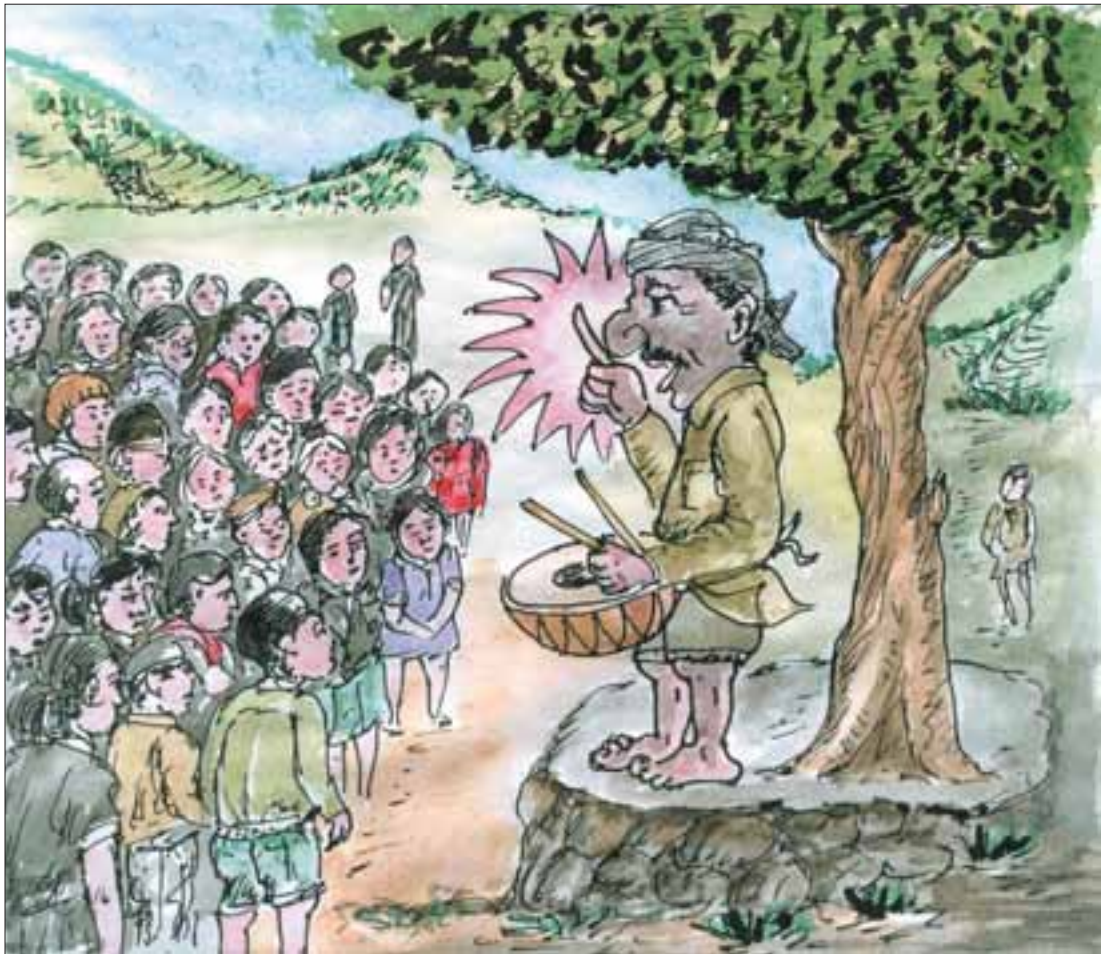


# Part One

# About Alternative Media



# What are Alternative Media?



Alternative media presentation in Thaiba, Nepal

Imagine the age before television, telephone, and the Internet... Village criers spread the news and people told stories for entertainment. Stories were told around firesides, in family and small community gatherings. They were chanted, recited in rhyme, and illustrated in dances. Families and communities played riddle games and exchanged barbs and wit in instant poetry for entertainment. These folkways were also the ways in which family histories and community customs and traditions were handed down from generation to generation.

