



## Office of Transition Initiatives

# NEPAL



### OTI MISSION STATEMENT

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

### FAST FACTS

Start Date: August 2006  
Budget: \$6.35 million (FY09)

### USAID/OTI

<http://www.usaid.gov> –  
Keyword: OTI

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In August 2006, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a program to help advance Nepal's transition to peace and democracy. In close coordination with other USAID programs, OTI sought to positively support the political situation as it evolved. The program will be handed over to the USAID/Nepal Democracy and Governance team on October 1, 2009, and will continue until August 2011, pending the availability of additional funds.

### ACTIVITIES

The OTI program supports efforts to promote long-term sustainability of peace and democracy in Nepal through local-level dialogues and wide-reaching, popular radio and TV programs targeting different groups within Nepali society.

Since its inception, OTI has worked with Nepalese partners to support the ongoing peace process by (1) increasing access to information and diversifying public debate on issues critical to political transition and (2) increasing local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.

Following the Constituent Assembly (CA) election on April 10, 2008, the OTI program widened its focus to address community stabilization activities. In response to a drastic rise of identity-based politics, as well as increasing lawlessness in the volatile eastern and central Terai districts, the program began looking at ways to enhance better understanding among different ethnic groups and initiate local- and national-level dialogue on a new constitution.

OTI replicated and expanded several successful activities, including popular TV shows and public service announcements (PSAs) on transitional issues, radio discussion shows linking local residents to their elected representatives, and promoting good local governance through Citizen Charters. Many of OTI's local-level activities also aimed to provide youth with the tools and opportunities to participate actively in efforts to promote peace, good governance, and local development.

OTI-supported radio programs on the constitution-drafting process have become increasingly popular among listeners, as the programs link citizens to their CA representatives and provide a platform where they can raise concerns on local issues. These radio programs, many of them broadcast in regional languages, provide a unique opportunity for remote communities to participate in Nepal's fragile transition processes.

## COUNTRY SITUATION

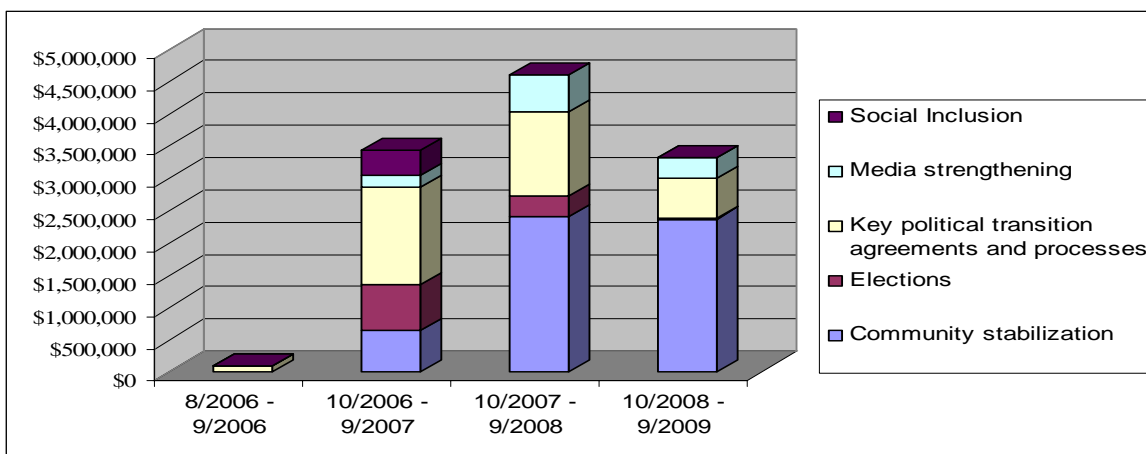
**Political Wrangling Overshadows Constitution-Writing Process** – The formation of a new government, as well as differences among the major political parties, has slowed the constitution-writing schedule. The government led by the United Communist Party of Nepal–Maoists collapsed after eight months, following the resignation of the Prime Minister on May 4, 2009. The fall was prompted by the government’s unilateral decision to sack the Chief of Army Staff (CoAS), a move that was criticized the President. With the support of 22 of 25 political parties in the CA, a new coalition government led by the Communist Party of Nepal/Unified Marxist Leninist was formed during May 2009, leaving the Maoists, the biggest party in the CA, out of power. Owing to the lack of trust among the major political parties, a number of CA committees have yet to submit their preliminary drafts of the constitution, which were due in July. To date, only six committees have submitted their draft recommendations for discussion at the CA. Lack of cooperation among the major political parties is expected to cause further delay in the constitution-writing process. According to the CA’s schedule, the first draft should be released for public comment by January 2010. The potential for unrest and violence during this period is high, as groups throughout the country are preparing to agitate if the draft constitution fails to address their demands.

