

A Workshop on

Role of Media in Nation Building

Kathmandu, Nepal

24 December 2014

Report

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)

Sanchargram, Kathmandu

1. An overview

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNU) organized and conducted a workshop on Role of Media in Nation Building on 24 December 2014 in Kathmandu. The workshop was organized aiming at generating opinions for early completion of Constitution making process to ensure foundation for nation building process under an inclusive democracy framework and to assert the direction that media should take in the course.

More than 80 people representing different walks of national life (list of participants is attached as annex 1) attended and participated in the discourses held in three sessions: Inaugural, vision sharing and envisioning (schedule of programme is attached as annex 2). Right honourable Subas Nembang, Chairperson of Constituent Assembly inaugurated the programme with sharing his views on role of media in building of nation and to address the transition.

Former Prime Ministers Right Honourable Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal and Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, and Former Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Krishna Prasad Sitaula shared their views on the progress and the barriers in process of Constitution making and possibilities of the way forward for nation building and role of media.

Final session was a working session on envisioning the role of media in nation building process. Mr. Chandra D. Bhatta from FES, Senior Journalist Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire and FNU President Dr. Mahendra Bista presented their visionary presentations on role of media in nation building. Various prominent commentators intervened the session by placing comments and suggestions on the presentations. Mr. Kashiraj Dahal, a jurist of constitutional law, moderated the working session and the session concluded with following major observation:

- Constitution making is a pivotal to provide a clear socio-political foundation and framework for nation building and new constitution should be in place at earliest representing the common spirits of all Nepali people at large.
- Delay in constitution making is pushed by the factors such as declines of morality and trusts among the actors, therefore, a culture of integrity is essentially built for nation building process.
- Constitution is to promulgated without delay in accordance with the commitments made by the political parties and the leaders in front of the people during and following Constituent Assembly's second election.
- Constitution should come representing the protection of the rights of the diversity of Nepali society and should be human rights friendly with full consideration to the rights of the women, ethnic and cultural groups and other deprived sectors guaranteeing inclusive democracy and justice within national integrity.
- Constitution should be media-friendly that media plays their role in nation building more constructively.

- Media should not focus only on the political agendas in their deliberations; they have to generate opinions in various issues of development and social justice that contributes to nation building.
- Media and the journalists should not be aligned to leaders and parties that they entertain their professional autonomy as fourth state.

2. Workshop Proceeding

2.1 Inaugural Session

Inaugural Session was chaired by the FNJ President Dr. Mahendra Bista and Mr. Ujir Magar, ... of FNJ had taken role of the Master of Ceremony. Ms. Anita Bindu, Vice President of FNJ, welcomed the chief guest, distinguished guests and participants. On behalf of FNJ she expressed thankfulness to them for offering their valuable time to the programme. She said that FNJ organized the programme as it considered that there is great role to be played by media and media persons. Accountability, empowerment and rule of law are pre-requisite for nation building and freedom of expression is an unavoidable element of rule of law. Constitution is a cornerstone for rule of law and democracy and due to delay in constitution making, role of media in nation building is not fully employed. These factors induced the federation to organize such workshop – she made clear. She appreciated the time contribution of the participants and welcomed to the programme.

Chief Guest Right Honourable Subas Nembang inaugurated the workshop by lighting a lamp as a symbol of peace and a good start. Mr. Born Bahadur Karki, Chairperson of Nepal Press Council, was then invited to express his few words regarding the workshop.

Mr. Karki, thanking for the time given to speak, expressed his views on role of media in nation building. He said that the role played by media in important events, particularly the political ones, for bringing change is unforgettable. There is no doubt that media should give importance on the main agenda of country. He said that the delayed constitution making process and the prolonged transition may lead the nation to complex problems. This may mislay the achievements. Therefore, it is essential to put pressure to the political actors to bring Constitution timely. The role played by the media in this direction is appreciable. He appreciated the organizer for a timely programme.

Giving an inaugural speech, Rt. Hon. Subas Nembang thanked the organizers for organizing such workshop on important topic that addresses a part of national agenda. He said in the present time playing role for making Constitution is the role of media in nation building. History of the important campaigns and movement would be incomplete if we exclude the role played by the media in terms of such campaigns or movement – he stressed. He assured his support and solidarity for press-friendly Constitution.

