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SUCCESS STORY

Radio Connects Citizens to the Constitution-Writing Process



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Radio Palung's new tower, which was installed with assistance from OTI, allows the station to be heard throughout Makwanpur and in neighboring districts.



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A member of Nepal's Constituent Assembly speaks with locals in Daman VDC during a Radio Palung program that connects residents with their representatives.

May 2009 – Nepal's energetic media sector has been both a protagonist and catalyst in the country's ongoing political transition. And since the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in April 2008, media organizations have become even more important to the process, taking on a crucial role in bridging the gap between CA members and the public.

To help promote two-way communication, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided hardware and human resources to Radio Palung, which is located in the Makwanpur district, south of Kathmandu. The initial grant paid for the installation of a new broadcast tower, giving the station the ability to reach 95 percent of the district, as well as parts of adjoining districts, and establishing it as a prominent broadcaster in the region.

This grant was followed by a series of grants to help build the station's capacity to undertake programming that improves citizen access to information and addresses locally relevant issues, including a weekly talk program that allows district residents to discuss constitutional topics with their CA representatives.

To date, the station has invited 15 CA members to address citizen concerns on its program, and the show is helping make representatives accountable to the constituencies they serve. For example, the show brought a CA member to a discussion in a Village Development Committee (VDC) in the jurisdiction where he was elected. Residents were understandably excited to see their representative, whom they had not seen since the election. More importantly, they had an opportunity to directly question him on the critical issue of federalism. The station later broadcast his responses throughout the district.

In another VDC, Radio Palung conducted a program that focused on the citizen's role in providing feedback to the drafters of the new constitution. Three days later, when CA representatives visited the VDC to solicit feedback on the constitution-writing process, they were overwhelmed when more than 3,000 people showed up. The turnout was the highest in the district, and residents credited the station with encouraging them to participate.

Seeing the success that Radio Palung is having with its show, a station in neighboring Sarlahi district is seeking to produce a similar program.