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SUCCESS STORY

The Power of Radio: Siraha Station Steps Up for Peace



USAID/Nepal

Radio journalists in Siraha prepare for discussions with decision makers.

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—station manager
at Samad FM

May 2009 – Over the past three years, Nepal has brought a peaceful end to a bloody 10-year Maoist insurgency, elected an inclusive government, and begun the process of writing a new constitution. However, the transition period has also given long-oppressed ethnic and religious groups an opportunity to petition for their rights—often loudly and sometimes violently—as they push competing agendas.

The Terai, located in the southern plains and the main operational area for USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), is the home of much of this ethnic competition and bears the brunt of these protests. OTI has been actively working to support local radio stations throughout the Terai, seeking to increase programming options and help broadcasters understand their role in supporting Nepal’s transition to peace. Recently, events in Siraha, a particularly volatile Terai district, underscored the relevance of this work.

During March, Siraha was the scene of a protracted protest by the Tharus, who were demanding that their rights be recognized in the new constitution. The protests led to clashes between the Tharu and Madhesi communities and left several people injured. The government imposed a curfew as leaders from both sides ratcheted up their rhetoric and called for attacks on the other group.

However, managers at radio station Samad FM decided to try to defuse the situation. Employees at the station, who come from the Tharu community, had recently completed a USAID-funded program designed to highlight the issues affecting local youth and find ways to link youth with decision makers.

Station representatives convinced leaders from both groups to participate in a live broadcast where they could discuss their grievances with members of the local government. And within 30 minutes of the start of the show, both sides had agreed to stand down, and the government subsequently lifted the curfew.

The station manager later said, “Through our program with OTI, we recognized the frustrated mindset of local youth and we knew we must act to stop the situation before it got worse. Tensions were so high, and we felt that dialogue was the best way to solve the problem.”

By stepping up to address ethnic tensions, Samad FM found a way to maintain peace in its community.