 Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

166 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

167 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

168 “One example UNDP produce, they hire the journalist which were involved in some local stations. And they produce their own program. Saying that you are not capable, blaming the stations, but they hired the same people from that stations, and they produced their own program.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
professionals could have benefitted. Others disagreed, arguing that international outfits brought expertise missing in the local industry.\textsuperscript{169}

One respondent, while critical of international organizations competing with the local media, wondered where the sector would be without the international community: “Sometimes I wonder if there is no international community, if there are no donors, how such a large number of radio stations, there are so many radio stations I don’t know how they survive still, it’s a wonder. More than 40 radio stations in Kathmandu, more than 300 radio stations all over the country.”\textsuperscript{170} Another similarly commented “Because if they do not pay these radio stations for broadcast, they would not survive. I do not think this is the right approach”.\textsuperscript{171} This leads to the very salient question, is the government (through subsidies) and the international community artificially propping up an unsustainable, and saturated market?

\textbf{Media and conflict resolution}

But media is giving negative messages, and media accepts, media waits for a good result. Giving negative messages, and waiting for positive result. So often I told media people, if you are delivering the bad messages, how can the society create the positive?\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{169} “…some Nepalese media might say, if you give us that kind of money, we can also do it, but I don’t think that is true. They bring with them, they have some experts, very good hands, a lot of experience, Now perhaps, some Nepalis can do…because they have learned the ropes now”. Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{170} Interview with local media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{171} Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{172} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
FM radio has the biggest potential to reach the wider Nepali population. It can overcome obstacles such as linguistic diversity, illiteracy and harsh geographical terrain, which hampers print distribution. According to participants, radio has also been a key platform for local conflict resolution interventions, a crucial component of community level peacebuilding. Participants gave several examples of radio performing conflict resolution. However, this seems to be irregular and ad hoc. Due to a reactive process and a lack of resources, there does not appear to be a cohesive strategy behind locally generated FM-based conflict resolution or peacebuilding efforts. While radio appears to be an ideal platform for media-based

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173 An example: “There was this incident…[with]… a Bollywood film star, for comments that he allegedly made in a newspaper that was something nasty about the Nepalese, people went on a rampage, destroying...buildings and business houses owned by the Indians, so anything to do with India were vandalized...If the media had not played its card right, that would have flared up the violence like anything, but media then played a mediating role. It tried to talk the different sides of the story ‘who heard him say that’, ‘did he really do it?’ that sort of thing. And that prevented the vandalism and the outrage from spreading across. And that is when we saw, ‘oh yes, media does play an important part.’” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

“...when 12 Nepalese people were executed in Iraq...we saw gory pictures on the internet. And people went on a rampage attacking anything to do with Islam. That could have been a very, very serious issues, it could have flared up violence in Nepalganj, where there is a concentration of the Muslim community. But again, the media played such a moderating role...through moderation, through dialogue, through discussions on the table. So these were the early signs that prove that radio can play a mediating role in containing violence or explaining a situation of conflict.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

174 One Nepali media professional gave this illustration: “there was a small problem with landless people...living on land which was empty, but owned by the Hindu temple. The landless people were from the Muslim community, and that incident had the potential to be very violent. Because the local people also stated complaining, and they started fighting with each other, it was mostly a Hindu populated area and the temple also objected and some political leaders, they are very good at cashing these things up and making it a political issue, a religious issue, at the same time no one was making an effort to have a dialogue among them. So this guy, a producer, he just went there and talked with the local Muslim leader and he also brought the priest from the temple, and the local political leaders and had them in one place and started to have a dialogue. After the dialogue on a talk show, they took the dialogue forward and the settlers agreed to leave that place, and the temple agreed to initiate the process to keep for them some land a bit further away, so basically the problem was solved later on, and it started with the talk show.” Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts, this potential remains unfulfilled in Nepal thus far.

When asked how the international community could most effectively support the Nepali media sector, most respondents said that more training was needed. Peace journalism was consistently raised as an area needing more attention by local media professionals. While the term “peace journalism” was not regularly used, the elements described as requiring more attention by local media professionals fit its broad description: “They have to have a mediating role, not only reporting the news but also work for the promotion of the peace.”175 The need to report victims’ perspectives was also stressed by several participants, corresponding to the tenants of peace journalism: “Within the peace process, we always neglected the one major aspect...and that’s the victim. We never produce any report. If we never address the victims, there is space for revenge again.”176

However, most international media experts interviewed denied that peace journalism was needed, focusing instead on the more traditional aspects of a neutral, impartial and independent media. This indicates a disconnect between what the local and international media analysts see as lacking in, or beneficial to, the Nepali media sector. An international media expert summarized by saying: “I don’t

175 Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

176 Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu. Reason victims have no voice: “Because the victims, they are helpless. There is no chance to be a minister, or prime minister. They never affect the interests of these corporate houses. But here, Maoists there is the chance to go to the government. UML there is the chance to go to the government. NC there is the chance to go to the government. So these media people are not ready to make some kind of differences, to create a kind of, a little bit strong reservation, because one they go there they might get some kind of problem for their profit. So that is main relation.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
think it is the journalists job to push for peace…it’s their job to have all the
information on the table and just kind of present it in such a way, and if it’s done
well you’ll have both sides of the report anyway.’\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{177} Interview with international media expert, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Findings

In Nepal, basic journalistic skills and professionalism seem to be under-developed, and media professionals chronically underpaid, if they are paid at all, leaving them open to bribery. Politicization appears rife, with most journalists affiliated to a political party and using their media position to further the agenda of their side. Further, journalists continue to be drawn from the country’s dominant ethnic groups, and are overwhelmingly male. Perhaps consequently, stories from traditionally marginalized groups seem comparatively rare. These factors and more may have led to little public trust in the media. Violence and threats against journalists too remain chronic. The vast amount of donor-funded journalism training appears to have had little impact, for a variety of reasons. These data suggest that Nepal’s media sector struggles to be an asset to on-going peace. In order to be successful, any peace initiatives need wide public support, which media coverage may offer. Without a well-functioning, independent media, the success of Nepal’s, and indeed any, peace process may be under threat.

Before travelling to Nepal, I believed from my research that the biggest obstacle to accurate, independent reporting would be the continuing insecurity in the Terai belt. As I have continued to read Nepali news over the Internet sporadically since I left the country in 2008, I believed the English papers to be independent and relatively professional. I was aware, however, that I am unable to assess the Nepali-language media, which obviously dominates the sector. After
beginning my research in-country, I quickly discovered that the journalists themselves could be dismissive of or down-play security concerns and instead cited a lack of professionalism and rampant politicization of the press as the two primary constraints.

Impact of partisan media history

Many of those interviewed expressed concern about the professionalism and partisan nature of Nepali journalists. Several ascribed this to the history of the sector. Journalism in Nepal is relatively new, with most respondents dating the beginning of a (relatively) free press at only 20 years ago. Print media began before radio, in the party-less Panchayat era (1962 – 1990).

The aim of media in the Panchayat period was to rebel, to put forward the views of the banned political parties through the highly partisan weekly tabloids that made up the mainstream media. As one Nepali editor put it: “So the political mission of the political parties and the media was the same.”¹ This trend has continued, with the partisan legacy leaving its mark on even the most professional papers. All media and media professionals are, or are believed to be, affiliated with one political party or another. The same respondent said that, even in the more professional papers, “again then the manpower was the same, the pattern was the same, and those manpower was very politicized, and that reflection is seen also in the newspapers.”²

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¹ Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
² Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
When radio transmission began, the state-run broadcaster, Radio Nepal, allocated airtime to different “stations” but all on the one frequency. According to a local media specialist, all radio programming, therefore, was broadcast from Singha Durbar, the seat of Nepal’s government. This did not serve to create an environment for the growth of independent media. Private radio multiplied after 1997. The Maoists too became deft users of the radio during the 1996-2006 insurgency.

Many respondents said that Nepali journalism is in its infancy, and will take time to grow. Participants seemed to think that many problems facing the sector were due to its immaturity, and that with time more sophisticated practices would develop. However, it remains to be seen what - in a heavily politicized and corrupt environment with only a small market for sophisticated media - would drive this development in media practice.

**Maoist insurgency period**

During the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), journalists faced pressure from both the Maoist rebels and the government forces. Each side wanted journalists to

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3 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.


5 “An example is the prostitution report that many well dress college girls were working as prostitutes. The media said that the evidence for this was that the police found condoms in their rooms. This was an anti-women report, men in the street are now suspicious of all college girls [think they are all prostitutes – eye them up and down etc]. But also sensational reporting. Before, the media and society never mentioned condoms, so its good that they do now, but if carrying a condom can get you arrested [is evidence that you’re a prostitute], people will ask themselves if they should carry them. Millions have been spent on encouraging people to use condoms to prevent against HIV – and this is the reporting we get?” Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
report positively on their activities. A local political analyst said that both sides suspected that the media were spying and put pressure on the media to gather information for them.\(^6\) A local political analyst said that journalists had no support from the authorities but were instead suspected and blamed. According to the same participant, authorities said to the media “you know information, and you hide it from us.”\(^7\) The authorities also censored the news produced: “In some of the regions, the media needed to use the army’s fax machine to send the news to Kathmandu There was no privacy or secrecy, so the army checked their news, and if there was any news they didn’t like, they would throw the news away.”\(^8\)

An NGO worker said that the government suppressed stories showing the Maoist point of view, or those showing government losses.\(^9\) A Nepali media expert said the government also lied to minimize troop losses or claimed that civilians killed were Maoist combatants.\(^10\) This led to public distrust of state broadcasts. A television journalist who reported on government losses during a battle while embedded with the Maoists was fired, and the television station “yanked off air,” according to one respondent.\(^11\) Another said that there was a lack of government

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\(^6\) Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\(^7\) Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\(^8\) Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\(^9\) Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

\(^10\) “during this conflict period, the state-owned radio acted as the mouth piece of the government, and in such cases they broadcast wrong information such as the army killed this many Maoists in this village but that was wrong, and local people were very angry about that. Innocent people were killed by the government and labeled as a Maoists...the people didn’t trust the state-owned media.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\(^11\) Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.
transparency at the time; government official wouldn’t speak openly with journalists.12 This fractured relationship with government authorities seems to continue to impact the media today, with most journalists forgoing investigative techniques when reporting on government issues.

Conversely, one respondent who worked for a radio station during the Maoist insurgency said that journalists were very scared of the Maoists. They were very careful about reporting on Maoist activities, as they had killed journalists.13 As the Maoists often controlled remote areas, journalists’ access to those populations and events was also restricted.14 The local people too were scared to speak to the media, for fear of retribution.15 The politicized nature of the media at the time (and to the present day) also fed into this. As one respondent explained: “Not only were people trying to be aware of which political party the journalist they were speaking to was affiliated with, but also which particular faction of that political party.”16 This reduced the ability of the media to tell the stories behind the conflict and to report accurately.17 Media who avoided reporting on the conflict or politics did not seem to be threatened by either side during this time.

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12 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
13 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
14 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
15 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
16 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
17 One very renowned journalist, Kunda Dixit (editor of the respected English-language weekly, The Nepali Times, has produced three photojournalism books on the conflict, and has organized a
Violence against the media was a fact of life during the insurgency, from both sides. There has been very little, if any, action taken against perpetrators. This may have contributed to the current-day context of impunity for those who threaten the media sector. Consequently, the self-censorship that dominated the media sector during the Maoist conflict continues today, and indeed some respondents claimed the security environment and corresponding self-censorship are worse. Such a situation both hinders and distorts the role of local media in peacebuilding across Nepal.

**Security situation today**

But if I write something, my family may get pressure in my village because of my work. The pressure may be in a multi-way sometimes they even damage our crops just to take revenge on the issue that we cite something against them.\(^{18}\)

Most respondents agreed that, for journalists outside the Kathmandu valley, the current security situation is worse. However, physical threats to journalists within Kathmandu have generally subsided.\(^{19}\) During the Maoist insurgency, pressure came from only two groups; now there are hundreds of armed militias and individuals who threaten media workers. Journalists cannot identify groups’ cadres, and this uncertainty creates a great deal of fear.\(^{20}\) One participant said “there are so

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\(^{18}\) Interview with local journalist, 29 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\(^{19}\) See for example interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\(^{20}\) Little more worse. Because at the time, if we were clever, if we separate Maoist and security personnel, we could be safe before. But now, we cannot know who are they.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
many underground groups that we can’t count them on our fingers. There are ethnic
groups, underground groups, and cultural underground groups or political groups
as well as criminals. So it is hard to recognize them now days.”21 This also includes
the youth wings of the mainstream political parties. A local journalist said that:

The political pressure to the journalists is through the youth wings of the
political parties. In different issues they are involved but we can’t write the
news. And if we do write, then again they will pressurize [sic.] us. There may
be a lot of irregularities where their involvement is there, but we can’t report
the things. For example if there is an issue of tender, and someone bids a
tender and other group give a pressure, that unauthorized pressure news
comes to us and we need to publish. But immediately after that they will start
to put pressure on us, why did we write against them. That type of pressure
is there from the youth wings. 22

This quote demonstrates the pressure journalists are under, even from groups
closely connected with the political parties.

