



## SUCCESS STORY

### Informing People about Transition through Comedy



Hari Bansha and Madan Krishna in a comic scene from their show, "Madan Bahadur/Hari Bahadur."



The program addresses issues the country faces as it transitions to democracy. In a scene from the show, Hari's daughter learns of her husband's death.

USAID/NEPAL

In August 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a 2-year, \$15,000,000 program in Nepal to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country's political, social, and economic future. The objectives of the program are to:

1. Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and
2. Increase the effectiveness of key political transition institutions.

**July 2007** – The current political transition in Nepal has seen both positive and negative developments. Positive action has led to the formation of an interim parliament, the promulgation of an interim constitution, and most importantly, the announcement of and preparation for Constituent Assembly elections in November. Conversely, the proliferation of armed groups, numerous strikes, continuing violations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and rising ethnic tensions threaten to derail the peace process. Furthermore, many Nepali citizens remain unaware of the details of the CPA and, as a result, are unable to participate fully in the effort to create a peaceful and democratic Nepal.

To raise awareness of the issues the country faces during its political transition, and to promote positive attitudes that can constructively influence the peace process, USAID/OTI has provided support to launch a TV series featuring Nepal's leading comic duo, MaHa (Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansha Acharya). The stars are renowned for their comic genius and respected for their democratic convictions. Their show, "Madan Bahadur/Hari Bahadur," is the story of a conniving villager's relationship with his kind-hearted neighbor. The show's episodes focus on pertinent transition issues, such as the plight of displaced people, inclusiveness and social harmony, demonstrations and strikes, the CPA, arms management, women's rights, landmine problems, human rights abuses, compensation for victims, and elections.

The program has quickly become one of the country's most popular shows, reaching an estimated seven million viewers in Nepal and abroad. Viewer's letters express gratitude to MaHa for raising relevant issues, and the show's catchphrase, "yaso gare kaso hola" (what if we do this instead), is mimicked by people in everyday parlance and invoked in editorials and cartoons. Because of its popularity, the series has been extended, from 12 episodes to 15, and the duo is planning to continue producing the show after USAID/OTI support ceases. In addition, to further leverage the comedy team's success, Nepal's Election Commission, which also receives USAID/OTI support, has asked MaHa to assist with a voter education campaign.