In upland communities like Chitral, Pakistan, as well as in some areas in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and other countries, these traditions still exist side by side with more modern means of entertainment. But for most of us, these forms have all but gone, taken over by electronic mass media. **That is why we call them traditional or 'alternative'.** They follow the ways in which our forefathers informed one another and entertained, and they are still alive especially in mountain and other remote areas.

In the remote hill settlements of Nepal, a village crier appointed by the community still performs the task of informing the village of festivities, village assemblies, harvest time, births, weddings, and deaths, the outbreak of disease, irrigation and water use, and other concerns important to the community. The crier goes up to the highest point in the village or the village centre, beating drums to attract attention and delivers the message. This act of informing people is known as 'Katuwal Karaune' or the 'Cry of the Katuwal'.







Alternative media are ways people have conversed with one another for centuries, using song, dance, poetry, drama, puppets, announcements, stories, and poems, and passing on these skills from one generation to the next. They entertain and are familiar and can thus be successful in reaching all members of a community, including non-literate people and marginalised social groups. Alternative media encourage community cohesiveness and can support social mobilisation as the products are developed and owned by the community itself.

In Pakistan, Sufi poetry is still passed on by bards who enjoy a high standing in the community. Similarly, the shepherd poets of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India, and the ancient storytellers of Nagaland and some villages in the Northern Areas continue to practise storytelling and verse.



Music and poetry evening in Chitral, Pakistan

## Forms of Alternative Media

Typical delivery forms include

- street plays
- stage plays
- puppet shows
- folk songs
- folk dances
- poetry
- radio programmes
- and various combinations of the above



Listening to songs and poetry

# Why Alternative Media?



Information delivered in an appropriate way is important for development. Having useful information and knowledge increases the chances for a better life and opens an important road away from poverty. However, professional presentations, lectures, handouts, meetings, and pamphlets have little or no effect in sharing knowledge with people who have minimal formal education or are not used to this way of acquiring knowledge. Equally many types of communication depend on modern technical infrastructure,

especially electrical power and electronic equipment, which is not always available in remote areas. Alternative media can provide a channel for reaching out to rural and remote communities and especially poor and disadvantaged groups. Even in urban environments, communicating and knowledge sharing based on entertainment can be a welcome and effective way of disseminating information and ideas.

Traditional storytelling, music, dance, and poetry continue to define people and communities in many remote areas - who they are, what they stand for, their life approaches, hopes, and dreams. For the outside world, these forms of communication provide a window by which we view and better understand mountain communities. They help us better understand ourselves, because they provide a bridge and mirror to our past.

In Pakistan, WWF-Pak has been carrying out an environmental education programme in remote northwestern areas. School nature clubs are a big part of the programme. Thirteen of these clubs have been set up in Chitral and Gilgit, with about 340 student members. Club activities include essay-writing, drawing, poster making, storytelling, and poetry contests. All aim at increasing the knowledge of nature in general, and the snow leopard in particular, among youngsters and their parents.

Alternative Media can champion change in remote areas, they help gather the community and introduce better practices in ways that are fun and entertaining and will get the message across better because they are in a language and form people know and understand.



Watching a street performance in Thaiba, Nepal



## Alternative media

- make the process of knowledge delivery independent of modern technology and the availability of technical specialists,
- help reach communities that lack modern facilities and technical skills, such as electrical power, audio and video processing, and telecommunication,
- bring communities together towards common action,
- empower communities that plan, organise, and select alternative media events which include community members in both message preparation and delivery (ownership),
- use formats in which people understand each other and speak a common language,
- work well where people need to be aware of need for information but have no means to access information sources,
- facilitate a dialogue between performers and audience,
- are not expensive and can be adjusted to the subject and environment,
- help to overcome the divide between the digital and non-digital world.



Play about reforestation, Nepal



Play about bees and beekeeping, Nepal

### Are we getting across?

Achieving development depends to a large extent on **communicating the right information in the right way**, not just disseminating handouts to the poor.

People will argue: But we have been communicating! We have been writing reports, publishing books, and sending them out to whoever may need them and whoever we think could use them.