In Nepalganj, for example, journalists explained that they did not answer the
phone if they did not recognize the number calling. As one journalist explained,
“Directly they send email, send fax, send SMS, they call them by telephone.”23 The
desire for caution was also perhaps communicated through reporters’ hesitancy to
recommend other media professionals for me to interview. Similarly in Biratnagar,
one journalist said, “…we get telephone threats. There are telephone calls asking
‘Don’t you have any children? Don’t you want to survive?’ So family members will be
worried, asking us whose call was that, threatening calls.”24

21 Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

22 Interview with local journalist (a), 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

23 Interview with local editor/publisher, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

24 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
Before 2006, those who did not report on politics were able to avoid threats, but after the peace process journalists do not know what issues they can safely address. Journalists described being threatened not only for reporting negative news about particular armed groups but also for not covering particular events. As one violent incident (a beating or a kidnapping, for example) could be claimed by several groups, it is very difficult for the media to cover the event without getting threatened by those groups not credited in the media for the attack. Powerful people who do not like the coverage they have received may also use these groups to pressure media workers. Criticism of elites does not seem to be well tolerated: “...people do not like any criticism. You can’t criticize anyone through the media. So, still this profession is not serving much.” Individuals claiming to be from underground groups sometimes demand money from journalists, even though media is widely known to be a poorly paid profession.

These threats are taken seriously, especially given the background of the Maoist insurgency, when 24 journalists were killed (Adhikari, 2008). “Within the past 2-3 months [late 2010] about six journalists have been threatened by these

25 “In the insurgent time, some journalists were safe to write the Maoists news and the security news, the conflict news. Some journalists were safe because they did not write the conflict news, so they were safe. But now days we do not know what is dangerous, what is not dangerous.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

26 “Even by the powerful group or the government group about whom we write, if we write about them they will not directly threaten us but will use these other groups to threaten the media sector, so it is hard to know who is going against the media or against me, because they are unknown.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

27 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

28 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
underground groups. They say that they will cut off your head and throw it away. That is exactly what they said.”

However, some participants also said that when some journalists were threatened, or even attacked, it was their fault for reporting incorrectly and for not checking their facts.

Just as the government and the Maoists used the media to their advantage during the insurgency, so too do the new underground groups recognize the importance of media influence. They appear keen for publicity: “they want us to write huge stories, front page story, about them”. Journalists in the Terai, both in Biratnagar and in Nepalganj, reported that the underground groups pressured the media to give them coverage. The stories pushed on the journalists were not always newsworthy, leaving the journalists in a difficult position. Either the media promote the activities of the underground groups and remain safe, at least for a time, or they refuse and face potential repercussions: “And some of them, the underground groups, who are not responsible for anything, would also like to be highlighted in the newspaper. And they threaten the newspaper over why their name isn’t in the paper.” Indeed, in addition to punishing the media, some underground groups appear to think that if they attack a journalist, it will directly result in more

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29 Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

30 “Because of the misconduct of a few journalists, they have gotten threats, or are even attacked because of a few people”. Misconduct means “They report biased reports, and also they do some bargaining, blackmailling. Like, if you give me money or any benefit, I’ll write in your favor, otherwise I’ll write against you. Blackmailling.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

31 Interview with local journalist, 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

32 Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.
attention for their cause: “There has been a concept that once [the journalists] are threatened, only then will they publish the news.”

The media sector appears to get little support from state security forces or elected officials: “If we talk with the government people they say we are working for the journalists, we are always helping journalists, but in practical [practice] we cannot see.” Even if the security forces had the resources and capacity to protect the media sector more effectively, there may be a lack of political will. Impunity remains a grave problem. Many attacks on the media sector have a political tilt: the coverage was not to the liking of one group or another. Therefore, when a suspect is arrested, the political group to which he (it is unlikely to be a woman) is affiliated may put pressure on the police to release their cadre.

A local journalist in Nepalganj said:

> We have lots of cases. Lots of cases. Sometimes some underground group or even open group they give the threat to journalists, if we complain to a government officer, they call the party leader, they talk each other and then at last the government officer says sorry we can not do nothing, you go your way.

This is not only an injustice; it also sends the clear message that violence against journalists is tolerated. This lack of state protection and prosecution may carry over

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33 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

34 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

35 “If you have a link to a political party then you’ll be freed, you’ll feel secure being associated with a political party. That’s the main problem, in most of the cases it happens.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

36 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
from the insurgency. However, many respondents linked widespread impunity to the instability of the current political environment and opined that once governance systems had stabilized, impunity would wane. One reporter noted sadly that “... in Nepal, the only way of working, only way of being safe is the power of the gods. Just power of the gods. Nobody knows what happened with the government, with the journalists. Just we are here till today with the help of the god.”

The current security situation, especially outside of the Kathmandu valley, has led to widespread self-censorship among media professionals. Similar to the insurgency period, local people are still hesitant to talk with journalists for fear of repercussions. One village-raised journalist based in Biratnagar reported that:

Some people are interested to share the stories, but in general the situation is scary. Even myself, when I go to collect some information on a particular issue, my family says do not get involved in this issue because we may have problems in the days to come. Similarly when to record something, some information the people any moment they may agree but the next moment again they come and say please delete because we are scared.

This quote provides a snapshot of how security pressure can inhibit information gathering. Even within Kathmandu, where security may be more stable, the strong influence of political parties and private business means that journalists self-censor to safe guard their career: “We can’t write what we could or what we should. There is always a risk for our career too - if we write something, it may hamper our career, so we can’t.”

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37 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

38 Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

39 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
only negatively hampers how effectively they can communicate about the peace process but also seems to render the media impotent as facilitators of the peace process in any meaningful way.

**Professionalism**

Nepal’s media sector has yet to mature. The recent explosion in the number of media outlets has contributed to this situation, as the demand for journalists has outpaced the number of professional media workers available. The absence of professional ethics and skills came up frequently in interviews and was seen by most respondents as the main challenge facing the media sector. Many respondents described a basic lack of journalism fundamentals such as verifying stories and investigative journalism practices.\(^{40}\) Important but controversial stories seem to be hidden, for example, alleged political party ties to organized crime and other corruption stories rarely receive attention.\(^{41}\) There is also an absence of basic infrastructure, with journalists lacking tape or digital recorders, computers, cameras and travel funds. This greatly impedes their ability to research and write

\(^{40}\) Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu. Also, “some of the journalistic values: the idea of precision, authenticity, the idea of trying to be precise, factual. That is not taken seriously. Even with very good journalists, it’s not there. It’s like verification, you have to verify, how many people died, oh, maybe 20. It has happened hundreds or millions of times…you just make some estimate, you just calculate on your own, you just make a guess, you just make it up from whatever comes in your mind. They won’t verify it…You can give an interview to someone, and the next day, even in the best of the best newspapers, I guarantee, won’t be a precise as what exactly you said.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu. Also, “Sometimes our editors get news through the fax machine or by the telephone calls, if they want that news it would appear in the newspaper. But sometimes that news was not true, and actually it was given for their own personal profit. Such type of disturbance is also going in the local media sector in Nepal. Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\(^{41}\) For example, interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu; and interview with international journalist, Kathmandu, 17 December 2010.
accurate, informative stories. Fundamentally, a shift in mindset has to occur. Many people within the media sector appear to become journalists to get close to power rather than to inform the community. This lack of appreciation for the role media can play in society may have a profound impact on the peace process. One local journalist explained how some view media work:

Some have taken this profession just for time pass. They do not have much interest ... in journalism. Journalists’ role is very important. They work as the image of the issues, positive or negative in the society. Most often there are issues which are negative issues in the society but those are brought into light by journalists.\textsuperscript{42}

This passage perhaps demonstrates how the current mindset many Nepali journalists seem to have may inhibit important social issues being openly discussed, which is crucial to establishing sustainable peace. This type of professional drive will take many years to develop, because the media sector cannot be separated from the larger culture, where patronage networks remain crucial and it is important not to upset benefactors.\textsuperscript{43}

Prestige factors into this in two ways: first, judging by salary, a media career appears to have little prestige in itself; and second, a journalist can have access to influential circles, and therefore a media career may often be recognized as a possible way of improving one’s social status.\textsuperscript{44} Consequently, stories that might

\textsuperscript{42} Interview with local journalist, 29 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\textsuperscript{43} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{44} “It used to some extent, but after this conflict, journalists don’t have any prestige. They have been chased by Maoists, criminals, so many have died, almost 24 journalists were killed in the conflict, so they are on the run in that sense. Journalists in the local communities have a certain amount of influence. You have a certain power, you have access, the access gives you power, and power gives you prestige in the society. They say here, no matter how much money you have, even rich people,
agitate benefactors will not be showcased. Nepal seems to still be very much a society where patronage and connections to power centers remain the key factors affecting success. Employment or promotion may have very little to do with merit. As one media professional recalled “I have been called by a minister to say ‘Oh he reads the morning newspapers to me, make him a newsreader,’ and even funnier is a situation where someone has said, ‘Appoint me him as a singer.’ Can you appoint someone as a singer? So that’s how things have been working.”

This emphasis on patronage networks downplays the importance of professional skills, bypasses journalistic ethics and suppresses negative stories about elites. This, in turn, may affect the greater public interest and dampen citizens’ ability to make informed decisions. In short, the importance placed on pleasing members of personal networks inhibits the media’s ability to do its job as a watchdog on power, and as the voice of the people.

Participants said that if one can get no other job, one becomes a journalist. This indicates that the best and brightest, with keen analytical and investigative skills, are not finding their way into the sector. One respondent, a media trainer himself, said that many of the journalists he sees cannot write in their mother

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they don’t have that much power compare with people who have access to the prime minister, or to the army officer, the police officer. This is a very different society, so people identify themselves, their association, mostly with the power centers. So a local journalist has access to the district officer, the police, he can have anytime, he has the number he can dial any time, the rest of the people they can’t. They don’t even dare to talk to a police officer, or go to the CDO officer. So all of this I think it has mostly to do with the access issue.”

44 Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

tongue. Compounding this, there are few institutes providing journalism training. According to respondents, the courses offered at Nepal’s universities are not in-depth and provide only a surface overview of what it means to be a journalist. Current textbooks in Nepali are scarce. In addition, according to one respondent who is engaged in the training sector, courses emphasize theory, with students given little chance to practice skills. Universities also do not appear to encourage cross-disciplinary learning. Consequently, one media professional who has a degree in commerce, said he struggled to understand the coverage of business news, as the journalist writing the report did not understand the subject matter.

In the past few years, private training institutes have proliferated, with some offering training in journalism. However, those running the courses are rarely professional journalists themselves, according to those interviewed. There do not appear to be specific, enforced regulations or guidelines on what constitutes a journalist, and who can offer journalism training.

There is also a lack of specialization. Especially outside of the Kathmandu valley, journalists are expected to cover all topics, so they rarely learn enough about one particular subject to cover it adequately. Journalists who do not read English may not be able to conduct extensive research over the Internet, which may be a limited tool anyway in a country with current daily power cuts of more than 14 hours.47

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46 Interview with local media expert, Kathmandu, 17 December 2010.

Issue-based training provided by international and local non-government organizations (I/NGOs) may exacerbate this. I/NGO-sponsored workshops may train journalists on HIV/AIDS sensitivity, or the importance of women’s and children’s issues, for example. This type of training, however, does not address the mindset of the journalist who may not think such issues are particularly important. Interviewees said that they could see through this type of training; it was more about transmission of information according to constantly changing donor interests, rather than geared to support the country’s media sector. As a local media specialist commented:

There [are] multiple issues in our society, there is the issue of the HIV/Aids program running, so NGOs want to give training on HIV/Aids issue training. Peace organizations want to give peace-messaging training, so always there is lack. Environmental people want to give environmental training. Sometimes we say, training is like fashion.⁴⁸

This perhaps demonstrates that media professionals may view training as related to an NGO’s agenda, rather than being designed to support the media sector itself. It also provides insight into the constantly changing priorities of the aid community, and that it may become difficult for their audience to take training seriously.