Asking a question where the problem is and where the pressure should reach? Mr. Nembang said that as there is difference between and among the leaders, the media should play role in a way that the leaders begin to rethink for co-working for good results. He remembered that the election of the Constituent Assembly was made possible by the same leaders in past by keeping the combatants in a cantonments as an example of cooperative culture among the leaders. He said that without having

agreement among political parties, the problem would not be resolved by the Constituent Assembly as the Assembly is also represented by same political forces. In the assembly there are three opinions that the process is to be sent to a Dialogue Committee, to be resolved in the House of the Assembly and to take to the referendum.

He said that the difference of their opinions on the number of the province, the judiciary and the state restructure are not much serious and they can resolve them within two hours if they wish to do so. He argued that the issues are to be resolved by the leaders in given time, the timeframe was committed by themselves before the people. To declare the Constitution in said time he said, there is also need of agreement between the parties because to shorten the process the provisions of the rules are to be suspended by consensus in the house.

Mr. Nembang asked the media and media persons to pressurise the political parties and leaders for building consensus first. There is no alternative to consensus for either content or the process of the adopting the Constitution – he stressed. He said that in his vision this agenda is the first agenda in the role of media in nation building as Constitution is the foundation for any roles.

2.2 Nation Building: Political Transition and Constitution Making

Second session was a session of the lectures from the representatives of major Political Parties. In this session Former Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Krishna Prasad Sitaula, Former Prime Minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai and Former Prime Minister Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal had expressed their views on the agenda of nation building, current political transition and Constitution making. They had expressed their view representing their political parties Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal Unified Maoist, and Communist Party of Nepal United Marxist Leninist.

Welcoming to the programme Dr. Mahendra Bista memorised these panellists that they had worded with the people that they would give Constitution by two years, it had been more than six years people are awaiting, however, there is still not certainty of new Constitution. He asked the leaders to bring the Constitution as promised as it is the departure point for a nation building onward.

MC Ujir Magar pointed out that the media have never attempted to create barriers on the agenda that the political parties have made as common ones. Media do not forget the agreements that the political parties have agreed and continues watching further and the organizers expect responses to the cautions raised.

Krishna Prasad Sitaula

As 22 January 2015 is close, the Constitution may not be adopted following the rules of procedures and the plan of action. If Constitution is to be adopted timely, rules of procedures and plan of action are to be modified. A fast track may be applied. There are differences among the parties regarding the content of the Constitution and mainly they are: Legislature, Executive, Judiciary and Federalism. We have 12 point agreement for sustainable peace, institutionalization of democracy, stability and progress. We could not achieve stability in these couple of years and the failures of the past are our common failures. It was our common resolution to adopt Constitution within one year and it seems we are not in position to do so.

It is natural that the federal structures would be debated as it is new departure in Nepal. The question on Judiciary is also natural. We remained longing in the numbers of the provinces. There are various interests and they could not be properly coordinated. The popular mandate given in the second election also brought difference in the composition of Constituent Assembly. However, the direction of the task has not be changed and there is need of agreement between the spirits and the says of 12 Point Understanding, Comprehensive Peace Accord, provisions of Interim Constitution and the new popular mandate. If we could not agree on contents we have to place them in right place and proceed further with the agreed procedures. Let us adapt to the extent we agree and let way for those through process to which we cannot agree at this time. We can make exit in new Constitution to resolve some disputes that we could not conclude now. I think to maintain our moral obligation to the people we have to adopt the Constitution by 22 January.

Dr. Baburam Bhattarai

Remembering the scene of the 12 point Memorandum in 2006 in Delhi and the furthered dialogues and negotiations of the parliamentary parties and then combating force, Former Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Dr. Bhattarai recalled that Mr. Madhav Nepal, Mr. Krishna Sitaula and Mr. Bhattarai himself are present as the witness of those processes. He cleared the audience that he would speak in the capacity of party's leader not as the Chairperson of the Dialogue Committee of Constituent Assembly.