**Maoist Lawmakers Obstruct Legislative Parliament** – With their party out of power, Maoists CA members have been obstructing the regular meetings of the Legislative Parliament for most of the past five months. The Maoists’ intransigence has prevented the government from passing an annual budget. Maoist lawmakers in parliament have proposed a resolution motion against the President, which the ruling government parties have, so far, beaten back. In addition, claiming the President’s move to reinstate the CoAS to be undemocratic and unconstitutional, Maoists cadres have initiated protest programs in various parts of the country. An increasing number of the Maoists’ disruptive activities have focused on the public activities of ministers, including the Prime Minister. Furthermore, these disruptions are becoming more violent.

**Rise in Identity-Based Politics** – Over the past few months, a number of ethnic and indigenous communities have initiated protest programs to demand constitutional language recognizing their cultural identities and guaranteeing representation in the state mechanism. In addition, many groups organized along ethnic lines, especially groups in the eastern hill and western Terai districts, are viewing the International Labour Organization’s convention on rights of indigenous peoples as a tool they can use to aggressively put forward their demands. In response, the government has made various agreements with agitating ethnic communities, providing assurances on preserving identity and, in some cases, autonomy. However, the lack of implementation of such agreements could stir ethnic tensions in coming months, especially when the draft of the new constitution is released.

## GRANTS SUMMARY

During FY09, OTI funded 125 grants totaling \$3,316,990. Ninety-three of the grants focused on community stabilization, 19 focused on key political transition agreements and processes, 3 on elections, and 10 on media strengthening. Since August 2006, OTI, through its implementing partner Chemonics International, has funded a total of 333 small-grant and technical assistance activities worth \$11,424,908. Funding committed to each sector breaks down by percentage as follows: social inclusion, 3%; elections, 9%; key political transition agreements and processes, 30%; community stabilization, 49%; and media strengthening, 9%.



## HIGHLIGHTS

**Linking CA Members and Constituents through Radio** – OTI provided extensive support to 36 FM radio stations throughout the country, assisting them with efforts to produce and air live radio talk shows that connected CA representatives and local government officials to their constituents. The program supplied many of these stations with equipment that enabled them to conduct local discussion forums with live connections to concerned decision makers, including CA representatives and chiefs of district government offices. These programs allowed rural communities to provide feedback on constitutional topics to the CA members and also provided a forum for the CA members to deliver messages to their constituents. In many areas, these dialogues provided the only platform where an ordinary citizen could have direct access to these officials. During the programs, officials were able to clarify misunderstandings about various state processes, such as land registration. In addition, officials were able to hear points of view that they may not have otherwise heard. The forums significantly enhanced local dialogue, as officials recognized that citizens were watching and citizens saw that officials would listen.



A CA member responds to questions from residents of Makwanpur during a live radio program.

OTI/Nepal

**Reaching Out via National Media** – Consistent with OTI's programming methodology, media was used during the year to amplify messages and disseminate information broadly. Media-focused activities included "Mero Jindagi, Mero Biswas" (MJMB), a Nepali adaptation of National Public Radio's "This I Believe" program. The MJMB campaign engaged 26 Nepalese to discuss and write about the core values and beliefs that guide their daily lives. The essays and testimonies aired on a national TV network, as well as on radio stations throughout the country, and were published in a national newspaper. Since most of the featured individuals were not nationally known and had limited access to media, the campaign had a secondary effect: it publicized their work. And the ensuing recognition has given many of the essayists additional encouragement to carry on with their efforts. Pushpa Basnet, one of the women featured by MJMB, has received financial commitments from viewers to support her effort to establish a home for children whose parents are in prison. Another segment, highlighting the story of Chameli Waiba, a woman from a rural village, was aired on National Public Radio in the United States in February 2009. Following the campaign, Ms. Waiba proudly remarked that her village has been called Chameli Waiba's village.

