

LIVING ON A TIGHTROPE: ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES OF GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT WORKERS IN A MAOIST-CONFLICT AREA

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Bijaya¹ is a grassroots development worker working in a rural area in east Nepal. She has been working in a Maoist dominated area for the last five years, though not by choice. When her international NGO office decided to pull out and instead support a local NGO established by its laid-off staff members, she had to either quit her job or work for that NGO. She could not remain without employment for various reasons, of which economic security was one. Therefore she decided to join the new NGO, which made her responsible for leading social mobilization work, in which she already had expertise and experience, in one of the villages. Many others like Bijaya are working in conflict areas. I have interacted with twenty of them who were working in various poverty-stricken villages of a relatively underdeveloped and inaccessible district in east Nepal which has suffered major armed conflict between the government's Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) and Maoist-led People's Liberation Army(PLA). Despite this conflict, development workers are continuing their work in rural and inaccessible areas, which exposes them to various risks. This narrative is based on my interaction with these individuals in late-December 2003.

These grassroots development workers had come to the area for a training program on food security. A new face could be a spy either for the Maoists or the army, so they initially hesitated talking to me about how they were coping with the conflict.

Most development workers working in poverty-ridden areas in Nepal's periphery are forced to work closely with the Maoists, by

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necessity not choice. Areas considered poor, remote and in need of external support also have high levels of Maoist involvement. NGOs are involved in various areas of development: savings and credit mobilization; nutritional activities to help chronically malnourished persons; introduction of new cultivation methods and new marketable crops and generation of awareness about health, family planning, sanitation and food security. Activists and sympathizers of the Communist Party of Nepal - CPN (Maoist) are also involved in these social organizations.

Government security forces are absent in these areas and concentrate near army camps, district headquarters and airports. Only occasionally do government forces visit the villages for 'search operations'. In these search operations, these outside development workers are highly suspect. To a lesser degree local persons working for the NGOs are also suspected for aiding and helping the Maoists. In such circumstances, I wondered how these people would cope with the difficulties created by demands made by the Maoists and the suspicion of the army.

Target of Suspicion

Development workers operate under the suspicion of both sides. Bijaya relates that the Maoists suspect her because she makes regular visits to the district headquarters, partly for official work and partly to escape the pressures of people and political conflict. Gradually sympathizers, if not cadres, became less suspicious as the villagers come to accept her. She clearly knows that there are cadres of the CPN (Maoist) within social/development groups she has formed, as their faces often change. When people disappear, she keeps her mouth shut with the understanding that they have been mobilized in other places to fight or to work for the Maoist cause. She knows that she is expected say nothing, especially around new faces and those suspected by local Maoist cadres as being spies of the army.

Not only have the development workers been learning to be quiet and wary of new faces, people in general seem to have acquired this attitude. There were none of the usual questions when I first arrived in the village. People just watched me out of the corners of their eyes.

On the day of arrival, I went out of the office to walk around the village without informing any one. A five minutes walk from the office brought me to the bazaar area where there was a school. Just outside the school I saw a young, dark man in very ordinary clothes holding a gun. He gave me a strange look, but I kept on walking as if he was not there.

After a few minutes of gazing, he looked away, and he tried to behave normally when I approached him. I was unsure why he was there, because the army camp was just fifteen minutes away. Later on in the office I was told that he was a government army man. This surprised me. Any one would have thought him to be a Maoist combatant. Why should an army person stand as a civilian in civil dress, and that too in a relatively busy place just in front of the primary school? His heavy gun was hanging from his shoulder, which might be interpreted as setting a wrong example to the young children who attended the school and inhabited the bazaar. Seeing this I reflected on what is generally reported to be a new game children in Nepal play, where they pretend to be either RNA or PLA, and bear sticks in the manner in which combatants carry a gun. This could be true, I thought.

The nearby primary school was closed. I entered a shop under the guise of being a customer and in the meantime asked various questions. A young girl entered the shop from outside. I asked her which is the bazaar area. I asked other questions as well, mostly about the village. I was surprised when she behaved as if she had not heard anything. I asked for two Vicks tablets after asking the price. When I paid the money, she again went out. I wondered “why so much silence?” I continued walking through large terraces and reached a point where the path narrowed considerably. There I met two labourers carrying boulders from the Thotne river which had formed a narrow gorge. I saw a small structure some distance away but close to the river, red pipes leading to it, and wires coming out of it. I asked the two men if this was a power station. I had guessed that this place is supplied with electricity even though it is away from the district headquarters. While coming from airport I had seen rows of big steel poles dug at certain intervals and wire passing through them. When I asked the person accompanying me from the airport about the electricity, he told me that it does not work nowadays. He quietly said that it was blown up twice by the Maoists. To my question, the labourers just nodded. Just to allay their suspicion, I told them that I had just come to the village for the work of the NGO there. They again nodded their heads, and I thought that they probably had not heard the name of that NGO. I told them that it is nice to have electricity. This comment too was met with stony silence.