To get coverage, some I/NGOs may pay journalists to feature stories about their project or key message. Yet again, this does not necessarily create genuine media interest in the issue. When asked if journalists, who remain mainly upper-caste males, would continue to report on these issues without financial incentive, many said they would not. The mindset of the media – what it means to be a

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⁴⁸ Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
reporter – must be discussed, rather than merely the content produced. As a local publisher said:

[Journalists] want to go and collect features news, for which they are paid by NGOs and INGOs. In which cases we are also paid for our...petrol for our bike. We prefer to go to...VDCs [village development committees, the smallest division of local government], Sometimes the NGOs say you go to Rangali VDC or Kalmar VDC, you collect this information. So now we are emphasizing more of the issues of child labor, the children picking up litter on the street side or children working with bricks for construction works. So we feature those news, those information because we are paid.49

Again it seems that for many reporters, the main priority is not to cover social issues, but to cover the stories that offer financial reward. The journalists do not appear to cover what they think might be newsworthy but instead appear very much directed by the I/NGO involved. Such direction undermines the development of journalistic skills, and hinders the practitioners’ appreciation of professional endeavors. This problem is not limited to the districts, as a local journalist described:

There are some people in Kathmandu who think we should raise these issues because INGOs pay us. As an example, Nagrik Daily, in the front page comes news related to children. Because UNICEF or Save the Children provides some funds to the journalists and on the basis of that reporting they get some money. Two days ago in Biratnagar almost all the major papers gave coverage to news about children, child labor and so on, because Save the Children is paying them.50

This may show that while the Kathmandu media sector is generally thought to be more professional than the district publications, their news choices too may be influenced by financial reward.

49 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

50 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.
Some participants critiqued this practice as “fluff pieces.” They said that reporters who travel with I/NGOs to their projects or who report on specific issues due to funding from I/NGOs do so uncritically. This was the major objection. Payment for stories was not considered unethical in itself, but the abandonment of journalistic inquiry seemed to be thought more problematic. As one media professional commented, it is not a problem that I/NGOs support journalists who have very limited resources to travel to more remote areas to seek stories on marginalized groups. The problem arises when a) the journalists involved are only reporting on these issues due to the payment, and to promote the public interest and b) when the journalists feel beholden to the I/NGOs and do not report critically. If the journalist is paid to give uncritical, positive coverage of I/NGO activities, it may be seen as bribery. As a local media specialist put it:

…it depends on what that local NGO is telling that journalist to do, and how high is the sense of free spirit and independence does that journalist have. The journalist often does not ask, look I will accept this 20,00, 40,000 rupees from you for this series of articles but I will write as I see it, is that ok with you? …It should be given, or else it is bribery, it is a blatant case of corruption.51

This demonstrates that it is not necessarily the financial help that may be problematic, but rather the way financial incentive may affect the journalist’s judgment. Even if the I/NGO invites the journalist to cover their activities fairly, he or she may self-censor so as to be considered for future support.52

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51 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

52 “But often journalists will not write...sponsored article that is critical of the paymaster...Maybe there is nothing critical to report about, but I doubt it. When a journalist has accepted a fellowship and is going on a sponsored trip, perhaps in the vehicle of the local district coordinator of that
The importance of prestige appears to greatly influence why some people join the media sector. Some interviewees joked that this was “dais journalism.”

Nepali communities hold many presentations and speeches, and the most important community members are invited to sit of the dais. Those considered most important can include media publishers and politicians. In this way, publishers can have direct access to the political power brokers and be seen by the community to have these links. One international participant said that local colleagues had told her that:

...a job in journalism has been a route into an NGO or a UN type organization ... perhaps that suggests that there isn’t such a dedicated [workforce], it’s not seen as ... a prestigious career path in itself, it’s seen as a route to go on and earn more money, a route to something completely different. So there isn’t perhaps this sort of commitment ... to the ideals of journalism.

This may be indicative of the mindset of some entering the media: that they may not have a passion for journalism, but may only see it as a path to a more illustrious career. Similarly, journalists may see the media as a stepping-stone into the political arena. This has an impact on the news reported, as they may be loath to upset their political benefactors. As a Dalit community and media activist said:

[Journalists] don’t want to be the editor of a newspaper in the future. If you interview a good journalists, they want to be a member of parliament, or on propaganda committee of a political party, or a political appointment somewhere else. They’re working in a newspaper, their motto is something different. They want to get support from a political party, for the betterment of them. This is their motto.

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53 For example, interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

54 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

55 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
Again, this passage seems to indicate that people may not enter the media profession because they are committed to the ideals of journalism. Instead, they may only view it as a step in a political career, and a chance to demonstrate political allegiance. They may not be committed to informing the population, but are rather looking out for their own interests, and the interests of the party to which they are affiliated.

As in other cultures, it seems to be very important in Nepali society to be seen. Many local papers seem to be mainly comprised of content written for free, by those who wish to heighten their profile. These opinion pieces may not be talking about a pressing local or national issue, but may be instead on a topic echoing the author’s interests, literature for example. According to participants, the editor of the paper does not exercise control over the content of these contributions, and is rather grateful to have free content to fill the pages. This means that many newspapers may not contain much news, or other useful information that would help a community member to make informed decisions. The practice of cutting and pasting stories from the internet to fill pages also dilutes the impact of the media.56

Free content and publishers creating newspapers to gain access to political elites rather than to provide community information, feeds into a saturated media market. One publisher in Biratnagar, whose family members are his editorial board, publishes 5,000 newspapers per week and is only able to distribute (often for free) a few hundred. His newspaper does not make money through sales (at 2 rupees each,

56 Interview with local journalist, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.
his newspaper costs less than half a cent); he instead survives on government subsidies, and does not pay for content. The goal is to fill the pages, not to provide quality content. This is not unusual, not is it rare for publishers to also be the marketers, delivery personnel and chief – or only – reporter. There are over 35 newspapers in Biratnagar alone.

**Media finances**

As an international journalist noted, “it's fairly clear that you can’t make a profit from running a newspaper in this country, so there must be another reason why people are doing it”. The Biratnagar publisher described above, who prints 5,000 copies but sells very few, when asked how he made money said:

> There’s a system of government categorization of the newspapers. The newspapers...fall in categories either of A, B, C or D. A newspaper that is in category of C [like his paper], gets 11,000 rupees from the Government of Nepal per month, promotion support. The municipality provides 1,400 per month for his paper, [the District level government] provides 500 rupees per month. Besides that we get some advertisements.

This is an attractive amount of money in the Nepali context, particularly in the districts. To put this in context, UNICEF posits that 55% of Nepal’s population lives on less that US$1.25 per day, the international poverty line. This equates to roughly 90 Nepali rupees per day. Eating at a local restaurant cost me an average of

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57 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

58 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

30 rupees per meal outside of Kathmandu. It is clear that running a newspaper and collecting government subsidies is an appealing prospect.

Advertisements do not net much: “Due to the presence of a lot of radios and FMs, print media doesn’t get much advertisement. The local newspapers get advertisement of only 200 rupees [about US$2.70] or 400 rupees [$5.40], very cheap it is.”\textsuperscript{60} The government provides subsidies intended to support a diverse marketplace of ideas. These subsidies appear to work in two ways. The first appear to be generic subsidies, such as for the purchasing of printing equipment.\textsuperscript{61} The second, as described above, is a more complicated system of ranking regular newspapers (from A for the largest through to D for the smallest distribution) to determine how many government-sponsored public service advertisements they will receive per month, with special advertisements on national holidays. This is the main way in which the government subsidizes the print media sector. However, there is little screening as to who may qualify for subsidy support, and many smaller newspapers appear to be little more than one-man shows.

Subsidies alone will not support the growth of a professional media sector. Participants noted that the only qualification needed to receive a subsidy is that you publish regularly. Sending a copy of your paper to the Nepal Press Institute in Kathmandu proves this. There is no verification as to whether more than this single

\textsuperscript{60} Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\textsuperscript{61} “...in print media there is some generic subsidy. If you want to buy a press in the name of a newspaper, you can get customs free, that’s the duty free things, that’s a type of subsidy. And the other one, if that press is in the name of a newspaper, electricity subsidy. And another one is a small amount, monthly or one issue, outside of KTM might get 6-7,000 rupees, which is publish the public service information which the government advertises. That’s a direct support. Out of that [besides that], all the things are generic subsidy, not direct support.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
copy is produced, and it is widely acknowledged that this system may be affected by
significant fraud.\(^62\)

The subsidy system appears to be encouraging people to enter the media to
make money and earn some social capital, rather than to inform the public. The
market is saturated, but not competitive, given that everyone may access subsidies.
This does nothing to ensure the survival and development of the best reporting.
Instead, a viable market, a demand for high quality reporting, is required to improve
the sector, and it must be eventually supported by advertising and the readership or
listenership financially supporting the outlet. This will take a long time, as much of
Nepal is inaccessible to the daily delivery of print, and has few economic ventures in
the community to support advertising.\(^63\)

In contrast to the subsidies received by print media, radio seems to receive
little government support.\(^64\) Like newspapers, FMs have suffered from an explosion
of stations which has saturated the market, and diminished their bargaining power
with what few advertisers may be available.\(^65\) Like print reporters, radio workers

\(^62\) “This is a very big problem since so many years...there are 35 newspapers, but there is no market,
it doesn't come. Nobody buys them...the Press Council, as long as you regularly publish the
newspaper and send them a copy, they give the newspapers some subsidy...because it is government
subsidizing the newspapers, thinking that they are doing a great job, most are not.” Interview with
local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\(^63\) “Nepal going through what it has in the past so many years, it doesn't have much industries to talk
about, the economy is not doing well, so the things that sustain any media venture are not there.”
Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\(^64\) “But in radio, there is no subsidy. If they want to buy the equipment they have to pay all the
customs or duty, as well as the electricity. The radio has to pay the renewal fee to the government. It
is very different in the radio sector.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011,
Kathmandu.

\(^65\) Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
frequently work unpaid or for very little, and many of them work at multiple stations to make ends meet. They also frequently work without any sort of contract or other employment documentation, making job security a major challenge. The sheer quantity of radio stations, according to one participant, has made it very difficult to distinguish a station for branding or advertising purposes. Instead of cultivating a loyal following, listeners twirl the radio dial until they find a program or song they like, with little awareness of which station they have landed on.

Several participants, assert that FMs have not been victim to corruption to the same extent as newspapers. Some thought it is harder, with real time listener call in facilities and breaking news, to hide emerging stories. However FMs remain vulnerable to being run simply for the prestige of the owner, who may not emphasize quality content. Free news or programming distributed by I/NGOs and music are the cheapest way to fill airtime. Radio stations seem to try to cover a wide geographical area for prestige, instead of concentrating on their own vicinity, which might attract local advertisers. One respondent said that he knew of several owners who had regretted buying into the radio sector, as it was too expensive to maintain. However, as a local media specialist explained:

...if you don’t have money, but you still want to somehow continue to keep the radio alive because so much social prestige, so much of your own stakes

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66 “...why people were still running weekly newspapers when it is not doing financially well is because you need for social prestige, you do it to have some political sponsorship from this or that, or to be close to the power center or that. Somehow they would want to run a weekly newspaper even if this was not financially doing well...What you see with radio, when licenses became so easy to obtain, is that in a place if a group of people went for establishing a radio, it has prestige value in a social setting, another group would want to start, without any regard for how many radio stations can a certain market sustain.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

67 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
have already been, so much that you do not want to part with the prestige that you earned, you want to continue but you want to cut down corners, how do you cut down corners, then we’ll just play music, canned music.68

Again, the emphasis does not seem to be on serving the community’s information needs. As another put it, “they are running for running”.69

This lack of sufficient pay in all media sectors, in addition to the media being seen as a stepping-stone, seems to have led to a high-turnover of staff. Conversely, media houses also use the influx of rookie journalists to justify the low rate or absence of wages. Some journalists may leave the media sector to enter the I/NGO world or politics; others may simply leave to enter a career with more stable pay. This staff movement has also impacted on the efficiency of training: if there is a high-turnover of beginner journalists, many rounds of basic training may need to be conducted. As skills do not get the time to develop and mature, journalistic quality suffers. The lack of adequate pay is currently being addressed in part by the national government, which has imposed a minimum wage. However, many participants expressed doubt that this would be systematically implemented, or that the wage designated was sufficient.70 As one local journalist explained:

Recently there has been a draft bill, a proposed bill, for minimum wages of the journalists where it said that a full-timer will get 5,200 rupees per month and part-timers will get 4,200. This is the minimum of the minimum. In the present context, if you see in Biratnagar onion cost 125 per kg. So how can one survive with 5,200 rupees for being engaged in the media sector?...In

68 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

69 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

70 “[The] government has just made a new act, I don’t know exactly what the name it is given but it is journalist act, journalist support act. But it is not in practical, just government has made, has formed, but it is not working in practice.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
some cases the family will support for some months, but the family doesn’t support forever. I have been working here for the past four years and my family has been asking me what I have earned since last four years. I have nothing.\textsuperscript{71}

This seems to indicate that the government specified minimum wage is not enough to support an independent, well-functioning media sector. While a minimum standard is an improvement, it may be unlikely to attract the best and the brightest to the media sector. Nor is it likely to change the culture of viewing media as an attractive career in itself, rather than as a stepping-stone to a more prestigious position.

