Presentation note by Laxman Datt Pant, Chairperson of Media Action Nepal – National Seminar on “Overcoming Challenges of Journalism Education Nepal” organized by National Integrated College and Media Action Nepal with support from University Grant Commission, 16-17 May. Kathmandu

Journalism Education in Nepal: Challenges and Way Forward

**Background**

In the last one decade, journalism education has witnessed a lot of demand from students’ intent on pursuing careers in journalism and mass communications. The increase in private television channels, FM radio stations, newspapers, online news portals and blogs has been a major cause behind attraction to journalism education.

Media educators in Nepal should produce journalists who can make decisions about what modern Nepal reads and watches. Today, it is obvious that journalism is straining under increasing corporate, educational and socioeconomic pressures.

**Scenario**

* Journalism education as a discipline of study appears to be heading into confusion in the absence of clear national policy and resource allocation plans.
* This is the only development sector that is deprived of state funds and, subsequently, is obliged to look for external resources and support.
* There are no specific criteria adopted for the selection of teachers in journalism. The criteria developed by the Universities for other subjects have not been applied in this case for several reasons.
* There is tremendous ambiguity in terms of what constitutes a formal degree in journalism. The range of degrees offered at universities-Tribhuwan University, Kathmandu University, Purbanchal University and recently at Mid-western and Far Western Universities differs from ‘pure theoretical analyses at one end of the spectrum to ‘completely hands-on skills training’ at the other end of the spectrum.
* These degrees are advertised as preparing the students for careers in print, radio, television, advertising, cinema, NGO’s/INGO’s or new media or some form of combination of more than one.
* Nevertheless, there is no formal government document or specific professional oversight body to structure or regulate these courses.
* Training and education are often looked as synonymous terms and works which in deed is NOT.
* The academia are not keeping in pace with the fast changing media scenario in the country. The universities (particulary TU and PU) have not changed or updated their syllabi for years. Whatever changes have been made, are very cosmetic.
* It’s unfortunate that with the explosion of electronic media, there is no university which offers a very comprehensive course in broadcast.
* Educational administrators generally find it difficult to understand that their journalism departments ought to be treated in the same way as their engineering schools--pumped in with resources, both financial and academic, and with quality assurance mechanisms fitting a professional course.
* There is total mismatch between the industry practices and what is taught in journalism schools and universities.
* Gender has not been mainstreamed in journalism education and courses so to mainstream it in journalism.
* The courses in general neglect issues of diversity, inclusion and gender sensitivity. There are no specific chapters or subjects under the disciplines that extensively deal with gender sensitivity. The academia are not keeping in pace with the fast changing media scenario in the country. The universities have not changed or updated their syllabi for years. Whatever changes have been made, are very cosmetic. It’s unfortunate that with the explosion of both print and electronic media, there is no university which offers a very comprehensive course in gender sensitivity or gender mainstreaming.

**Burning challenges**

* **Lack of regulation and supervision:** There is no specific professional oversight body to structure or regulate these courses.
* **Lack of human resources and infrastructure:** Lack of resources and physical infrastructure is a major concern for journalism teachers and students in Nepal. This includes lack of proper infrastructures, labs related to broadcast and photography or sound technologies, lack of relevant learning materials and books. The lack of competent faculty members is another burning problem the colleges and universities are facing.
* **Inconsistent course curriculum:** There is no clear direction in the various journalism and mass communication courses offered by different universities. The curriculum in most journalism institutions is outdated and not relevant to the skills required in the outside world.
* **Lack of industry collaboration**: The collaboration between academics and media industry professionals is regarded as crucial element in filling the gap between journalism philosophy and its practice. Conclusion

**Way forward**

* The new generation is heavily interested in getting quality yet practical and professional knowledge in the field.
* Journalism educators need to be aware of current communications findings and to prepare their students, as well as in-service journalists, for new ways of professional work
* Media developers and agencies like UGC can help overcomet his gap in several ways: funding teacher training and curriculum development, providing updated educational materials and adequate equipment, facilitating the creation of student-run media to develop practical skills, and funding cross-disciplinary partnerships and programmes.
* Provision of effective regulatory mechanisms, substantive efforts for the advancement of human resources as well as infrastructures, need-based course curricula, and collaboration of the media industry and academic plus training institutions will contribute for the development of the field.