After reaching the northern end of the village, I returned and came back to office after about forty-five minutes of walking around the village. Near the office I saw two women weaving woollen carpets in a house. I entered their courtyard and asked about the rugs, their price and

how they obtain wool and the like. First they asked me why I was in their village. When I told them that I had come to the NGO office, they seemed to suspend their worry. They asked me to come inside the house where the landlord explained about the rugs. The main problem they are facing is the lack of wool supply and a market for their products. The landlord said that the market has fallen so much that they can hardly find buyers. He related it to the conflict. On the question of why he continues this business, he just said it has been his profession for a long time and he does not want to give it up. Moreover, they are also doing it to keep themselves occupied. If all the costs involved are included, it would all be loss, he said. When the sun began to set, he asked me to return to the office.

At the office the staff members were worried about my absence. They immediately suggested that we go for dinner. I expressed surprise because it was not even five in the evening, though the light had begun to fade. But they said that if we do not go to hotel now, it will be too late to return. "Curfew begins from seven p.m., but it is dark by six p.m. as days are shorter in these winter months. So, we need to hurry," the office accountant explained. Nowadays, they said, people do not walk in the dark. Once the sun goes down, people should be at home and fed. With the first instance of darkness, people prepare to sleep. As if on cue, by five p.m., all those who wanted to attend the training had arrived and were all together in the hotel for food. All participants limited their talk to the training work. They never referred to Maoists or others, the problem created by them, or aspects of their personal lives. I felt that my presence made the participants reticent. The office staff had warned me beforehand not to talk about politics or make any reference to the Maoists, army or the government.

By seven p.m. no human voice disturbed the darkness. The village was already deep in slumber. The usual twinkling lights from neighbouring villages were gone. Only the occasional barking of dogs gave any indication of human presence. Some light in the office from the solar panel allowed us to read until nine p.m. and prepare for another day's lesson.

People came out of their homes only after the morning was well advanced. When I referred to the calmness of the night to a staff member, he told me that it is a usual thing these days. "When dogs bark more intensively, we assume that either the Maoists or the army are roaming the village" the person informed me. Previously, I was told, there was much singing and dancing, especially among the young girls and boys.

People sat in groups talked, discussed and gossiped, they walked around the village, exchanging pleasantries, especially in the evenings. Now-a-days, it seemed that even the committed evening drinkers and drunkards had stopped disturbing the night.

After the whole day's discussion next day, the trainees became familiar and comfortable with me. As they may have sensed my clear lack of political affiliation and partiality for consensus and agreement, they started to obliquely refer to the Maoists and the army and the difficulties brought by their presence. When we sat down for the evening meal, they clearly started referring euphemistically to Maoists and the army, in a low voice and after a look over their shoulder.

After returning from dinner, we sat together for some time around the fire. They then started telling each other the problems they have been facing. Bijaya told me the story of her torture by the army. One day an army team came to her office in the village and asked her to tell the names of Maoists and to help them find one leader called Bharat Raut. All the staff members said that they do not have any knowledge of the Maoists and their leader. The army then ransacked their office, destroyed everything, threw away the papers and made them walk half a day to a hilltop.

For the whole day they were kept in the hot sun with nothing to drink or eat. An army officer told them that they have been supporting the Maoists and that they know all about them. The workers consistently denied this charge. But the soldiers were not convinced. They asked, without supporting Maoists and getting their support how could they work there? The soldiers again asked them to name Maoists in their areas and to help the army in finding the leaders. When they said that they did not know any Maoists, the officer (Major of the army) got angry and started misbehaving. He even pointed guns at them and asked them to tell him the names of Maoists. When these NGO workers consistently denied any knowledge of the Maoists whereabouts, the soldiers cooled down. "After a while, they told us to eat. But due to fear, stress and exhaustion, no one could eat" Bijaya narrated. They returned to the office exhausted and disturbed. Later on she heard that the RNA had killed Bharat Raut, who they knew as 'Kusum.' After about a month of this news, the army major who had interrogated Bijaya and her colleagues also got killed when Maoist cadres attacked the airport where he was stationed along with 150 of his troops. The accountant of the office, who hailed from that village and whose house was also close to the airport, narrated the story about the attack on that airport.