He recalled the pitfalls of Nepali political movements furthered since 1950s. According to him, present political forces have been fighting against the Monarchy that failed to provide prosperity to the people. There are two tilts in the political movement, i.e., capitalists and socialist and present Constituent Assembly is also represented by these two drawing forces. However, he agreed that these two are the forces for nation building. For nation building the Constitution as the principle recognized law and political document is essential. He made it clear that the negotiation among the major political parties is essential and the agreement should ensure institutionalization of the achievements that are attained by 12 point Understanding, Comprehensive Peace Accord, Interim Constitution and the Agreements done with the newly regional and ethnic forces. Even the mandate of the second election has changed the composition of the Constituent Assembly, solution is on the consensus and agreement between the political forces with due consideration to the previously agreed agenda and the fresh mandate.

For consensus, the role of leadership is significant and the changes in the leaderships of political parties and forces have also affected in reaching common points. As state restructuring, federalism and justice were core agenda of the previous armed conflict, the seriousness in seeking resolutions in these regard are essential. Media should contribute in fastening the problems by encouraging the political parties to resolve the differences by balancing the liberal and social justice aspects within inclusive model of democracy. CPN United Maoist is not in position to go back from the Interim Constitution and we can reach to an agreement around the points consented on 16 May 2013. I urge FNU and all journalists to push for consensus proactively.

Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal

Former Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Madhav Kumar Nepal applauded the organizers for organizing discussion on very timely subject matter. He argued that present problem rests in the mutual trusts

among the forces present in Constituent Assembly in a name of two third majorities and representation of specific interest groups. He made clear that he and his party is not in favour of ethnic provinces and he and his party has no problem with negotiating for multicultural federal, provincial and local structures. In a country of diversity, federalism is to be adopted with considerations to the geography, access of infrastructures, development potentials, language, culture and existed diversity of the people. Ethnicity and religion should be respected sincerely.

Giving an example of the situation of USA in terms of separation proposal of Texas, he said that national unification may not be possible by distributing sweets and any proposal in any names for separation are not only unacceptable but also objectionable. Vulnerability of Nepal in geo-political aspect is to be given consideration. Political forces should think for going together not for holding together. Considerations are essential to promote development, good governance and equitable inclusion and these all should for preparing a competitive environment.

If we believe people, trust on election is to be firm as it examines everything in democracy. Government should be structured in a model as people accept. We have no big difference on judiciary but the electoral system that we introduced as proportional model brought problems and it is essential to think on how our system addresses representation of marginal minorities. Placements of women and Dalits are more serious than other ethnic participation. Circumstances are a basic factor for proportional representation.

Balance of powers is to be given due consideration for seeking negotiation. CPN UML in 1991 negotiated for then Constitution taking in to account of then power composition and agreed the Constitution keeping own different opinion. In current Constitution making process that sort of approach may be essential for the political forces saving identity, history and rights. People are hurried for acute economic development and social justice, therefore, state structure should be agreed to accelerate these. He asked with all concerned political forces for adoption of Constitution on 22 January 2015 being mindful of the present power balance keeping geographical unity constantly intact.

2.3 Media Session: Role of Media in Nation Building

Third session of the programme was chaired by Mr. Borna Bahadur Karki and moderated by Mr. Kashiraj Dahal where Senior Journalist Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire and FNU President Dr. Mahendra Bista presented papers. The session was commenced with objective sharing by Chandra D. Bhatta. Presentations were followed by commentary interventions by representatives of various media organizations and participants and finally, the floor had agreed on the summary presented by the moderator as the conclusion of the programme.

2.3.1 Presentations

Mr. Chandra D. Bhatta (FES)

Nation building and democracy is also a product of cultures of inhabitation. Endeavour for nation building and modelling democracy is to be cultural relative as well. May be the explanations made by West such as social contract, Marxism and Darwinism do not exactly fits with our cultural backdrops. Therefore,

nation building is to be explained within the analogy of cultural evolution of specific country. Our challenges are development and flourishing of languages and culture.

What are universal standards of state-ship and what is the weight for local values? The problem is on the determining the balance between these two. As nation building and state building are two separate ideas, Nepal, particularly the politics, is lagging behind the discussion of state building and agenda of nation building is left within the shadow of political negotiations.

For us, Constitution making is a fresh social contract and that should take into account the envisioning of nation building. FES and FNJ are engaged now to further the discussion of such envisioning essential for acceleration of national discourse on democracy and development from this perspective. We hope for a fruitful presentation and discussion in this direction.

Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire

Presenting the highlights of his paper, Mr. Ghimire said that nation building is an output of a continuous process of political changes. In post conflict society, an acute change is desired for nation building. In the view of nation building, state is only a legal and political construct but there are other constructs such as physical constructs and cultural construct. Cultural construct is very important as it is pivotal for a sense of belongingness. Equality among the citizens is an essential element to realize sense of nationality.

The challenge that we are facing in present is transforming marginalized nationalities into the united citizenship and addressing the demands of the citizens by state and enforcing them from the court if needed. We have to be careful to the unnecessary extended transition which is also a great challenge even for institutionalizing the changes that we brought.

Mr. Ghimire clearly argued that the role of media, either in nation building or state restructure, is to present critical views. In the time of armed conflict Nepali media had presented a common critical view that the solution do not rest in weapons and denounced military solutions. He asked whether the media should take a dominant role of activist for causing promulgation of Constitution and disfavoured this idea as his personal subscription on role of media is only on presenting critical and constructive views from own space as fourth estate.

He suggested the media to review and introspect own failures and weaknesses as the activism of media led even against the notion of Constitutionalism. He pointed out further that Constitution should come from the participation and spirit of people otherwise early adoption would be meaningless. Bringing Constitution by suspending established plan of action curtails the participation of the people and ignores the opportunity to put forward their sayings in the drafts. Therefore, he cautioned on the accident potential on the fast track of Constitution making (paper is attached as annex 3).

Dr. Mahendra Bista

Accepting the idea of nation building as process of making people empowered citizens presented by Mr. Ghimire, Dr. Bista agreed that there is a question for media that how to further whether as only

professional or as activist as well. He said that as continuity of past campaign for democracy as frontline sect of civil society, FNU and media as a whole has role in putting civil pressure.

Local values are to be given due consideration otherwise it may lead to destructions instead of nation building and the main challenge is to convert transition into stability. He said that there is no doubt and debate that media is to continuously effort for informing people, promoting public opinion building and facilitating with critical views; however, there is also need of active role to play as interest group and civil pressure group to bring press and people friendly Constitution.

He raised a question, if we take a decade for making a Constitution, when we start building the state. Extension of transition brings frustrations and lead to dissolution, therefore, at this point the Constitution making has been the major agenda of nation building.

Presenting an assessment that persons belonging to institutions are being more powerful in recent years and institutions are being weakened which is serious threat for democracy and nation building. Therefore, he argued that pressure is to be given through critical views on contents saving potential accident.

He presented that nation building is a broader movement that includes state building, development, and empowerment of citizens, reconstruction and peace building. Media should give importance to these all with full consideration to their priority in time. Presently, media has to conduct campaigns for making peace process complete, institutionalization of agenda of change, making nation strong, preserving Nepali originality and making such a Constitution that ensure these all. As the time given by the political parties for adopting Constitution is coming closer, pressure from media is essential for pro-people content, acceptability, agenda of nation building with state restructure (paper is attached as annex 4).

2.3.1 Interventions of the Participants

Commenting on the presentations **Mr. Rajendra Aryal (President of Press Chautari)** thanked the organizer for opening an environment for furthering dialogue among the political actors as there was deadlock appeared. Political stability is the basis for nation building and media should focus on its role for bringing political stability. He appreciated the presentations for making clear about the role of media for dialogue. He asked to **Mr. Ghimire**, if he had opined participation of people refers to referendum. He said that media should call for complete Constitution.

Mr. Badri Sigdel (President of Nepal Press Union) thanked the organizer for alerting the leaders for timely work on Constitution. He said that the programme has importance on drawing attention in a time where people are very suspicious about the words of the leaders.

Mr. Bishnu Sapkota (Revolutionary Journalist Association) said that media may not be separated from society and may not remain undivided and represent the classes. In present situation the question of what sort of Constitution, for what and in whose favour is important than the question of early Constitution. In the name of adopting Constitution on 22nd January, status quo should not be maintained underestimating the agenda of revolutionary forces outside the Constituent Assembly and forerunning agenda are to be incorporated.

Mr. J B Bishwakarma pointed out that there is need of reviewing the present priorities and public opinion may not be formulated by excluding some groups. Media should inform and educate in general that how nation building would be possible. Media has to highlight the contents of disputed issues.