This limited market, restricted financial resources and lack of professionalism has an impact on the staffing of media houses. Media cannot attract and retain the best and brightest to the sector while wages remain so low. Once journalists acquire the skills or status they were searching for, most move on. Some may leave burnt out, or to seek better employment opportunities. For those who are committed to the ideals of journalism, the low wages are compounded by high job insecurity: they are rarely given employment contracts, and in a sector which does not greatly value expertise and quality content, senior journalist may be fired to make way for younger, cheaper workers.\textsuperscript{72} Media professionals frequently work in

\textsuperscript{71} Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\textsuperscript{72} “Here it is seen that the media houses themselves try to fire those people who have been working for a longer time because they need to pay more for them, rather they will hire the fresher. And a fresher may come there and can work for six months without any pay.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
multiple roles or for multiple outlets in order to make ends meet. As one local journalist said:

If I am not paid well, I have to search for other work. Here in Biratnagar hardly you will find someone who says I am fully engaged with this media sector. He will give you three or four names or six names if he gets 2000 rupees from this it means 12,000 rupees per month. I may be the only person who is involved in only two. Many of our friends are engaged in many media or many newspapers. And because of that our output is not good. Once if I publish an article in a newspaper the same cannot be published in another and to create another one I need another time and another cost. So, had there been some organized way of producing our outputs obviously we could have been giving quality outputs, only being involved in one sector.73

This illustrates that when journalists have to take many jobs in order to make a living wage, it may reduce the quality of content produced. This in turn reduces the quality of information researching the community, and their ability to make informed decisions.

With the market so saturated, a limited advertising culture in place and the low price of print media, it is difficult to see how Nepali media could afford to pay their staff even this minimum wage. While this gap persists, journalists will seek other ways to earn money. Additionally, while there are other journalists or community members willing to work for free or provide free content, media houses have little incentive to respect pay or other employment demands.74 Offering a

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73 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

74 “One of the journalists from one television station, he wrote a letter to the editor where he has raised the problem in his television station, that they are not getting well payment at the end of the month. Just because he wrote that letter to that newspaper, he had to resign form his television organization...I remember one of my friends who was working in a daily newspaper, he started writing in the blog, and one time he wrote the condition about the payment, he was not getting payment for 3 months that’s what he wrote in his blog. That was the reason he also had to resign from his newspaper. I think these two examples, they give the kind of scenario of the Nepalese journalists.” Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
different perspective, one participant maintained "a private media organization will be willing to give only to a person they have faith in, who has the necessary qualifications." This demonstrates the vicious circle currently trapping the Nepali media sector: journalists who do not meet a certain professional standard may find it difficult to demand adequate wages, but it may be impossible for them to become professional journalists without greater investment.

**Bribery and extortion**

Participants claim bribery and extortion in the Nepali media sector seem to be fairly common. At one end of the spectrum, it was accepted that to get media coverage of a workshop or event, the organizer would have to throw a party for the media, or take them to a good restaurant, and pay for their food and drinks. Without this entertainment, the consensus was it would be very difficult to get coverage. At the other end, some participants reported journalists being paid to cover up negative stories for special interest groups, highlight their good works without disclosing payment, or write negative pieces about the competition.

Some reported blatant black mail of businesses by media professionals. There were also several stories of media houses encouraging the practice to avoid paying their staff a wage. As a local newspaper publisher said:

75 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

76 “They generally do not write that this [paid positive coverage] is an advertisement...and this is also creating some confusion among the people, because they are presenting it as the news, but it is in support of someone or something.” Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

77 “There have been different cases, one from [an eastern district], where it is said that there have been about 10-12 journalists which formed an organization called Press Club and they are demanding for money, issuing their letter page and asking for money. In [another eastern district]
In Nepal there is to a great extent a trend of bargaining. If someone gets some news about someone – some bad news – immediately the news does not go to the press. Before that there is a dealing. The person is called and there is a talk in between they might say the issue with certain conditions, this amount of money...79

This may again demonstrate that the task of informing the community is not always the priority of some journalists. A media position may be seen as a vehicle to make money through extortion and other illegal dealings.

A couple of participants defended the practice of rewarding journalists for positive coverage using euphemisms such as “voluntary donations,” but believed that hiding negative stories should be stopped. One local media specialist said that it might be easy for the journalists to justify extortion or bribery to themselves, given the criminality and general corruption that pervades Nepal today:

These businessmen, they are all crooks, they are perhaps making money through all the illegal means, they are [inaudible] smugglers in the Terai area...so what is the harm in getting a few bucks out of them is perhaps the mentality that works. So I have heard of some people in Biratnagar for instance, which is close to the border, where the journalists, some prominent journalists in the area...were getting monthly payments from the customs. So customs officials were paying them a monthly remuneration of 6,000 or 7,000 rupees just to keep quiet. Just not to report on the flow of good, illegal contrabands from Indian to Nepal, and Nepal to India...The police would too, the reporters demanded 2.5 lakh rupees [250 000 rupees] from the contractors. Such type of news comes, so this needs to be investigated to see how far it is, how deep rooted.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

78 “One example from [an eastern district], one reporter who used to work for [a prominent daily Kathmandu-based broadsheet], he worked for them for nearly six months and then he went to Kathmandu to ask for his remuneration. At that moment the reply was that we have already issued a card for you, you can use that card for collecting money. An identity card as a reporter, so go to different sources [to get money from them – through blackmail etc]...there are also some newspapers who tell their journalists to go and collect advertising from the companies, they tell them to go and collect them and what money you earn from there you can get a share from it. In such a situation they go, but they are not paid from their office so they need to go and if they do not get anything, whatever products the factories or industries give them, they receive it.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

79 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
throw a party for journalists once in a while at a certain restaurant, a
restaurant who is perhaps already paying that police officer for allowing it to
open until 12 instead of 11 or 10 as the practice is in that town. So there is
that nexus.\textsuperscript{80}

Not only does this quote perhaps illustrate the role of corruption in the media, but it
also may demonstrate that corruption currently affects many of Nepal’s institutions.
It would not be realistic to expect the media to be immune. However, given the
media’s general role of community watchdog, the involvement of the media may be
particularly problematic.

Several participants argued there was no excuse for extortion or bribery, and
that media houses unable to pay journalists a living wage should not be allowed to
operate.\textsuperscript{81}

\textbf{Social inclusion}

At one point the non-minority journalists, they will prevent this [social and
political] progress, and many things of the society. Because they have the
pen, they have a very big instrument.\textsuperscript{82}

The Maoist insurgency gained traction outside of the Kathmandu valley in
part because they said they were fighting to abolish the caste system and to install
broad equality. Now that the Maoists have joined the mainstream, their struggle has
been taken up by a variety of ethnic groups who demand their own homeland
within a federal state. At this time of flux, it is crucial that social issues receive press
attention. Nepali journalism in general appears to only skim the surface of issues,

\textsuperscript{80} Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{81} Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

\textsuperscript{82} Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
rarely investigating or analyzing in-depth. Social issues are a prime example of this.

The voices of common people are rarely featured in the media, as one local journalist explained:

It is a big lack, between people and media houses, people and leadership, people and CA [constituent assembly] members. It is a very huge gap. Because we are thinking that in our media in our newspaper, common people are hidden, there is not seen common people. We [can find stories on a] leader, business man or any union leader, but we are not searching common people, common professional, it is a huge problem for us, and we are realizing this, but we are going to improve on this also.83

This quote illustrates the absence of the voice of everyday people in the media. Without more attention to the issues people outside of the political sphere feel are important, it may be difficult for a lasting peace process to progress. In particular, without airing victims’ stories and local perspectives on the conflict, community healing may be difficult to achieve.

While there are a vast number of media outlets, they do not seem to be providing the information the public needs to make informed decisions on crucial issues including the peace process. Not do they give all sections of society a voice. There seem to be two main reasons for this: one is that these types of stories are not prioritized, and second, the media workforce itself is not sufficiently inclusive.

Interview participants uniformly said that social issues were gaining more

83 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
prominence in the media, but that there was still much more to be done.\textsuperscript{84} An example is the increasing (but still not sufficient) number of stories about ethnicity-based unrest, such as the Limbuwan movement in the eastern hills. However, stories continue to be surface-level reporting, and people outside the affected districts do not understand what the movement was calling for or the impact the movement is having on daily life. A prominent human rights advocate in the east said:

\begin{quote}
At the present Limbuwan/Khumbuwan situation in Ilam, Panchtar or in Taplejung. We go there and we see the different situation but as reported from the center they give very less importance or what they report there is not the actual situation here. Here the situation is much more worse than what they write there or much more different than what they write there.\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

This quote perhaps demonstrates that the media may be out of touch with what is happening in areas that continue to be affected by community tension. Whether due to a lack of resources or interest, minimal or inaccurate coverage of the demands of marginalized groups may reignite conflict in the future.

One participant from a minority group said that ethnicity-based movements such as the Madhesi and Limbuwan protests want space in public dialogue, “they want their issues heard, but the media is not working in that direction, they project issues in a negative tone.” Another said that “the other conflicts are not getting any media attention at all, none at all … I think it is one of those conflicts that a lot of people are not really understanding right now and it has the potential to really

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{84} However, little research seems to have been done on this: “it has to be measured, we don’t know, we just assume most of the time in Nepal, that’s the problem.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{85} Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
escalate later on and become really violent.” This lack of attention has resulted in threats against media houses and staff. Similarly, there may be more stories on Dalits, but they still tend to be negative stories, such as Dalits being denied access to temples due to their low caste status. A Dalit community and media activist said:

If you look at the number of the stories published in the media in the same days, it is very high, women, Dalit, but if you look at the content of the story, it is very difficult, it is different. There is one phenomena in Dalits, if some Dalit girl was raped, they publish the story, if some Dalit gets beaten, they publish the story, if some Dalit was killed because of the hunger, they publish the story. We meet with some people in the village, and they say, we have to be killed to appear in the media. We have to be killed to appear in the media. [...] This is the thing. It is hard, the Dalit voice, the media make a significant contribution, to make the Dalit voice louder, they publish the case of atrocity, this is also necessary, if someone is killed, this should also be in the media. But only this is not should be, there are other images also, this should be in the media, which is lacking.

Such reports do little to give these communities a greater, equal voice in society, or promote understanding of their issues. Thus, such surface-level reports do little to support peacebuilding. As the Dalit advocate put it:

Their capacity to give a voice to the voiceless in the mainstream media is still very low, they have no strengthened capacity in the mainstream media to include those voices, even today. They present only the negative stories very well. The movements, they projected very negatively.

Coverage of only negative aspect of a group may continue their victimization. In order for marginalized groups to be viewed as equal, they must be portrayed as

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86 Interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

87 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

88 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

89 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
such, particularly by opinion-makers in society. This is part of establishing a positive peace, and the media can take a lead role in this.

The vast majority of Nepali participants in this research were high-caste Hindu men. This social group continues to dominate the media sector. One participant referred to the sector as “‘Bahun-baat’ which is Brahmin-ism. It is a Hindi word in fact – Big Brother rules are in media.” Those I spoke to were unanimous in their declared support for more inclusion among in media sector personnel. As one participant described the sector, “[marginalized groups] do not have access to media, so they do not get much coverage. For instance in [the Federation of Nepali Journalists in the eastern district of] Morang there are 150 members but only one Dalit member is there so far. They are discouraged, they are not encouraged to come to this field.” Two participants said that their publication was making an effort to promote social diversity in its staff, but that is was difficult. One local journalist said:

they are trying...many person[s] coming in this sector, but not staying a long time... temporarily, they start, and then go away. It is more important problem for us – why women or ethnic groups person not staying here, they join but leave because they have more opportunity in NGOs, INGOS.

Several reasons were given for this absence of journalists from traditionally marginalized groups from the media workforce: 1) the media has traditionally not

90 “The Brahmins have been at the front foot, even since the Rana period, because the Ranas gave special protection to the Brahmins, and they had a sentiment that the Brahmins should not be killed even though they commit crimes because killing a Brahmin is a sin. But other people might have gotten that penalty too. The Brahmins they got opportunity for education, they went to Banares, they got a higher education and they have been publishing since that time, and that influence is still there.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

91 Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.

92 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
been a sector that marginalized groups would even try to enter, lower-caste people or women have traditionally had prescribed positions within the society; 2) as the wages are so low, only those who have families relatively wealthy enough to support them can afford to enter; 3) again due to low pay, journalism was not a desirable career; and 4) the generally lower education level of marginalized groups may not enable them to compete for jobs. 93

Even when marginalized groups are employed in the media sector, they may only be employed to represent their group’s issues. One local media specialist said:

Now days we can see a little bit of inclusiveness, especially in radio, if there is no staff within the radio station, they find someone for women program, women are appointed, they appoint Dalit for Dalit programs. They appointed disabled people for disabled programs. At least there is someone who can represent, but that is not enough. They are involving their issues programs. Like Dalits are involved mainly in Dalit issues, they are not involved in news, they are not involved in other society-focused programs. That also creates some barriers... 94

This trend appears to exist mainly in radio, with radio stations or programs for women, Muslims, Dalits and other excluded groups growing in number. This may be a result of donors prioritizing minority rights. 95 It also means that the marginalized are speaking to their own audience rather than communicating with the rest of the

93 “The people themselves don’t want to come in the media sector due to the lack of awareness. They don’t think being a journalist is a good profession...The placements of minority journalists is the most important part to raise their own questions by their own people. If such type of backward caste people will come in the media sector, it will improve their reporting [reporting on them].” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

94 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

95 “It’s a big thing, that’s all the donor community care about. The donor community only care that you give the Dalits a voice. It’s about almost negative discrimination. You can almost give that too much attention.” Interview with international media expert, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Nepali community. It reinforces social barriers, and may contribute to “ghettoizing” of marginalized issues and media.