At about ten p.m., when they had started to sleep together in a hall after a meeting, they heard the noise of bullets and bombings. This continued for the whole night. There was nothing they could do except continue to lie huddled on the floor. At about three a.m. a helicopter came, flew around the village and dropped bombs around two rivers located on either side of the airport. After that the noise settled down. When it was full light in the morning, the accountant went to his home. He saw a few dead bodies while going from the office to his home, which was about ten minutes walking distance. "As my main interest was to find out if anything happened to the family and the house, I did not look at these bodies closely, but from first glance they seemed to be of the Maoists," he said. He told us that his family members heard people breaking in through doors, staying in the corridor and treating those who were wounded. After a while they left without doing anything and/or saying anything to the family. Along the corridor of his house, there were still many spots of fresh blood. These people talked in a very low voice, and from what could be overheard, they were from the Maoist's side. The family and a few others staying in the house did not come out of their room. "When we guessed that the battle was over, we started cleaning the house to remove all those blood stains thinking that if the army finds out that Maoists had stayed there, they would ask us many questions," he told us. Later on they heard that a helicopter came, probably taking all those dead and wounded soldiers. They had no clue as to how many were dead because Maoists had taken their dead/wounded people with them, as had the army. Many people did not come out of the house until the afternoon. It was only in the news they heard that the main person of that airport security force was killed.

Bijaya narrated the impact of Maoist's leader Kusum's death in the village. People were suspicious of each other. They thought that anyone could be spy, but Maoists did not come to the village as openly as they had done in the past. It reduced the influence of the Maoists in the village, but it also brought the Maoist wrath that had been on the army onto the development workers. Their amicable relationship had been shattered. It became very difficult for them to go to the headquarters. To allay the suspicions of the Maoists about the NGO workers giving information to security personnel, they have started to take along with them a person trusted by Maoists, but not a Maoist cadre, when they go to the district headquarters. In this way they hoped to reduce the chance of the Maoists accusing them of being spies of the RNA. The cost involved

would be justified by various excuses such as covering the cost of a target person to visit headquarters to get information, training and the like.

Army personnel rigorously checked people entering the district headquarters. Constant curfews and the presence of plain-clothed army and Maoist spies forced them to be acutely attentive. The development workers had to watch what they said and carefully design their facial expressions to keep from arousing suspicion. Both the soldiers and Maoists could easily cause people to permanently 'disappear.' For common people and low-level development workers, it is easier to get access to Maoist cadres than to army personnel, so development workers worried more about being disappeared by the army than from the Maoists. The main reason for this is that Maoist cadres and local leaders come from the local area and can be reached through various social links. RNA personnel are generally drawn from the outside so they can perform more ruthlessly in an alien place. The RNA also stay within their 'barracks' and are unable to merge with the villagers, whereas the Maoists, through their guerrilla tactics are able to disappear within the village.

Taking Notice of the 'Disguised Persons'

Development workers narrated stories about 'disguised persons' and their actions. In one location they talked about the arrival of a rag-tag looking man who looked like a Maoist. He greeted the people gathered in the village with the 'lal salam' (red salute) raised fist of the Maoists. A few persons returned his compliment by saying 'lal salam.' After a while the RNA came to the village and shot those who had returned the 'lal salam.' The first person who came to the village in disguise was a spy to discover the Maoists in the village. This is called 'search operation.' Development workers also now and then face these disguised persons, who come to the office and try to mingle or ask for different kinds of information and services. When they realize that the person(s) is somebody in disguise, they keep their mouth shut and carefully express words. Usually they behave as if they have not heard greetings like 'lal salam.'

After the army finishes its 'search operation,' it is the turn of the Maoists. They ask what the army had told them to do and what information they had given to them. They politely answer that they just discussed the office work. If Maoists are unconvinced, a new danger arises. As grassroots workers more often interact with Maoist workers, they tend to know them better than the soldiers.