**Getting across effectively means inducing change by providing appropriate knowledge. Are we communicating information the way people understand it, want it, and can use it?**



# The Alternative Media Approach



The major components in the successful production of alternative media events in communities are: broad participation of the community, selection of interesting, locally relevant stories that convey important messages; selection of an appropriate, locally attractive, medium for the event; and use of local materials.

## Participation

Alternative media events should be prepared by local people willing to dedicate their work to the community. The role of external specialists is to provide training and assistance, if needed. Using alternative media means facilitation of community involvement at all levels. Full participation of local people in the entire process of selecting the problem and message, and planning, designing, developing, and delivering an alternative media event ensures ownership of the production and adequate identification of real needs for knowledge. Overall, it enables conceptualisation of a long-term knowledge sharing model for the community.

### Participation encompasses:

- Involving community leaders, local people, and artists who can motivate people and have the flair to convince local people and disseminate information useful for them
- Promoting equal participation of women. Women's participation is vital; they should be motivated to be a part of the team to participate fully in planning, organising and delivering information.

People from Lakhuri Bhanjyang (Nepal) organised a team to discuss safe drinking water issues. Village women were involved in preparing and drafting the street play. As users and providers of water in a family, women know the realities of water resources and manage the water supply at home. The women performed a street play in a local school. In this way they shared their knowledge and transferred messages to their fellow villagers. They were successful in transferring indigenous knowledge on water conservation.



## From message to story

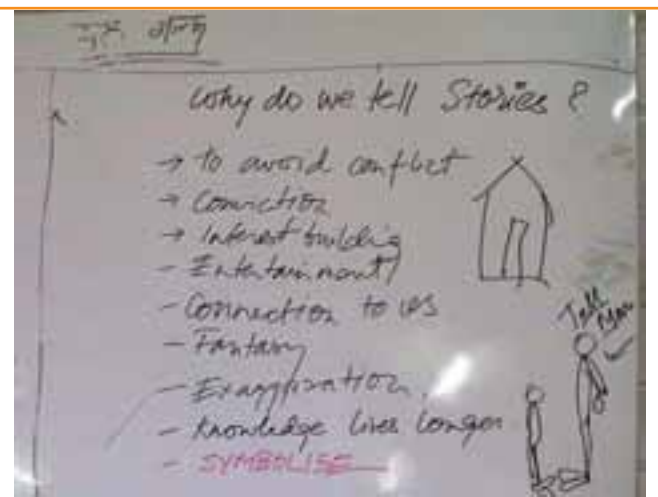
Alternative media events are intended to convey locally important information or knowledge - the message - in a an attractive and entertaining way. Most often the best way to do this is to develop a story, whether brief (as in a song or poem), or long (as in a play or puppet show). Story telling is an old art of disseminating information and sharing knowledge. It is a description of events; spoken words told from one person to another in an effort to communicate a message or a feeling either real or



imagined. A story provides important messages that teach the most of important lessons of life. Stories are told from parent to child, from generation to generation. Many have been repeated, adapted and improved from a time when there was no television, no radio, no newspaper, indeed no paper.

Common elements that are found in a story are:

- problem
- struggle
- solution
- lessons learned
- element of surprise
- social messages



## Use of local materials

Whatever might be the message, the tools used for communication should be, as far as possible, local materials. External materials should be used to complement or better illustrate the issues described by local sources. Using local materials helps foster the feeling of ownership of the message and means of delivery. It also means that communities can work independently and spread the approach to others with little further support.



Local instruments give sound effects in Nepal



Symbolic car made with local materials in Nagaland, India

# The Alternative Media Process

The use of alternative media for spreading development messages means a participatory process in which members of the community and external specialists (if needed) work together to produce and deliver messages aiming at empowering the people by making (new) knowledge more widely available. This section presents the main steps in the process.



A key principle in using alternative media is people-to-people communication in which the message is prepared and delivered by members of the community themselves. It may take some time and several meetings and trust building before the right team members are gathered and formed and the potential community partners are persuaded to join in, particularly among marginalised groups used to staying on the sidelines. But their involvement is invaluable, they should in fact be the driving force of the alternative media production. The aim is to ensure that the alternative media project is embraced and owned by the community and not imposed by 'outsiders'.