Some participants from traditionally marginalized groups said that they strove to highlight the stories of their own community. One participant from a janajati group said “if an issue of janajati comes I always tried to prioritize it when I present.” 96 A Madhesi journalist expressed a similar sentiment. This may mean that the work of journalists from one group may not be trusted by others. 97 As one local journalist explained:

A news quoted by a Pahadi journalist is not taken in trust by people in the Madhes. Or a news quoted by a Madhesi journalist is not taken in trust by the Pahadi community…And in KTM valley too, if a Madhesi journalist goes there to work, they do not take it easily. There has been some type of discriminatory attitude towards the Madhesi journalists in Kathmandu. 98

This quote may demonstrate continuing inter-communal rifts. More inclusion in both media personnel and in media content may help to bridge these gaps, and to help to foster positive peace.

The dominance of higher-caste males in the Nepali media has an impact on how social issues are reported. It may be more challenging for them to recognize the value of covering stories about traditionally marginalized groups, and it may be

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96 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

97 Another example: “...we have more difficulty with the journalists of the Terai region, especially the Madhesi community. First of all they don’t have that many journalists, and they are more politically biased. So we have difficulty having independent reports from the Madhesi community.” Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

98 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.
difficult for them to access these communities. Several participants felt that the dominance of high-caste men in the media meant that coverage of marginalized or rural groups received lower priority. One participant from a minority group said that they were also often excluded from training opportunities, as currently, trainings are done in partnership with elite-run local organizations.

In a country in flux, the position of high-caste men at the top of the social ladder is changing. As several participants pointed out, they may be journalists, but they are human beings first. This means that high-caste journalists may have a vested interest in preventing a restructured state that is believed to reduce the power of their ethnic group, i.e. federalism. One local political analyst said:

Traditionally marginalized groups are in favor of federalization, which was a commitment of the peoples’ movement and the Constituent Assembly. But who will be the losers? The elites. This is the perception – it may not actually lose anything. They are saying everyone else will get a state, and what about us? These are the people who control the media and other institutions; they are using the media to advocate against a federal system. They are creating terror, havoc and fear. They could also play a balanced role; they could also resent the pro-federal side. This type of balanced media is not there.

Again, this may show that the importance of the identity of media personnel, and of their place in Nepal’s traditional power hierarchy. Greater social inclusion in the workforce may help with this. For a peace process to progress, it has to be supported by the public, and this support has to be based on accurate, balanced

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99 “Even the involvement in the news sector, there is a lack of janajati, Dalit, Muslim, Madhesi groups, which play an important role in the news. Here also, like everywhere, Brahmin Chhetri have a huge amount of reporters, manpower. It is also the fault of the minority people because they don’t like to share their problems, their issues with us so we are unable to write as much news as they want.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

100 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

101 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
information. Thus, the media can play a significant role in either supporting or destabilizing the peace process. As another participant commented “some media are playing a type of destructive role to break down the peace process also. That type of trend is emerging … [a]gainst federalism, against the state restructuring.”

Several high-caste participants expressed confusion at, or rejected the demands of marginalized groups: “they are demanding for their rights, but sometimes their demands are too much.” As another said: “… their demands are uncontrolled, it is difficult to publish … they are demanding too much. If journalists are aware people, we have to understand the national situation. If they demand we need a different country how can we write? There will be problems.”

This indicates that journalists are censoring the content they produce, instead of reporting on potentially explosive social and political issues. This type of censorship does not allow for the airing of grievances crucial to conflict prevention and necessary in a healthy democratic society. Several respondents thought that this perception had influenced the negative coverage of both the federalism debate and the negative coverage of ethnicity-based movements such as the Limbuwan. This clearly influences the media’s ability to play a peacebuilding role, as negative coverage may fan tensions rather than provide a space to air opposing views.

One international participant said that the lack of attention to social issues was symptomatic of the larger political priorities, as the bigger parties have a “fairly

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102 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

103 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

104 Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
superficial” interest in minorities and *janajatis*, with the probable exception of the Maoists. She commented that “if you’re a newspaper and politics is your focus, then that is going to be to the exclusion of those groups ... there is a definite gap there. If I were Nepali I would want to see more - a lot more - coverage of those issues.” Further, she said “These people were native to this country but were sort of almost viewed as outsiders by the media.”

Respondents felt that this lack of adequate coverage extended not just to ethnic groups and women but also to the community outside of the Kathmandu valley in general. According to the 2001 Census, only 14 percent of Nepalis live in urban centers (DFID/World Bank, 2006). Participants said that the national newspapers devote very little editorial space to news from the districts. One participant said he believed they generally carried as little as 10% of coverage for non-Kathmandu-based stories, including international news. Participants also said that radio mainly re-broadcast news from Kathmandu instead of focusing on local issues. One Nepali media specialist said that he had conducted a study on the news interests of Nepalis living outside of Kathmandu and found that they appeared to have very little interest in national news. He said that when given a national newspaper, they quickly scanned it until they found an article on their local area and ignored the rest of the paper. Similarly, he played a radio segment with Kathmandu-based news, and one local news segment and asked people how many stories they

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105 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

106 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

107 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
remembered. He reported that they retained substantially more information from the local reports and showed little interest in the national news.108

A local media expert said that there were now a lot more journalists working for the rights of certain groups, such as Dalits, janajati, people with disabilities etc.109 The use of this advocacy language is interesting. A Kathmandu-based NGO worker also used advocacy language “they ... take a stand,” to describe the reporting of a newspaper he seemed to view favorably.110 A local journalist said that during the 2006 peoples’ movement, Kantipur daily newspaper was considered an “eighth party” of the democratic seven party alliance.111 The media in general are given a lot of credit for beginning the peace process, which may be a continuation of their role as political advocates during the party-less Panchayat period. As one participant said: “journalists ... sometimes act like militants themselves”.112

It seems evident that the divide between the ruling high-caste elite and the traditionally marginalized groups is not the only rift affecting balanced coverage. The major discrepancy between Kathmandu-based news and views from outside of

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108 “...to show the effect to the radio operators and producers, I produced one bulletin, local issues right there with the local perspective. And the same day I recorded one bulletin from Kathmandu...I played first the Kathmandu bulletin, it was a ten minute bulletin, and in the 11th minute I asked them, how many news do you remember now, tell me. They hardly remember two news. And then again I played this local bulletin. They remembered more than 80%. And I also asked them to take a national newspaper and read it. And once they find in 5 pages, they found one news in the name of their district. They start to read that one. I asked them, on the first page there is the news with that much big font and four columns, but you didn’t care this one, but you read thoroughly that [local] one, what does that mean?” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.

109 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

110 For example, interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.

111 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.

112 Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
the Kathmandu valley is another factor diminishing the role of the media in the peacebuilding process. As one respondent said, “Media is kind of island. When they break this island, then they will make greater influence in Nepali politics. But now they don't want to even break their island...People out of this island, they think differently.”  

As mentioned above, only 14% of the population lives in urban centers (DFID/World Bank, 2006), meaning that this emphasis on Kathmandu excludes the vast majority of Nepal’s people.

In Nepal, there appear to be two peace processes. The first is the official peace process, which takes place at the national political level between the Maoists and the State. The second is taking place at the popular level, between different ethnic communities as well as caste and gender groups. The mainstream print media in particular seems to be placing significant emphasis on the political peace process, to the detriment of the social. The daily Kathmandu-based national papers prioritize the daily machinations of the political parties, engaging in he-said/she-said journalism. They appear to be written by the political elites, for the political elites. One international participant said she thought the “obsession” with Kathmandu was “shocking.”  

There is very little sense of engaging with the wider Nepali community or including issues that concern those outside of the national political sphere. Reasons for this include that district-based journalists felt safer reporting on central-level news, it is more prestigious, and it may be more stimulating for them. It may also be because of logistical access, language barriers

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113 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

114 Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.
and illiteracy, rural people seem to get more information from radio, rather than print. There is very little analysis in the newspapers or alternative views or solutions given in the media coverage. According to participants, this is changing but very slowly.

Prestige is a major factor influencing this politically driven coverage. One participant, a media trainer, commented that covering social issues, especially in the district, will not get a reporter noticed. As many journalists seem to greatly value recognition by local powerbrokers, they aim to write stories that party leaders will appreciate, and that may lead to a social promotion of the journalist. For example, a journalist might be invited to a meal or a party with local leaders. As such recognition will not result from coverage of social issues or rural/marginalized communities, it is more difficult to get a journalist to cover these stories.

However, district-level voices need to be heard in the peace process. Rural people were the main targets of both sides during the insurgency, and are most affected by poverty and a lack of resources. They also make up the bulk of the Nepali population. As one local journalist said:

Until and unless the local issues are given priority there wont be a good or sustainable peace process in the country. The peace process will not get any hope or will not be sustainable until the people know what is going on over there. To get the logical end to the peace process, people should also know what the constitutional committees are doing there, that should come to the people, and what the people are doing there that should go to the national media. Maybe there they may have less space to give coverage to these issues and local media is covering them, but they should not avoid the issues of regional level.115

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115 Interview with local journalist, 31 December 2010, Biratnagar.
This quote clearly speaks to the importance of local voices in a sustainable peace process. The media can play a vital role in communicating the interests of the population to the political elites, and in communicating the political process to the grassroots level.

Journalists in the districts can feel ignored by their Kathmandu editors. They also feel like they are neglected by training initiatives, and overseas exposure opportunities. Several district-level respondents seemed to feel that they worked harder than their Kathmandu-based colleagues, but received little recognition or perks. As a local journalist said:

I cannot say the journalists that are working at the national level are the good journalists. They have less responsibility than those working at the local level, because the national-level journalists only have to work for one newspaper, the local journalists, I have to give 12-15 pieces of news per day and work in the FM too. So it is hard to work in the local level, but they are capable to be the national level news reporter too. Local newspaper journalists have a lot of awareness, and I think the national level don’t have that responsibility. We have to write a lot of news, they only have to write one. And we have to sit in the press up to 1 or 2 a.m., so it is harder to be a local reporter. 116

They also seemed to feel that they worked very hard during the insurgency period and put themselves in danger to do their job, only to be ignored once the danger had past: “In war time we were important also. Reporter out of valley were important, because they make the important catchy news, in war time, but this [peace] time we are ignored.” 117 They also seem to believe that if a Kathmandu-based reporter filed

116 Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

117 Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
the same story, it would be published.\textsuperscript{118} They appear to feel unappreciated, overlooked, and job satisfaction seems to be low. As a local journalist said:

Nepalese media person getting opportunity – means in Kathmandu. Out of Kathmandu we are feeling nobody seeing us, nobody reading us, nobody listening us. So here is very discrimination...They work in insurgency time, in which time journalists are in very risk to reporting...They get opportunity to study to go to international seminar, workshops, training but nobody is from outside Kathmandu getting so. It is very discrimination, we are feeling. So there is not the debate of discrimination on ethnic group, gender or other issues, other forms, other society, but it is discrimination from out of valley, or in valley.\textsuperscript{119}

This speaks to the dissatisfaction and under-appreciation journalists at the district level seem to feel. Unless there is a motivated media workforce investigating local-level issues, it will be difficult for diverse voices to be heard on the national stage.

The peace process needs this input to be inclusive, sustainable, and ultimately successful. A Nepali media expert said:

But at the same time, even if the peace process...is assigned by heads in KTM in some five star hotel, it is the people on the ground who make it possible or impossible. So we are working with the grassroots people, in media and otherwise...These are the people who make it successful or unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{120}

This quote demonstrates the need to involve the general population in the peace process, and to give space for their stories in the media.

\textsuperscript{118} “If the journalist from Kathmandu comes here, their reports will publish in high priority. Same issues, same place, but same media, the priority depends on the reporters, is from main office or district reporter, it depends.” Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalgunj.

\textsuperscript{119} Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalgunj.

\textsuperscript{120} Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
“Politics, politics, politics”

...we sometimes joke also that is the three P [of Nepali media]. Politics, politics, politics.\textsuperscript{121}

The political peace process in Nepal seems to have stalled, and UNMIN left on January 15 of this year. There seems to be a tremendous sense of frustration, as the news carries story after story of bickering among the political leaders. As one local media specialist explained:

...there is no news, because everyday, in newspapers and these local stations, they always cover the same line, same event, same quote, same dialogue from the political elite, there is no alternative views. That’s it. The disagreement between the Maoist leaders, Buburam and Prachanda. If you go through the whole newspaper, for a week you can find that kind of information. And UML leaders’ disagreement in between, what does that mean? Everyday. And we send that kind of message to the people, how do they perceive that news? There is no news exactly, everyday the same line. Same line, same thing. There is no other real information. There is not a blank page, or blank space in the radio or newspaper, but there is no news. More or less no news. That is the reality.\textsuperscript{122}

This quote perhaps demonstrates that while many newspapers are published and there are many radio stations on air, there may remain an absence of accurate, quality news. Nepal’s media appears to specialize in daily digests of the soap-opera-esque antics of Nepal’s political elite, which may not equate to informing the public on issues of public interest.

