

# SECTOR BRIEF

Issue #11, September 2015



**Sector:** Media

**Interventions:** Improve rural radio programming

**Districts:** Banke, Jhapa, Kailali, Sunsari

## Radio gives bargaining power to smallholder farmers

Lack of effective information is a critical constraint to all businesses, particularly to smallholder farmers and rural micro enterprises that operate in information-poor environments where many information channels are ineffective, inaccessible or unaffordable.

To explore the role of mass media in improving the information environment for rural markets, Samarth-NMDP undertook a scoping study on information and media for the rural poor in September 2013. The study showed that

over 80% of people in Nepal listen to radio, out of which almost 40% - who fall in the poor category - listen to it on a daily basis. The study not only highlighted the importance of radio in information for the rural poor, but also highlighted significant problems within the radio sector.



In March/April 2014 Samarth initiated a multi-dimensional analysis of the radio sector in Nepal to test the findings of the initial scoping and provide a deeper insight into the radio sector for both the project and other stakeholders. The analysis and appraisal of agricultural programmes showed significant weaknesses in the programming style, quality and content: The programmes were mostly top down, poorly formatted and lacked relevance to the audience. Samarth, therefore, embarked on making information markets work better for the rural poor by introducing new and dynamic approaches needed to ensure that the programme content is information rich as well as attention grabbing, to create a sizeable and sustainable pro-poor change in the field of agriculture.

## Local radios are assisted to produce farmer centric programmes

In late August 2014, Samarth partnered with three radio stations: Two commercial stations - Kanchanjunga FM in Jhapa, Dinesh FM in Kailali - and one community station - Krishnasar FM in Banke. These stations were chosen on the basis of their popularity, efficiency of management and willingness to partner with Samarth-NMMP.

“Samarth-NMMP’s engagement with us has been different from day one. Contrary to earlier ‘pay to play’ business model of other donors where sustainability of the programme is seriously questioned, Samarth-NMMP has allowed radio stations like us to take the full ownership of the programme providing minimal technical and equipment support. The result has been very fruitful. The field based format has made our programmes very popular among the farmers, district agriculture offices and the government. We also received the ‘Best Agriculture Programme’ award this year from the District Agriculture Office, Banke.”

**Tula Adhikari,**  
**Station Manager, Krishnasar FM, Banke**

Since none of these stations were focusing much on field based agricultural programmes, Samarth provided training and mentoring support as well as limited programme start-up cost to test agricultural programmes that would be audience driven, participative, field based and following the principles of ethical journalism. Samarth also supported the three FM stations to promote their programmes to attract advertisement so as to ensure sustainability of these programmes. Three new farmer driven agricultural programmes were launched in September 2014 - one in each partner FM stations.

The programmes not only delivered information, but also gave a platform for the farmers to voice their concerns. A large number of serious, tangible issues have emerged from the interaction programmes with farmers, which have reached policy makers and concerned officials. Bodies such as the District Agricultural Development Office (DADO), National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) and Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) have not only participated but have also taken actions accordingly.



*Presenters of Krishnasar FM getting ready for a new programme*



*Farmers being interviewed by reporters of Krishnasar FM*

After four months since the initiation of the programmes, a survey was conducted on a total of 1,800 respondents (farmers) from Banke, Kailai and Jhapa districts on the popularity of these programmes. The survey in Banke showed that almost a quarter (23%) of the respondents had listened to the programmes and 92% of them stated that they were regular listeners. Almost three quarters (72%) recognized the programmes as having given them a platform to effectively represent their views.

One of the stations, Krishnasar FM from Banke has already been able to attract sponsorships from District Agriculture Development Office (DADO) and District Livestock Service Office. ***The government agriculture office in Banke has also awarded Krishnasar FM's 'Kheti Kisani' programme, supported by Samarth, as the best agricultural programme of Banke district.***

## Farmers benefit as radio becomes their voice

In South Western Nepal, also known as the rice basket of the nation, a large number of smallholder rice farmers were unhappy with the prices they were receiving for their crop. They felt forced to sell their paddy at a price which they believed barely covered production costs.

The middlemen purchasing and stockpiling the rice believed that they were shouldering the risk of lack of clarity about national and regional prices, so they offered lower prices, citing this risk. The ones to lose the most were the poorest farmers who neither had the facility to store their paddy nor the cash reserve to pay back loans they had received to plant the crop.

"The radio stations played a very important and a positive role in this matter. They came forward as a representative of all the farmers and presented the issue as a campaign. This helped us to reach a conclusion sooner. The FM played a leader's role in this issue. I hope they will play the role of a watchdog in the future as well."

**Shankar Sapkota,  
Chief, Nepal Food Corporation, Banke**

Farmers knew what was causing the problem: One of the biggest buyers in the rice market was Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) that purchased significant quantities of rice for food security purposes. The NFC, a government agency, influenced the prices of crops significantly but declared the prices late every year, when most farmers would have already sold their crop. The farmers wanted NFC to announce their buying price as early as possible to give them greater bargaining power.

It was this situation that Krishnasar FM found when investigating problems around the rice prices through field based investigation. The radio station gave a platform to the farmers to highlight the issue through participative programming and organized an on-air debate among farmers, the NFC and the DAFO. The NFC recognized the problem and announced the price of crops for Banke and Bardia districts one month earlier than the previous year, in the programme itself.

**Result: The poor farmers who could not hold on to their produce for long due to immediate cash need were benefitted with Rs 200 more per quintal of paddy in November 2014 compared to the previous year. Altogether 5,028 households were calculated to have increased their income from their rice crop by an average of Rs 4,576 (£ 31) - A total of Rs. 22.26 million in increased income to small holder rice farmers by March 2015.**

“Radio Programmes focusing on agriculture have been a boon to us. Many other radio programmes talk about oranges, apples, cardamom or rainbow trout fish farming, which is not relevant to us. Krishnasar FM makes agriculture programmes on rice, wheat cultivation and crops that are suited to our locality and local needs and also takes our grave concerns to the authorities for solution.

I was present during both of the discussion sessions with Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) organized by Krishnasar FM. The NFC announced the price for paddy in the programme itself which was earlier than the previous years. Due to which, I have personally profited at least Rs. 200 per quintal on the paddy that I sell to middlemen. I thank Krishnasar FM for giving the negotiation and bargaining power to small farmers like me and many others.”

**Prem Chaudhary,  
Farmer, Banke**

## Next steps

Samarth-NMDP attempts to share its experience on successful pilot radio programming to wider radio industry by providing case studies and workshops through the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) Nepal and Broadcasters Association of Nepal (BAN) so that other radio stations would be inspired to follow and copy similar audience driven and field based business model in their respective radio stations.

Samarth-NMDP is simultaneously looking to expand a similar model in five more districts: In Dhading and Sunsari, Samarth will be working with local FM stations focusing on agriculture and small businesses; while in Dhading, Langtang, Rasuwa, and Taplejung, it is planning to produce radio programmes specializing in Tourism related information to build the capacity of the locals to enhance the experience of tourists. Samarth has already partnered with Saptakoshi FM in Sunsari and has completed the production mentoring. The programme will start airing from the second week of October. Programmes like these will open up avenues for receiving information and voicing concerns, to small tourism entrepreneurs and smallholder farmers in these districts.

## About Samarth-NMDP

Samarth-NMDP is a five year UK aid-funded program that aims to reduce poverty in Nepal by increasing the income of smallholder farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs. The programme follows a market systems development approach, addressing underlying causes in the performance of the market systems, to bring about more competitive and sustainable markets that work better for the poor.