## Step 1 - Identify needs

The identification of needed messages or knowledge should be a community or group oriented process with as broad a participation as possible from all community members, in particular marginalised social groups. The first, critical step is to find out what issues people are interested in and why they want to know new things. Focusing on local development issues is an obvious starting point in needs analysis - local infrastructure, hygiene, water problems, natural resources management, social issues, economic constraints, gender bias, education, and similar.

Even when promoting a particular issue or development theme - say natural resources or community forestry - it is important to know first where the community stands in terms of awareness of the issue, and to find out the community's own problems and needs. Conduct informal talks and interviews with community members, gather community members for consultations, and relate your advocacy to the findings.



People from Lakhuri Bhanjyang, Nepal, assessing their knowledge needs



Discussing a strategy





### Case study from Chapakharka, Nepal

Villagers, with the help of facilitators, conducted a needs assessment exercise and identified a motorable road leading to the village as the priority need. They realised that if enough people were motivated, they could construct the road themselves. They selected a locally popular medium – the dohri (duet) song – for conveying their message. Dohri is a traditional song form with verses sung alternately by a group of men and a group of women expressing their opinions and trying to 'win' the argument. A

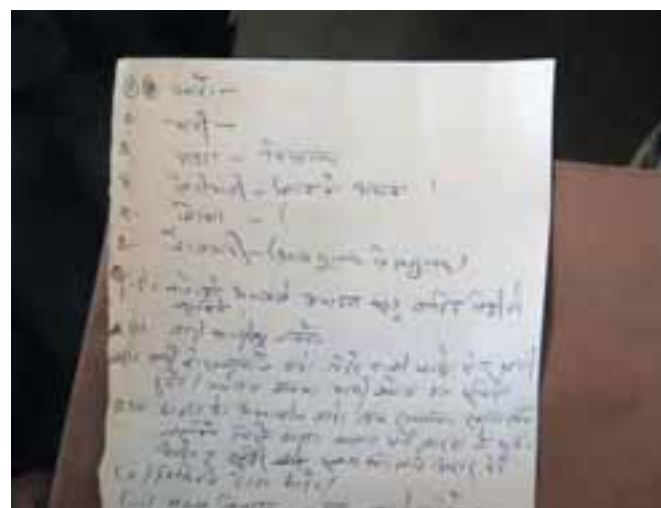


dohri song was prepared and sung at a community event with the aim of motivating the villagers to work together for the road construction. As a result a group of volunteers was formed to provide labour for the construction.

## Step 2 – Select the message

With the issues pointed out, concrete messages that address the needs should be identified and selected according to the interests and capacity of the targeted audiences, and the availability of the local or external knowledge and resources needed to address the issue. It is important to involve the broadest possible sectors of the community in planning the appropriate message/s and next steps, not just in identifying needs.

Workshops on 'Use of alternative media to provide sustainable solutions for transferring knowledge and information' were conducted in Guwahati (India) and Lakhuri Bangjyang (Nepal). The workshops focused on a needs assessment exercise as the first action. Local people participated in the activities that followed.



Messages collected at a workshop



### Step 3 Develop the story

Often the best way to convey a message is to tell a story that illustrates the problem, the solution, and the result of the change. The way in which a story is developed depends to some extent on the medium to be used (see step 4 below), but the main elements remain the same, whether the story is told in song, poetry, a play, a dance - or by a storyteller. The alternative media team members and community participants should sit down together to discuss and decide how the story will unfold, what ingredients it will emphasise, and where it will lead.

Using the issue to be highlighted or message identified, the team members should

- i) develop a storyline: where they want the plot or series of events to take the audience or the community;
- ii) determine or lay down who will be the protagonists - the parties at odds or in conflict. Either realistic or exaggerated characters may be developed. Characters may be just that, or they may be made to represent certain concepts. Sometimes one character can be made to represent or symbolise something such as a despotic landlord, or an unfair law, which creates conflict in the community; a humble farmer can symbolise the community, or the rendering of justice to the underdog;
- iii) agree on what kind of resolution they want, who they want to triumph, and every turn and step of the struggle.