**Mobilizing Youth for Small-Scale Development Activities** – Youth remain forceful actors in the transition process, particularly at the local level, and OTI has devoted significant resources to activities targeting young people. The program supported local nongovernmental partners with efforts to establish Youth Mobilization Committees (YMCs) in hundreds of villages across 11 eastern and central Terai districts, areas where youth are recruited by armed groups. Through the YMCs, which were inclusive of women and participants from historically marginalized groups, youth consulted with community leaders to identify small-scale development projects. Then, using an in-kind mechanism and a small grant (less than \$400), the YMCs worked with their communities to implement priority projects. Commonly known as community development funds (CDFs), these activities engaged more than 120,000 young people in productive community improvement projects during an 8-month period. Projects included reconstruction of community libraries and early childhood development centers as well as rehabilitation of roads, health posts, and schools, and community-generated funding nearly matched the CDF grant funding provided by OTI.



The YMC in Durgapur worked with the community to repair a village road.

OTI/Nepal

The YMCs not only garnered community confidence, some went on to manage community projects without OTI assistance. In addition, a number of the groups have lobbied local officials to secure government funding for larger development projects. In one case, residents and local government officials in a village in Siraha District were so pleased with the YMC's work that they have allowed the YMC to manage many of the community's small government-funded development projects.

## PROGRAM APPRAISAL

Overall, the program had a robust year with grant activities progressing at a solid pace. The program adapted smoothly to the long-planned staffing transition of the Senior Management Team and to the new management of the USAID/Nepal Democracy and Governance team. In August, OTI held a strategic review session to reassess the political situation and evaluate future areas of focus for the project, paying particular attention to the growing trend of identity politics apparent in various parts of the country.

As the focus of the program has become more local in nature—with respect to both context and operational partners—OTI worked with several organizations that had a wide reach and network at the community level. These alliances made it possible for the program to operate effectively, particularly in the eastern and central Terai, despite the worsening law and order situation.

In accord with its media strategy, OTI consistently encouraged information dissemination networks that displayed flexibility and innovation in response to the ongoing transition process. The program supported radio and TV outlets with efforts to address current transitional issues through programming, including call-in radio shows in local languages and TV and radio programs at the national level that used humor to educate the public about the political transition, democratic norms and values, and constitutional issues. Similarly, OTI continuously supported the efforts of local FM stations to reach media-poor areas.

Various activities, such as disseminating messages of peace and communal harmony to large crowds at International Youth Day events, highlight OTI's ability to quickly recognize and capitalize on opportunities. OTI responded quickly to mark World Press Freedom Day by supporting the production and broadcast of radio, TV, and print PSAs on the importance of a free press, free expression, and the role of responsible media. Similarly, seeing an opportunity to disseminate crucial information on the peace process, OTI established a Peace Stall that was visited by more than 8,000 people during a 10-day religious fair in Rautahat District. OTI also stepped in to provide initial support to establish the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue, a multi-functional CA resource center. The USAID/OTI team was able to procure and install all the requested equipment, allowing the CA chairman to inaugurate the Centre within a week of grant clearance.

## NEXT STEPS

Priorities for the next quarter include the following:

- OTI will hand over the program to USAID/Nepal's Democracy and Governance office on October 1. (OTI will complete the hand-over process in October and will remain available to the office, as needed, in an advisory capacity.)
- The Nepal Transition Initiative program will continue to assess emerging "hot spots" for new programming on social harmony, nonviolence, and community cohesiveness.
- The program will monitor the progress of the constitution-drafting process and design activities that will inform and educate Nepali citizens in the lead up to the second round of public opinion collection.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Jennifer Boggs-Serfass  
Asia/Middle East Deputy Team  
Leader  
Tel: (202) 712-1004  
E-mail: [jboggs@usaid.gov](mailto:jboggs@usaid.gov)