\textsuperscript{121} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
Nepal’s new constitution has yet to be drafted, even though the deadline has now been extended twice. The political process in Kathmandu seems very far from the villages, where people seem more interested in news about issues affecting their daily lives. While national politicians fight for power, the voices of the people at the district or village level are often lost. Rather than improving, the situation seems to be getting worse, with some in the Maoist camp talking of a return to war. While this is highly unlikely, it does little to stabilize the country. Violent ethnicity-based movements are also receiving little national attention, which minimizes the chances of those conflicts being resolved. As one human rights defender described the current situation:

Two years and a half have been wasted in the peace process and nothing has been done. The common people have not had any benefit from the peace process, neither they have any loss. So they are getting depressed as the time passes. Sometimes they are forced to come to the political meetings, they are hired, they come but they pay no interest. There are also many issues of people getting exploited because of different political activities or different issues.

This perhaps illustrates a disconnect between what the political elite prioritize in the peace process, and what matters to the average Nepali person. The general population appears to be disheartened by the lack of progress in the peace process, and the lack of any real benefit to citizens. Instead of picking up on this and holding the political establishment accountable, the media appears to be exacerbating the situation by focusing on political reporting.

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124 Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.
Many Kathmandu-based media professionals stress that the media can say whatever they like about politicians. While this may be technically true, it seems that a combination of the need to curry political favor, the need to secure financial support and, especially for those in the districts, physical threats, conspire to keep many controversial stories out of the papers, or at least off the front page. As a prominent editor said “if one newspaper, one media is close to one political party or a certain political leader, they can report properly about others, but not that particular side where they themselves are associated.”

Some participants felt that the competition between the broadsheet dailies kept them from being too openly biased. Indeed, while I was in Nepal the English-language papers carried many stories of corruption and scandals involving relatives of prominent politicians.

Participants said that if a negative story about a political party was published in all the papers except the one affiliated with that party, it would be too embarrassing for the paper concerned. An active readership writing letters to the editor and commenting on media websites from around the world also performs a watchdog function.

However, according to participants, stories not of party interest could be minimized, buried in the back pages or left intentionally vague to

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125 Interview with Nepali editor, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

126 “The dailies have to write freely, they have to report on everything…maybe it is still possible for a businessman, but it will be impossible for a politician to try to shut up a newspaper. Because of the sheer number of the broadsheet dailies, it is simply not possible to ask all of them not to report on that. Because one of them will report, and if one of them reports, and that doesn’t appear in all the newspapers, the readers will question. And there is also an active readership…So it will be shameful.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
protect the affiliated political party. Inversely, positive coverage can be highlighted. The media also appear to be highly aware of the influence their coverage may have on the political stage “…the friends in [a prominent daily paper] they say that if we wish, we can change the government, alter the government, we can make a new government, we carry that capacity.”

Newspapers are believed to cover a story in a way that is advantageous to the political party to which they are connected. Weeklies, given their political history, more blatantly barrack for one political party or faction. The daily broadsheets are considered more professional, although participants felt that they could identify which newspaper supported which party. A local newspaper publisher in Biratnagar explained:

Papers are close to parties, so whenever any news comes if it is against the party interest they may hide the information. There is very less fact-based news come. They highlight the things related to the opposite parties, but their own parties issues, if it is not in their favor then they do not publish it…But I am not affiliated with anyone, that is why I am still on a bicycle.

This illustrates that for some journalists, the interests of their party might be more important than producing balanced reports to inform the public. It may also speak to the importance of political connections for career advancement.

127 “There is an example of the killing of two reporters, one Birendra Shah and another Prakash Choudhary. Birendra Shah was a the central committee member Chautari close to UML, so his killing got the coverage of all the media, but Prakash Choudhary was close to RPP [Royalist party], there was not much news about him or his killing, they still say that it is unidentified, his [killers]. There is not any pressure even from the ministry level for investigation or news coverage, so there is influence, political influence even in the news.” Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

128 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

129 Interview with local newspaper publisher, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.
One respondent noted that journalists must cultivate these relationships to gain access.\textsuperscript{130} He added that small houses cannot become neutral, they have no money, no resources, so they need patronage to survive asking, “When the big houses are not neutral, what can you expect from the smaller houses?”\textsuperscript{131} Radio stations were described no differently.\textsuperscript{132}

While media houses or publications could be identified by participants as supporting one political party or another, so too could individual journalists. Politics, and proximity to influence, is a key motivation for people to enter the media sector. Both journalists and owners/publishers seem to use media as a stepping-stone to a more influential position within politics, according to respondents. Every person within the media sector, and media organizations as a whole has, or is believed to have, an affiliation to a political party.\textsuperscript{133}

There are three main media unions in Nepal, and each one is affiliated to a different political party: Press Chautari (Communist Party of Nepal – United Marxist-Lennist), Press Union (Nepali Congress) and Revolutionary Journalist

\textsuperscript{130} Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu

\textsuperscript{131} Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu

\textsuperscript{132} “Now, after observing the relevance and impact radio can make, people from all walks of life have registered radio stations in their own name, so political parties own radio stations. So the story of partisan media in Nepal is something that everybody knows. Radio stations, newspapers and television stations are aligned to one political party or another, so that’s where they compromise the credibility and the balance part, the basic tenants of journalism, to talk in favor of a certain political party, and that’s the worrying part.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{133} “[Journalists] have no capacity. Some journalists they have no good education, they have no good knowledge. They are supporters of the parties. They are not independent, they are not the peoples’ journalists. So it’s our problem...If I am a supporter of one party, blindly I support. I forget my professionalism, I support blindly. Even when my supporter party has done wrong, I write that it is doing good.” Interview with local journalist, 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
(United Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist). Even the umbrella organization, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, was described as highly political.\textsuperscript{134} Affiliation seems to be necessary to advance a career and for protection.\textsuperscript{135} Journalists may cover issues selectively to benefit their chosen party, but may also keep this affiliation quiet if it conflicts with the allegiance of the publisher or owner. Journalists open about their opposing political affiliations may not be promoted. However, participants felt that this happened rarely, as people of the same political ilk tend to band together.

Not only are the media organizations and personnel perceived to be highly political, the content is also very focused on political coverage. As one interviewee said: “Nepalese media are following the leader, their nonsense type speeches. Somebody says something, that makes the first coverage, the first main news.”\textsuperscript{136} Some participants said that the public was very interested in political stories, while others, as noted in the “Social inclusion” section above, thought that the majority of the more rural population took little interest in the political intrigues that dominate

\textsuperscript{134} “...they get together only for politics, like the [Federation of Nepalese Journalists], and they get together because they get to be elected, and they get to be elected means they get to be close to one party of the other. And throughout the time they’re in power, they’re elected, they’ll get a lot of opportunities for different things, whatever they deem to be important, and those are some of the things they work for.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{135} “If they are involved in the political party protects them, the political party will also invest money and also security, like social security, and also other chances they can get, attached to the political party. If they want to be fair, professional, they have no good opportunity, no good facility. They have already mind made up, I am a cadre of the Maoists, and now I will go reporting. I will be a journalist, but I will be a journalist of Maoists. I will be a journalist of NC. Publically they never say... I am fair, they say. They always speak, I am fair, I have no any biasness, but who are their news sources? Publicly they always say I am fair, I am neutral, I am impartial, everyone says.” Interview with local human rights defender, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

\textsuperscript{136} Interview with local journalist (a), 19 December 2010, Nepalganj.
Kathmandu. This may be related to whom they see as their main audience: the general public or the elites. Indeed, non-political events may be given a political spin merely to attract media attention, as the following quote demonstrates:

...they think that issues do not become news until [they are] linked with politics or get some political influence. An example is a recent program organized for Darshain [festival], while inviting the people it was said this is completely not political, please raise no political issues here, make jokes, laughter, songs, it should be a quite interesting program but there should not be any type of politics. But in the course of the program the announcer said that, thinking that the program would get less importance, we are trying to invite the representative from UML here to give us all a speech. To make it to the news, so they make it political.

This politicization of the workforce and coverage is affecting the peace process. Not only are the voices of the general public ignored and ethnic or cultural movements reported on negatively, but the media seems to be taking a position against issues such as federalism as discussed above. Problematically, they also seem to be taking a stance against the Maoists, a party to the peace process and the one with arguably the greatest popular support. While the media are credited for supporting the partnership between the Maoists and the seven-party-alliance (of democratic parties) that led to the peace process, now that there are rifts and competition between the parties, the media appear to be reflecting that. In the lead

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137 “People also like to read such political news, hard news, breaking news, which politician is giving a speech. So the editor is compelled to write such type of news...Journalists are also involved with the politician, so they like to write their news. For the readership, it is also more exciting or they take more interest in the news about politics or politicians...It is the news which is sold in the market, so people are used to reading this type of news, and they want it.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalgunj.

138 Interview with local journalist, 27 December 2010, Biratnagar.

139 The Maoists won the most seats in Constituent Assembly election, although now popularity may be waning, it is difficult to tell.
up to the Constituent Assembly elections, the media were reporting that the Maoists would win very few seats, which was very much out of touch with the reality outside of Kathmandu.140

The Maoists do not appear to have the same representation in the media sector as other prominent parties. Only one journalist I spoke with was identified as a member of Revolutionary Journalists (the media union affiliated with the Maoists). One other Kathmandu-based participant said “I think if we go to the number, there are very less number of the journalists who write in favor of the Maoists, because many journalists they are in favor of NC or in favor of UML.”141 A local media specialist said:

A lot of broadsheet newspapers, they are unhappy with the way the Maoists are doing politics. Most of them are behind UML or Nepali Congress. And now, the Maoists want to keep UNMIN...So there is this aggressive tone against UNMIN. And if it was the other way around...if Maoists were in government, if they wanted to kick UNMIN out, and UML and NC were in opposition and wanted to keep UNMIN in...the newspapers, would also toe the lines of NC and UML to keep UNMIN in, now, they want it out.142

This quote may demonstrate the significant impact political influence in the media may have on the continuation of the peace process. UNMIN has since left the

140 “[Political] influence is there and it seems real because how the media present the issues, they just see the favor of the time and they do it...they published that the Maoists will not get a strong position, they would get even not the second or third position. They could not present what the real situation was. It’s not the point that we are supporting the Maoists or that we should not always be against the Maoists...their influence is there at the newspaper and the ground reality does not come. We went to places and we met many people and they support [the Maoists]. But media against them – the Maoists. This was about the situation at the time, the elections. Their analysis is different, ground reality is different.” Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

141 Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.

142 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
country. This perception that the media is against the Maoists is dangerous for the continuation of the peace process. As one journalist in Biratnagar noted:

The issues related to the Maoists, or their PLAs or the cantonment, the integration of PLAs is only not a part [is not the only part] of the peace process. That can be the political part, but there are so many social issues to be addressed, issues of social conflict. These are also an important part of the peace process...Not only political issues are a part of the peace process.143

This quote speaks to the need for the media to cover issues other than politics. While the political peace process is obviously crucial, peace at the social level, at the grassroots level, may be considered equally important.

There was some disagreement as to whether the wider Nepali community was able to tell which media outlet was affiliated with which political party. Most respondents felt that the educated Kathmandu population were aware of which media are affiliated to which party, but there was uncertainty as to the degree of awareness of those at the district headquarters or village level. Many politically savvy people seem to read multiple sources in order to get a more complete understanding of a story, and make up their own mind as to what actually happened. The newspaper-reading public may be more sophisticated in this than the radio or television audience.144 As print has a longer history in Nepal, one respondent felt that the print audience was more mature.145 However, he also said

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143 Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

144 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

145 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
that the sheer volume of low quality media may result in confusion. One Kathmandu-based journalist disagreed, saying:

> Even in the cities, most of the people they just scan the front page, and they throw the newspaper, they do not read the articles and they do not make their mind or idea reading the articles. I have seen extremely few people they read those articles and they can distinguish and they can make the difference of who is writing for whose favor.

This quote may demonstrate that it is essential for the media to be accurate and balanced, because people may not have the time, inclination or sophistication to analyze what they are reading in order to make up their own minds. People outside the valley seem to fare even worse. A local political analyst felt that this lack of awareness was a risk, that this made them more vulnerable to manipulation and persuasion and lobbying.

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146 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

147 Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu. Similarly, “Only people who are related to the political parties can understand what the peace process, or federalism or democracy is about. It is the same for the cities or the national level.” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj.