Ms Manju Thapa commented that the media at present is not presenting issues for public opinion and agenda balancing the gender concerns. Presenting a recent finding she said that there is presence of only one percent in public opinion building from women population. Ensuring promotion of women participation in all spheres is to be one of the crucial agenda for upcoming Constitution.

Mr. Poshan KC commented that Constitution making is the principal agenda for nation building at present, therefore, a regular campaign is to be launched by media for timely adoption of Constitution. Weakened state mechanism leads to a weakened media; therefore, media should pressure the leaders for enabling state institutions.

Mr. Shiva Gaunle raised a question whether media should take decision itself? What is and what is to be? A simple answer is changes of feudal structures. Media should raise the question, criticise the issues in favour of public at large and to make the position holders accountable as contributing to nation building.

Mr. Suresh Acharya stressed on the need of giving importance on Constitution writing in term of nation building in present time. Speaker said within two hours, negotiation could be reached but the leaders have pointed out there are three subjects where difference is prevalent. It is clear that Constitution could not be adopted on 22nd January but media should not worried as this commitment is not a legal rather moral and failure of this moral commitment of the leaders will disclose the dishonesty of the leaders. Media also failed to cause discussion on the contents of the disputed issues of the Constitution. The role of speaker is also questioned; now, we need a Constitution that lead us for nation building.

Mr. Arun Baral argued that there is need to improve media itself. Therefore let us review our past deeds that what we did last one year for the content of Constitution? We could not contribute enough to build opinions. Interactions between the relevant columnists and beat reporters did not happen properly. Media itself is problematic and internal problems are to be addressed and resolved first lets purify ourselves.

Ms. Yasodha Timilsena asked what sort of Constitution about? Are we wishing Constitution wearing a cape and with moustaches? Media should not raise issues for own but for others who are deprived. Media is event oriented and it should give up this approach if wish to contribute in nation building.

Ms. Pratima Bibas Rai charged Nepali media divided into the political ideology rather standing professionally. If media invests its effort undivided for Constitution, there is possibility of good results in Constitution making process.

Mr. Raju Lama expressed his poor belief on adoption of the Constitution timely. He criticised the title of the programme as many people spent time on Constitution rather nation building. If Constitution is brought giving powers and rights to the people suppressed for years that would open doors for nation building.

Mr. Deependra Kunwar alleged media on the failure of the assessing the demands of dissenting parties in the past and ignoring at present as well. If Constitution is for nation building consideration must be given to the demands of the powers which are outside Constituent Assembly.

2.3.3 Drawing Conclusions

Following the participants interventions, moderator allowed two presenters to respond the issues raised by the participants in their respective presentations. **Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire** responding the issues raised in his presentation made cleared that he would not argue for referendum for each of contents but by shortening the process for adopting, the people might be ignored to see the draft and comment on it. He said that he is also in favour of media campaign in the interest of broader public interest but he denied acting as wing or cadre of political parties.

Dr. Mahendra Bista responded that FNU would launch programmes not in regular basis but that does not necessarily mean daily street demonstration. Media should oppose in constructive way he added.

Following these responses, **Mr. Kashiraj Dahal**, session moderator, presented his moderation observation summary as follows:

- Constitution making is a pivotal to provide a clear socio-political foundation and framework for nation building and new constitution should be in place at earliest representing the common spirits of all Nepali people at large.
- Delay in constitution making is pushed by the factors such as declines of morality and trusts among the actors, therefore, a culture of integrity is essentially built for nation building process.
- Constitution is to promulgated without delay in accordance with the commitments made by the political parties and the leaders in front of the people during and following Constituent Assembly's second election.
- Constitution should come representing the protection of the rights of the diversity of Nepali society and should be human rights friendly with full consideration to the rights of the women, ethnic and cultural groups and other deprived sectors guaranteeing inclusive democracy and justice within national integrity.
- Constitution should be media-friendly that media plays their role in nation building more constructively.
- Media should not focus only on the political agendas in their deliberations; they have to generate opinions in various issues of development and social justice that contributes to nation building.
- Media and the journalists should not be aligned to leaders and parties that they entertain their professional autonomy as fourth state.

With sum up of the moderator, **Mr. Born Bahadur Karki**, Chair of the Session thanked all participants for their active participation with valuable inputs and said that nation building is a regular process and media should contribute on it by facilitating on information and opinion building process. Constitution is like a bridge that makes linkages between people and state for nation building initiatives.