The development workers write nothing about either the Maoists or the army in their notebooks. Sometimes the Maoist cadres also stay with

grassroots development workers and look into the notebooks. It sometimes happens that they are friends from school, or neighbours, or relatives. These social ties mean that they need to give space and food to these cadres. If a problem arises with the Maoists, these relationships are evoked for help. In one research exercise where development workers had to maintain a report of new happenings in the village and changes in livelihoods of certain households, they observed that some Maoist activities in the village adversely affected the livelihood of the sampled households and that, moreover, Maoist cadres demand food, donations, and shelter from the individual households. These demands certainly have consequences on the livelihood of the households. But they would not be able to report these incidences, as there is real danger of Maoists reading these notes. They decided to write these notes when they are in the office in the district headquarters, and then keep these reports there. The RNA also checks, among other things, the notebooks.

Communicating in Code Language

Because of the RNA and Maoist practice of checking even notebooks and letters, development workers have developed metaphoric words to describe situations. When three persons who were supposed to attend the training did not come, other participants said that their villages might be having 'high fever.' I did not understand. When I asked a participant about it, he said that it is a sort of 'code language' they have developed. 'Having a high fever,' I was told, means that the conflict situation is intense and it is dangerous to travel. The biggest thing the people, including the development workers, fear is getting caught in the crossfire between the army and Maoists.

There is little danger of accidentally being killed when only one group, either the Maoists or the army, is in the village. When the army starts a search operation, however, it becomes difficult to move. This situation is referred to as an 'increase in temperature.' I was told that it is also often used in writing letters. When a field staff member is unable to come to a meeting at the head office because of the conflict situation and the possibility of getting caught in the middle, he/she writes that he is having a high fever and thus will not be able to attend the meeting. There are several other words that are often used to obliquely refer to the Maoist problem. For example, if there are Maoists on a certain route, one would advise a person not to follow that route by saying that that route passes through jungle with wild animals.

Paying Levy to Maoists

Development workers were also found secretly paying some levy (a certain per cent of the salary) to the Maoist group. I was not told how much they paid. Sunuwar from Solu told me that he was taken to a forest by a Maoist group. They asked him to pay 25 % of the project budget to the Maoists. He told them that he does not himself have such funds, only his small salary. He said that the Maoists urged him to invest money only in infrastructures. Even though they did not disclose the amount they pay to the Maoists, it seemed that they had paid a small amount. In a neighbouring district, it was found that all the teachers in the village pay such levies to Maoists. The norm there was that a teacher should pay half of the first month's salary and then afterwards one day's salary every month. The Maoists usually give written receipts of the payment, but as it is extremely risky to keep these at the home and the office, they ask the Maoists to make record in their book by another name. The local Maoist and the person paying the levy know clearly what name was used. This practice often causes army personnel to catch the wrong person when they conduct their search persons based on seized records.

Sunuwar also has a pass from the Maoists. To visit his village, he has to pass through a gate constructed by Maoists, which requires showing this pass. As it would be dangerous to go to headquarters carrying such a pass, he hides it under some boulder once he passes out of the gate. On his return, he retrieves the pass and then enters the gate. At home, he similarly hides this pass under a boulder until he needs it.

Deepak Bhattarai has been working as a helper in the office, but comes from another neighbouring district also affected by Maoist activities. When he goes to the village, Maoist cadres whom he knows ask for a share of his salary. He has been saying to them that his salary is very low and barely enough for survival. Then they say that if his salary is too low, he should work with them and they would also give him a gun. Nowadays he faces great pressure and avoids contact with people in his village. He does go to the village, but in such a way that people do not notice him. He does not roam around the village, and just spends his time staying inside the house. Moreover, he does not stay in his village for more than three days at a time. He has also been thinking of migrating to the Gulf countries for work. If the pressure becomes too strong from the Maoist side, he may soon try to go abroad.

Using Polite Words

Development workers are careful to use polite words for the Maoists when they suspect that they are around. When I wanted to take a camera to the field, office staff told me that I should not take it as ‘other friends’ might ask for it. I was surprised by the use of the word ‘friend’ for the Maoists. When I inquired about this later, the staff member told me that a suspected Maoist spy was in the office. The word ‘friend’ would not offend Maoists. Development workers were also extremely respectful to the RNA soldiers. They would do whatever the army tells them to do. The high-handedness of the soldiers was clearly apparent in the district headquarters and in airports. They were given great privileges and their orders were final. When I pointed my finger to count the layers of fences erected by the army to protect the airport, my NGO friend asked me not to point fingers towards army property. This is considered disrespectful by the army here. He told me in an irritated way that if army persons come to hear of any disrespect to them, they take the suspected person(s) to their camp for interrogation. From then on I kept holding my hands together lest I might use improper words and gestures. I thought at least in Kathmandu we need not be so careful in our day-to-day conduct. But here, people live in close association with the soldiers and have much to fear from them.