148 “You’re talking about the average Nepalis, so no! No...people know a lot, because of the radio stations, they know about...the price of vegetables.” Interview with local media researcher, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu. “Most of the Nepalese out of, especially cities, either they don’t read newspapers, or they just rely on FM radio and television. That means they don’t make any idea just reading the articles and news that has been published in newspapers. Rather they make their idea through local mobilizers, like teachers or the party cadres who are working in the local areas.” Interview with local journalist, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.

149 Interview with local political analyst, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
**Business**

And before this, growing number of the Nepali media, Nepali media was with the Nepali people, now, with the businessman. Previously, it worked for the people, now, it works for making money.150

While it may be more difficult for the daily national broadsheets to cover up political missteps, they do appear to cover for business leaders.151 Similar face-saving is also afforded to those at the district level. Many who own shares in media houses also have other substantial business interests.152 This appears to discourage journalists from covering negative stories related to the business interest of their owners, or of their owners’ friends. Several participants said that some invested in media only to control their public image, and to provide cover for illegal dealings.153 Political recognition also appears to be a prime motivation.154 In the regional center of Butwal, one participant described the seven daily newspapers as each being

150 Interview with Dalit community and Media activist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

151 “Businessmen, because of the sheer power of money, and their power to affect the newspaper’s finances, and the newspaper’s revenue, they may be able to do it” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

152 “...having a newspaper is a relatively small part of their business, and perhaps in a lot of cases its so that they can gain the political influence that will help them in other areas of their business.” Interview with international journalist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

153 “...people are coming in the media to protect themselves, criminals are coming to make money in the media sector or to use the journalists, or to protect themselves from the police department or the government” Interview with local journalist (a), 21 December 2010, Nepalganj. “Another situation is that there have been so many people who invest in the media sector, but they do illegal business. Just to protect themselves, they are investing for media.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

154 “What happens is, if you want to be recognized, say you are running a fairly successful business, say in import-export, or if you are running industry, printing machine, then you may have made money, but you are still a small fry, you are just a business man, and you want to associate with and you want to be seen to be associating with some of the power centers, and the power centers are, in Nepali, in our setting the power centers are politicians, political parties, in that community. In order to be a little visible, then you will start a newspaper.” Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
owned by, on average, 20 businessmen. Therefore, 140 businessmen are owners of the media. He questioned the medias’ ability to write critical stories of business in this environment: “If I write, next day, I have to resign or I have to go out. That is the reality.”

Extortion too, appears to have a role in this. Most prominently at the district level, journalists may be paid for positive coverage of a business, to hide negative coverage, or to promote a negative story about a business competitor. Advertising also seems to be both a revenue raiser, and a method of extortion payment. Some participants said that journalists may receive a percentage of the revenue from the advertising they attract to the paper. I heard reports at the district level of journalists approaching a business, and demanding that they advertise with the publication, or receive bad press. Recently, and infamously, an Indian juice company got substantial negative press in the national newspapers. The company alleges it was approached for advertising, which it refused, quickly resulting in a smear campaign.

Not everyone interviewed saw this as an intrinsically bad way of approaching business. And again, it cannot be separated from the wider culture. For example, the Terai area on the border with India is known for rampant smuggling. It is well-known that police can pay a lot of money to be posted there, so that they can

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155 Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.

156 Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.
earn money from taking bribes at the border.\textsuperscript{157} The media sector is not immune, and cannot be expected to act differently from the rest of society, particularly when wages are so low, or non-existent.

\textbf{International intervention}

The arrival of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), did little to help the broader media sector. This is not surprising, and is not the Mission's fault, as the media sector was not a part of UNMIN's mandate. However, its presence had unintended consequences. UNMIN recruited some of the best and brightest in Nepal's media sector. Those who were bilingual in English and Nepali, with good analytical skills, applied for positions with UNMIN. Considering the wage differential, and future potential career that this opportunity afforded, journalists cannot be blamed for applying. Nor, considering the value of the addition of these journalists to UNMIN's staff, can UNMIN be blamed for selecting them. However, this did leave a hole in the local media sector. In particular, those with excellent English may have been the ones to access and analyze UNMIN's management had they stayed in the media. Participants said that those how had left to join UNMIN, had not returned to the media sector, instead being hired by other UN or international organizations. Again, financial and career considerations may explain this.

Not only did they become key staff members, media personnel became key informants during UNMIN's stay in Nepal. When conducting field trips in the Eastern region, local journalists were among the first people we spoke to about the local context. They quickly became tired of speaking with us, however, as we were

continually extracting information, without being able to give much back to the media community. I also found this in my research, as one human rights professional said that he had only met with me because he felt obliged to. Although I believe we quickly developed a rapport based on my previous Nepal experience, it was clear that he felt beholden to share information with an international researcher, rather than enthusiastic about doing so.

Participants were unanimous that more media training is needed in Nepal, and that systematic training should have been introduced to support the peace process at its inception. The media sector, both at the Kathmandu and district level, clearly felt that the international community were not serving their interests. For the amount of money spent, participants did not seem to feel that there had been sufficient impact.\footnote{For example, interview with local NGO worker, 14 December, Kathmandu.} While training is being provided, it has so far failed to address the mind-set of many of journalists who may see media as an avenue to money and political prestige.\footnote{“...the important thing is, focus on ethics, focus on morality, and then focus on training of journalists to make them more responsible. So that good quality journalists remain, and these party cadres, party workers, they quit carrying their party flags and go back to their parties. That is the situation we have to create somehow, if we cannot do that our journalism sector will really go haywire.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.} Rather than tackling professionalism, training seems to have been issue-based, ad hoc and without adequate follow-up or demonstrated
commitment. As one participant put it "just training is not enough if they don’t use it in their work, it is useless.”

Participants seemed to feel that the international community was not connecting well with the local media sector, especially outside of Kathmandu. Little research into the Nepali media context seems to have taken place, according a local journalist:

The NGO, INGO they have to plan they have to design course and then they come here and conduct the training, but I think that should be planned by our side, and that should be for us. They did not understand the training they needed, but they come here and give the training and just went on – they didn’t matter what about the training or what was the scope of the training. They didn’t know what is the need of the local peoples, the local media people.

This may illustrate the need for development agencies to conduct due research before designing interventions, to ensure that the training devised meets the needs of the target community. Participation of the target group in project design is also paramount. Elites (English-speakers) may be consulted, rather than a more representative sample of local journalists. The same people are regularly selected for training opportunities, which one participant described as “just like watering in

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160 Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.

161 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

162 “…the training from BBC can be in the context of UK, USAID can be in the context of USA. They should catch our context, in what context we are running.” Interview with local journalist (a), 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

163 Interview with local journalist, 20 December 2010, Nepalganj.

164 Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
sand.” Having been through so many similar trainings, attendees no longer appear to listen to the instruction given, but rather come “just to see what these people say. So they’ve just been trained, it’s the attraction of the airfare or the bus fare, the per diem, the hotel and networking for which they come.” Attendees rarely pass on the knowledge gained through external training to others in their organization.

Participants also criticized international actors for competing with local production houses. The BBC World Service Trust and UNMIN itself were both criticized for creating their own programming and distributing it through local broadcasters, rather than working with local production houses to support local content production. The reason given, that local production houses did not have the capacity to make quality programming, was thought to be hollow by local practitioners, as the international bodies hired the same production staff who were employed by local houses. Some participants felt that, while these internationally-backed productions helped to train those they work with, for the money spent to produce these interventions, may more locally-employed media

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165 Interview with local human rights defender, 30 December 2010, Biratnagar.

166 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

167 Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

168 “One example UNDP produce, they hire the journalist which were involved in some local stations. And they produce their own program. Saying that you are not capable, blaming the stations, but they hired the same people from that stations, and they produced their own program.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
professionals could have benefitted. Others disagreed, arguing that international outfits brought expertise missing in the local industry.\textsuperscript{169}

One respondent, while critical of international organizations competing with the local media, wondered where the sector would be without the international community: “Sometimes I wonder if there is no international community, if there are no donors, how such a large number of radio stations, there are so many radio stations I don’t know how they survive still, it’s a wonder. More than 40 radio stations in Kathmandu, more than 300 radio stations all over the country.”\textsuperscript{170} Another similarly commented “Because if they do not pay these radio stations for broadcast, they would not survive. I do not think this is the right approach”.\textsuperscript{171} This leads to the very salient question, is the government (through subsidies) and the international community artificially propping up an unsustainable, and saturated market?

**Media and conflict resolution**

But media is giving negative messages, and media accepts, media waits for a good result. Giving negative messages, and waiting for positive result. So often I told media people, if you are delivering the bad messages, how can the society create the positive?\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{169} “...some Nepalese media might say, if you give us that kind of money, we can also do it, but I don’t think that is true. They bring with them, they have some experts, very good hands, a lot of experience, Now perhaps, some Nepalis can do...because they have learned the ropes now”. Interview with local media specialist, 4 January 2011, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{170} Interview with local media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{171} Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

\textsuperscript{172} Interview with local media specialist, 5 January 2011, Kathmandu.
FM radio has the biggest potential to reach the wider Nepali population. It can overcome obstacles such as linguistic diversity, illiteracy and harsh geographical terrain, which hampers print distribution. According to participants, radio has also been a key platform for local conflict resolution interventions, a crucial component of community level peacebuilding. Participants gave several examples of radio performing conflict resolution. However, this seems to be irregular and ad hoc. Due to a reactive process and a lack of resources, there does not appear to be a cohesive strategy behind locally generated FM-based conflict resolution or peacebuilding efforts. While radio appears to be an ideal platform for media-based

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173 An example: “There was this incident…[with]… a Bollywood film star, for comments that he allegedly made in a newspaper that was something nasty about the Nepalese, people went on a rampage, destroying…buildings and business houses owned by the Indians, so anything to do with India were vandalized…If the media had not played its card right, that would have flared up the violence like anything, but media then played a mediating role. It tried to talk the different sides of the story ‘who heard him say that’, ‘did he really do it?’ that sort of thing. And that prevented the vandalism and the outrage from spreading across. And that is when we saw, ‘oh yes, media does play an important part.’” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

“…when 12 Nepalese people were executed in Iraq…we saw gory pictures on the internet. And people went on a rampage attacking anything to do with Islam. That could have been a very, very serious issues, it could have flared up violence in Nepalganj, where there is a concentration of the Muslim community. But again, the media played such a moderating role…through moderation, through dialogue, through discussions on the table. So these were the early signs that prove that radio can play a mediating role in containing violence or explaining a situation of conflict.” Interview with Nepali media specialist, 17 December 2010, Kathmandu.

174 One Nepali media professional gave this illustration: “there was a small problem with landless people…living on land which was empty, but owned by the Hindu temple. The landless people were from the Muslim community, and that incident had the potential to be very violent. Because the local people also stated complaining, and they started fighting with each other, it was mostly a Hindu populated area and the temple also objected and some political leaders, they are very good at cashing these things up and making it a political issue, a religious issue, at the same time no one was making an effort to have a dialogue among them. So this guy, a producer, he just went there and talked with the local Muslim leader and he also brought the priest from the temple, and the local political leaders and had them in one place and started to have a dialogue. After the dialogue on a talk show, they took the dialogue forward and the settlers agreed to leave that place, and the temple agreed to initiate the process to keep for them some land a bit further away, so basically the problem was solved later on, and it started with the talk show.” Interview with Nepali media expert, 16 December 2010, Kathmandu.
peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts, this potential remains unfulfilled in Nepal thus far.

When asked how the international community could most effectively support the Nepali media sector, most respondents said that more training was needed. Peace journalism was consistently raised as an area needing more attention by local media professionals. While the term “peace journalism” was not regularly used, the elements described as requiring more attention by local media professionals fit its broad description: “They have to have a mediating role, not only reporting the news but also work for the promotion of the peace.” The need to report victims’ perspectives was also stressed by several participants, corresponding to the tenants of peace journalism: “Within the peace process, we always neglected the one major aspect…and that’s the victim. We never produce any report. If we never address the victims, there is space for revenge again.”

However, most international media experts interviewed denied that peace journalism was needed, focusing instead on the more traditional aspects of a neutral, impartial and independent media. This indicates a disconnect between what the local and international media analysts see as lacking in, or beneficial to, the Nepali media sector. An international media expert summarized by saying: “I don’t

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175 Interview with local media expert, 15 December 2010, Kathmandu.

176 Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu. Reason victims have no voice: “Because the victims, they are helpless. There is no chance to be a minister, or prime minister. They never affect the interests of these corporate houses. But here, Maoists there is the chance to go to the government. UML there is the chance to go to the government. NC there is the chance to go to the government. So these media people are not ready to make some kind of differences, to create a kind of, a little bit strong reservation, because one they go there they might get some kind of problem for their profit. So that is main relation.” Interview with local media specialist, 6 January 2011, Kathmandu.
think it is the journalists job to push for peace…it’s their job to have all the
information on the table and just kind of present it in such a way, and if it’s done
well you’ll have both sides of the report anyway.”