These steps may coincide with the process of collectively writing the story, or the plot may be discussed collectively but one writer, playwright, or storyteller is assigned to do the actual writing. If the latter, then the team will again discuss the writer's product.



Street performance in Bandarban, Bangladesh

## Tips on script writing

After developing a story the next step is to write the actual script. This may be a play script, song, poem - whatever medium has been chosen. The language of the script should be very simple and appropriate for the community. The aim is to make communication more effective by focusing on what helps to draw in an audience. When developing a script, it is useful to bear the following points in mind.

- Actions speak louder than words - promote actions that are possible.
- Blend messages into the story, don't add on afterwards.
- Tell a story - don't preach.
- Think visual - for example, soil can be a character.
- Entertainment - the script should contain entertaining and comic elements, while touching on the community's problems and possible solutions.
- Don't start with the problem statement, introduce it after setting the scene.
- Prepare the script with a particular audience in mind.
- Tell the audience how and why as well as what.
- Have an element of surprise.
- Where possible use music to heighten the experience.



## Storyboard

A storyboard is a means to maintain and keep continuity of issue presentation, and to direct and to visualise a script, especially one that will be presented in action like a play. It is a collection of frames developed in bits and pieces to put the story together for implementation in the selected media. It helps to visualise each character and its role, including dialogue. Participatory development of the storyboard by the group helps all participants to understand the consistency of the story and the messages.

STAGES	DIRECTION	SOUND	DIALOGUE
I A: Enter from 3 and move towards 3	A: Enter from 3 and move towards 3	Ah... Ah... Wh... Wh...	
II A: Move around the circle 3	A: Move around the circle 3 Dance Move	222... 222...	
III T: Come forward start talking with A A: Respond T with surprise expression	T: Come forward start talking with A A: Respond T with surprise expression	Chink... Woon... Tong... Tong... Kak... Kak...	
IV			

Storyboard prepared in Guwahati, India

Essentials to be considered while preparing a storyboard.

- Use minimum props to reflect any character or object to make it more practical when presenting in the field.
- Use sounds, body language, and dialogue to enhance the uniqueness of characters and situations.
- Ensure equal participation of both men and women characters.
- Use locally available materials and props.



## Step 4 - Select the delivery method

The next step is to select the best method to deliver the messages. Typical delivery forms include street plays, stage plays, puppet shows, folk songs, folk dances, poetry, radio programmes, or a combination of any of these.

The next section tells more about different types of alternative media. The alternative media group should decide which type of medium is the most appropriate for delivering the message based on the local traditions, available resources, and message.

Using alternative media effectively means discovering what media the community finds most fun, and avoiding any that are inappropriate. If there are many possibilities, then select the form that best fits the message.



## Step 5 - Produce and deliver the alternative media production

The next section provides some basic ideas about how to produce different types of alternative media 'products'. The most important point to remember is to involve the community as much as possible in production and delivery.



Preparing for a performance, Thaiba



## Step 6 - The alternative media event



A sport, culture and alternative media event in Chitral, Pakistan

The formula of 'edutainment' (education and entertainment) is a key concept often employed in the alternative media approach to knowledge delivery and transfer. The production must be able to grab the spectators' interest and attention and be able to entertain, but it must also bring home the message at the end of the presentation, the actual objective of the alternative media production.

An alternative media event can be a straightforward performance (play, puppet play, story telling, song or dance), advertised in advance or at the time through music, drums, or a 'village crier'.

It can also be packaged as part of a competition, for example, songs and poetry on the environment, or a broader scale cultural event. It can be prepared as a 'stand alone' event, or built into an existing (or created) larger event, for example a sports gathering or market day.

After the production, immediate audience feedback may be obtained by asking the audience what they thought about what they just viewed, what they think of its message/s, and their own ideas on the issues tackled. This feedback can help in the planning of future productions. whether in the same or a different community. It is also good to note down problems and hitches encountered during preparation and delivery of the production to improve future planning.

Ideally, the alternative media team should try to ensure continuity of events and make a long-term programme for educating and entertaining people.