It seemed that development workers clearly know the psychological stress these lower ranking soldiers face. I closely saw army personnel and observed their behaviour through out a day and half while waiting for a flight. An army Major was in command of the overall security of the airport. He seemed not to have slept the whole night. His face clearly showed that he was an alcoholic. He severely scolded any passenger who did not obey his somewhat arbitrary rules. When some elderly women did not heed his orders to keep unchecked bags on one side of an unmarked line, and checked bags on the other, he commanded a young policeman to order the old ladies not to cross the lines meant for bag checks. The situation was made worse because the old ladies during this confusion, entered the restricted area – again an area not demarcated by lines but arbitrarily ordered.

The Major was angry with the policeman for not clearly separating the checked and unchecked baggage. Another policeman in the area was worried because the Major was angry and I overheard him saying in a very low voice that this man will ‘eat’ his job, meaning fire or transfer him. An army person who until then was just roaming around in the area with gun casually slung on his shoulder, immediately changed his

behavior when he heard that the major was angry about the relaxed security situation. He stood on the next higher terrace in a fighting position and put his machine gun on a stand. He would point his gun towards the people, and move it slowly around. He was stationed about five feet away from the shed where passengers gathered to protect themselves from the rain. From his dress and hair, I guessed that he had not bathed for days. May be from excessive sitting around the fire, his face bore the mark of smoke. I also guessed from his face that he is also an alcoholic. His stern face, position, and behaviour frightened me.

As a whole, the tense situation suddenly arose just because of old ladies not knowing where to put the bags, which was a result of no clear rules or lines to show what passengers were supposed to do. There was no real threat of any kind.

There were many elderly women requesting the Major to allow some extra baggage so that they can send something to their sons and daughters in Kathmandu. Whimsically he accepted some requests and rejected others. I did not see any rules for that. I saw the Major closely following a young lady the whole day, who seemed to be familiar with many security persons. I was told that she owns a *bhatti* and a restaurant, where soldiers often go to drink alcohol. The Major was teasing her all the time, particularly the tika she had on one of her temples. He was saying that it is not a good practice to have tika in places other than in the middle of the forehead. It was also a new custom for those of us who are from central Nepal, but in east Nepal Newari girls put tikas (just a red mark) on the temple as well. The Major made this an issue. Despite this humiliation, the lady pretended to enjoy talking to him. The Major has the liberty of giving three tickets to whoever he likes. She first asked that he give a ticket to her, but when frequently, and shyly, requesting a ticket for her 10-11 year old son as well, the Major said that he had finished his quota. She then requested him to order the pilot to take the boy. Local people know that pilots also reserve such right and when the weight is low, they take extra people. The Major was not giving her a decision, may be to make her hang around him. Ultimately, the flight was cancelled, and I did not see her again.

I also observed another person in a very unstable condition. He was a police sub-inspector, and from his speech and look, he must be from the Tarai. He was a young and nice looking man, clean shaved and smartly dressed. But he was so impatient that he was unable to sit on the chair for more than a few seconds. He would sit for five seconds or so and then stand up, move here and there, and come back to the seat. He was doing

this the whole day. When the Major was away, he also followed that young lady and talked to her and her son. He tried to pat the son on his back. Later on he said to the woman 'it is not only you that have children, I also have a son.' He pulled out a photo from his pocket and showed it to the lady. The lady glanced at it but did not pay attention. He looked at the picture for a while and then kept it in his pocket. Sometimes, this policeman was abnormally polite giving the impression that it was artificial, and at other times, he would be angry and harsh to the general public in the airport.

A friend of mine told me that it is extremely dangerous to sit around security persons nowadays. This is especially so during the night, when they would be heavily drinking and carrying loaded guns. But drinking is the only coping/escape mechanism for these low ranking army and police persons under pressure from their higher ranks and from the constant risk of Maoist attacks. They are the ones who are most exposed to the attacks from the Maoists. The common citizens, including the development workers, often face the consequences of the psychological pressure these security persons undergo.

Dress and Other Codes

When I arrived at the airport, I was amazed at how people looked strangely at me. I thought I looked very normal. But outside the airport, the office staff who came to pick me up told me that the cap I was wearing is a Maoist cap. I was surprised. I had recently bought it in a Gandhi handloom outlet in India and the fighters are not seen wearing them. It turns out that one of the prominent Maoist leaders wears such a cap. I did not heed the suggestion given by the office staff until I overheard women on the way to the market saying that a new person has come to the village wearing a 'Maoist cap.' When I heard this, I removed the cap and kept it in my bag.