177 Interview with international media expert, 14 December 2010, Kathmandu.
Conclusions

Nepal’s media sector is in obvious need of attention. The problems facing the sector are vast, and interconnected.¹ Short-term, issue-specific trainings may do little to improve the media landscape. Rather, to effectively contribute to the peace process, the media needs sector-wide review.

The peace process is ongoing and needs support to regain momentum. Local media can help maintain public interest in the peace process and put corresponding pressure on political leaders. In addition to arousing public interest in this process, the voice of the general population, including minorities, must be heard and integrated into the wider peace and reconstruction dialogue. Media are uniquely positioned to perform these tasks.

According to Schirch (2006), the media can have the following roles in peacebuilding:

- Tell victims’ stories, aiding in informing the public and victim catharsis
- Mobilize public support for peace
- Catalogue a relatively objective record of the past, necessary for community healing. This can also mean establishing a record of human rights abuses
- Can create public pressure on parties to come to the negotiating table in good faith, and
- Can act as the public conscience, and help communities to maintain a culture of peace.

¹ Please see Media Sector Mapping illustration in the appendix for an overview.
Currently, according to the participants in this research, the local Nepali media fail to adequately perform any of these roles. They are not telling victims’ stories. Reporting superficially on the constant bickering of Kathmandu’s political elite does not mobilize public support for peace; it may numb people to it. By self-censoring, accepting the climate of impunity for past crimes and bowing to political pressure, the media are not objectively recording the past. While the media had a major role in the massive uprising that bought the warring parties to the negotiating table in 2006, their tendency to promote the agenda of the party holding their allegiance undermines the ability to perform that role now. Finally, by excluding traditionally marginalized and rural groups from the dialogue, the media are fundamentally unable to act as a public conscience. By superficially, or negatively, covering ethnicity-based and other movements, they are not able to maintain a culture of peace. Indeed, negative reporting combined with a lack of professionalism such as basic fact-checking, can add to a climate of violence. While some media outlets do strive to contribute to a culture of peace, by and large much needs to be done to help the Nepali media support a peaceful transition.

As described above, there are many factors impeding the professional development of Nepal’s media sector. Factors such as threats of physical violence, self-censorship, politicization, finances, prestige and most importantly, mindset, must all be addressed in order to have a healthy, professional, independent and trustworthy media. The United Nations’ Mission to Nepal was a political mission, not a peacekeeping mission. Because media appear to have a significant role in promoting peace or a return to violence in post-conflict contexts, it could be useful
for United Nations’ peace missions to engage with the media sector as part of a peacekeeping or political mission mandate. Although UN missions currently engage the media, the relationship works in a public information capacity rather than seeking to support professionalization. While public information is crucial, the latter may help to improve public support for peace processes and discourage a return to conflict.

This research has informed the following tentative recommendations for how the UN missions could engage more effectively with the local media sector. First, when a UN mission begins in a country, a thorough assessment of the media sector should be carried out: strengths, challenges, what role during the conflict, demographics of media personnel, previous trainings conducted (and impact) should all be evaluated. Any additional intervention would be context-specific, based on this preliminary evaluation. Progress could also be measured against this baseline. Asking local media professionals what they think they need is crucial.

Next, after a media assessment has been conducted, regular media monitoring for trends in coverage should take place. As there is already media monitoring for stories of interest, this step may not be too difficult to accomplish because it would require people trained in social science research methodologies: such as content analysis, surveys. While there is a great deal of literature on the relationship between media and conflict, there is little on how local media influence peace processes. A systematic analysis on the local media landscape by the mission could be invaluable. These two are basic suggestions that could easily be
incorporated into the work of the missions if they are not being systematically
performed already.

The recommendations that follow might be more ambitious, but it is useful to
begin a dialogue on how missions can more robustly engage with the development
of professional local media. First, Partnering with a local, permanent institution
(such as a major university or in the case of Nepal, the Nepal Press Council rather
than I/NGOs), the Mission could run high-level workshops on basic media skills, the
importance of investigative/social issues journalism (particularly post-conflict) and
media management skills. It is integral that key media personnel — not just
journalists but also editors, publishers and perhaps political spokespeople — be
included in these training sessions. One of the key problems with media training is
that it has focused too much on journalists who have little influence on running a
publication. Targeting decision makers would help encourage true change. This
could be replicated in the field offices with district-based media. In addition to
mainstream media development professionals, other experts could include a mix of
highly qualified locals and media professionals from other conflict-affected
countries to provide lessons learned.

Ideally, these trainings would be run regularly and followed up by monitoring of
content to assess training impact and provide feedback to participants on an
ongoing basis. Potentially, peace journalism or conflict sensitive journalism training
could be provided, but I understand that from a traditional media intervention
viewpoint that prioritizes media neutrality, this is controversial.
The idea is create pressure on media leaders to ensure that their staff report in a professional manner. Knowing content is being monitored and analyzed by the UN may also allow for a reduction in political pressure, perhaps providing protection against self-censorship and create more space for district and village level, as well as social and investigative reporting.

Support to the Ministry of Information or national media councils to develop appropriate media laws, ethics, codes of conduct and national monitoring and evaluation or media research resources could also be beneficial. For example, Biratnagar has around 35 weekly newspapers, which have poor content and are not financially viable. Yet because they are regular, they receive subsidies, which is an economic incentive to keep a paper going. Such a policy does not contribute to a vibrant, professional media landscape as intended, but could be reformed with technical support. It would also be ideal to consider curriculum development support and logistics to media training institutes or universities. A lack of practical training or quality education (including a lack of good, current media textbooks in Nepali) is a major obstacle in producing the next generation of quality journalists.

Any training projects could then be handed over to the local organization when the mission departs for sustainability, perhaps under the benign supervision of the United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the United Nations’ Development Programme (UNDP) (as a Media Development project) to provide protection against political/social pressures, for example, from Nepal returning to only high-caste male elites receiving training. Some member check participants have mentioned a role for the Office of the High Commissioner
for Human Rights (OHCHR) too, as it often provides some type of media training on Human Rights.

Finally, issue-based training does not appear to work. When journalists in the district are trained on reporting on women's issues, for example, they are paid for each article they produce on that topic. This does not change their underlying mentality. Journalists interviewed were clear that they were only writing these stories because they were paid and not because they thought these issues were fundamentally important. They also were not recognized by political elites for reporting on social issue, so the trainings did not seem to have had a lasting impact. This is why a more general professionalism intervention could be more beneficial.

However, these recommendations are based on fieldwork in only one country. Similar research must be conducted in other conflict-affected countries. Research should both explore the relationship between media and peace and examine how international agencies’ work supports positive media development. More specific policy recommendations can then be drawn from this data. Much more needs to be done in this arena.
APPENDICES

Map of Nepal
**Abridged Political timeline**

1856: Beginning of hereditary Rana prime ministers.

1951: End of Rana monopoly, King retains executive control.

1962: King installs party-less Panchayat system to complement absolute monarchy.

1980: In response to popular demonstrations, a referendum is held giving Nepalese a choice between the Panchayat system and multiparty democracy. The vote retained the Panchayat system with a majority of 54.7%.

1990: The first mass Peoples’ Movement, or Jana Andolan culminates in multiparty democracy system with a constitutional monarchy.

1996: Start of CPN-M insurgency

2001: Crown Prince shoots family in Royal massacre. King Gyanendra assumes the thrown.

2002: King dismisses government, begins to appoint a succession of Prime Ministers.

2003: State of emergency declared; armed police force and army deployed.

2005: King Gyanendra seizes direct power in a Royal coup.

2006: Second Jana Andolan; signing of Comprehensive Peace Accords between Seven Party Alliance and CPN-M

2007: United Democratic Madhesi Front formed; widespread Pahadi/Madhesi; CPN-M/Madhesi clashes.

2007, March: Gaur Massacre. 27 Maoists killed in clashed with MPRF (Madhesi militants) when the groups had organized events on the same day in the village of Gaur.

2008, April: Nation-wide Constituent Assembly elections

2008, August 18: Maoist leader Prachanda sworn in as Nepal’s Prime Minister

2009, May: Prachanda resigns under party pressure.

2011, February: Jhalanath Khanal of the UML party appointed new Prime Minister.
Interview Guide developed before arriving in Nepal

Interview Guide

For journalists:

1. What publication do you belong to? How long have you been working for them? Where you a working journalist during the CPN-M conflict?

2. Can you tell me about the environment for local journalists in the CPN-M conflict?

3. Can you tell me about the environment for local journalists during the Madhesi conflict?

4. Can you describe any obstacles they may have faced during these conflicts? E.g. What was local media's access to the conflict? (media severely threatened during the conflict)

5. Can you describe to me how the local media may have contributed to calming the situation?

6. Can you describe to me how the local media may have contributed to the continuation of the conflict?

7. How is the current political environment for journalists? Are they able to operate freely?

8. What is peace?

9. What is peacebuilding?

10. Ideally, what role do you think the media should play in peace-building? E.g. Should they advocate a perspective (peace journalism), or remain strictly neutral?

11. How can the UN, I/NGOs, or Nepali government support media’s role in peacebuilding? E.g. media training

For other participants (e.g. officials, NGO workers etc):

1. What organization do you work for? How long have you been working in this sector? In Nepal?
2. Can you tell me about the environment for local journalists in the CPN-M conflict?

3. Can you tell me about the environment for local journalists during the Madhesi conflict?

4. Can you describe any obstacles they may have faced? E.g. What was local media’s access to the conflict? (media severely threatened during the conflict)

5. Can you describe to me how the local media may have contributed to calming the situation?

6. Can you describe to me how the local media may have contributed to the continuation of the conflict?

7. How is the current political environment for journalists: are they able to operate freely?

8. What is peace?

9. What is peacebuilding?

10. Ideally, what role do you think the media should play in peace-building? E.g. Should they advocate a perspective (peace journalism), or remain strictly neutral?

11. How can the UN, I/NGOs, or Nepali government support media’s role in peacebuilding? E.g. media training
Interview Guide developed after arriving in Nepal

Can you tell me about the situation for journalists during the Maoist insurgency?

Can you tell me about the situation now? (how has it changed?)

What are the main challenges?

Can you tell me about the influence of politics on the media?

Can you tell me about media finances?

How does the media explain the peace process to people at the village level?

How do village or district level stories feature in the national media?

How are social issues covered?

How are minority issues covered?

Ideally, what is the role of the local media in peacebuilding?

What role do you see for the international community?
Table 4: Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Position Type</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Caste/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<td><strong>Kathmandu</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 14 December 2010</td>
<td>NGO worker</td>
<td>Radio &amp; TV</td>
<td>Janajati</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 14 December 2010</td>
<td>International media expert</td>
<td>Radio &amp; TV</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 14 December 2010</td>
<td>Local journalist</td>
<td>Radio &amp; TV</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 15 December 2010</td>
<td>Local media expert</td>
<td>Radio</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 16 December 2010</td>
<td>Local media expert</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 16 December 2010</td>
<td>Local Political Analyst</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 17 December 2010</td>
<td>Local Editor</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 17 December 2010</td>
<td>Local media expert</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 17 December 2010</td>
<td>International journalist</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nepalganj</strong></td>
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<td>10 19 December 2010</td>
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<td>Print</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 19 December 2010</td>
<td>Local journalist (a)</td>
<td>Print</td>
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<td>12 19 December 2010</td>
<td>Local human rights defender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>13 20 December 2010</td>
<td>Local human rights defender</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Local journalist</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Print</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21 December 2010</td>
<td>Local journalist</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>21 December 2010</td>
<td>local editor/publisher</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Janajati (but from very advantaged group normally classed with Brahmin/Chhetri)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Biratnagar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<td>Print</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Women’s radio staff</td>
<td>Radio</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Madhesi - Brahmin &amp; Radio</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Human Rights defender</td>
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<td>Brahmin</td>
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<td>Print</td>
<td>Brahmin (but active in Dalit community)</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Position Type</td>
<td>Caste/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 January 2010</td>
<td>Media expert/editor</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>6 January 2010</td>
<td>Human Rights Defender</td>
<td>International</td>
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<td>6 January 2010</td>
<td>Political Analyst</td>
<td>International</td>
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<td>Local media specialist</td>
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<td>Local media specialist</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
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<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9 January 2010</td>
<td>Local media specialist (a)</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Journalists unpaid/paid little

Can't pay to go to villages to cover stories

Elites produce free content to raise profile

Influence of business

Little official training/qualifications

I/NGO training

I/NGO pay for content

Only rich can work for free/little

District issues/ppl ignored

Lack of social reports

Politics central story

Prevalence of political affiliation

Political ties = impunity

KTM centric

Self-censorship

Threats/violence against media

High turnover

No specialization

Business leaders buy media to control public image

Prestige main motivation for entering media – stepping stone.

Only rich can work for free/little

Exclusion of minority journalists

Influence of business

High turnover

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Influence of business

No specialization

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