There are other dress codes, particularly in relation to the brand name of shoes. The commonly available Gold Star shoe is considered by the soldiers to be a 'Maoist shoe.' This shoe is made in Nepal and is also relatively cheap. Soldiers would suspect a young man and woman wearing a Gold Star shoe to be a Maoist. Luckily my sport shoe was of a 'safe' brand.

As most of the development workers were young and rustic like any Maoists, they had to dress cautiously. They would definitely not wear my cap or the Gold Star shoe. They were also conscious of other brands of clothes considered by soldiers to be Maoist. They take care of their

elbows and knees to make sure that they look clean and soft. They wash these parts regularly and softly massage them with oil and ghee. While checking young persons soldiers scrutinize these parts under the assumption that Maoist cadres have roughly treated their elbows and knees in their training.

I asked whether the identity cards given by the office would be sufficient to keep army personnel from suspecting project workers were Maoists. I was told that army personnel would suspect any NGO grassroots worker in conflict areas of being Maoist supporters and sympathizers, and these identity cards would not truly be trusted. This also was my experience in one instance in the neighbouring district. I came across about 150 army personnel in a hill pass about an hour's walk from district headquarters who asked my two young male research assistants, also working as development workers in villages, various questions, and then started to check their bags. Possibly due to my graying hair the army usually has not troubled me, and this time they also they let me go easily. When I realized that some time was going to be spent checking these research assistants, I went to the soldiers and told them that I was from Kathmandu working on a project and that the men were working with me as research assistants. The army officer looked me over and let my assistants go without further checks.

The other codes include the use of torch light, not staying out long in the night, blocking the window to the roadside by bricks, and sleeping on the floor if firing takes place. Torch lights attract the attention of both army and Maoists and can make their bearers into targets. Similarly, when I stayed late until about nine p.m. I was told that if this were to persist the army would ask for explanations.

Staying in a Family with an Older Woman

Development workers have now realized that older women can directly and strongly argue with Maoists. Only women can refuse Maoist demands for food and shelter. If the same refusal would come from a man, they would take him away from home and kill him. Therefore, development workers also feel safe and stay in such families where older women can protect them. The reason for this behaviour of Maoists towards older women is unclear. But it should be noted that it is in the cultural practice of both Hindu and non-Hindu families/communities to see older women as mothers. Moreover, it is a tradition that females should not be killed. This practice is also seen in the hunting and butchering of animals.

In the district headquarters, the strategy is somewhat different. District headquarters were found to be over-militarised and this seems to pose other problems and risks. Therefore, office workers were found to maintain two residences - in the office quarters and in a private home. Even though formally they say that they stay in the office quarters, in reality they sleep in a room rented in a private house with the family of the landlord. It is one of the ways to maintain a distance from the army, which also seems to bring many risks. Moreover, as bomb blasts in para-statal offices have tended to take place at the start of office time, office workers enter office late and leave early.

Checking Information from Both Sources

Though development workers behave as if they wholly believe the information given by the army and government, they try to confirm it from the Maoist side also. Radio was one of the sources to find out what is going on from the Maoist side. I had a chance to listen to a FM radio station operated by a Maoist group. I was told about this station only after I had been with the trainees for two days. They know about the radio, the day of broadcasting and the frequency from Maoist contacts. As the place, date and frequency of the radio broadcasting keeps on changing (to escape from army search), development workers need to be vigilant of the changes in radio programs. They regularly ask Maoist cadres about the changes. The radio broadcasts were also important for the development workers to know about Maoists and who to contact if need arises. The Maoists radio refuted many of the news that came from government media.

Conclusion

It seems that from the perspective of grassroots development workers, it is extremely difficult to carry on development activities in conflict areas. This difficulty is not only caused by Maoists, but also by army personnel. To cope with the problems, these grassroots development workers have developed a variety of mechanisms to adapt to the conflict situation and to carry on development work. They have been doing this not only because they have a commitment to development work, but also because they have to earn a living.

The continuity of development work in conflict zones also gives the impression at the national or at donor's level that projects continue to be implemented with little or no problems. Most of the persons working at this level do not understand and know the problems at the grassroots.

Their false impression overlooks the problems the grassroots development workers are facing in their day-to-day life. As this narrative shows they have been exposed to various risks and dangers at great physical, emotional and psychological costs.