



Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project

CS:MAP Newsletter

August 2020

Issue 34

Words from the Deputy Chief of Party

It is my pleasure to share with you yet another issue of the Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) monthly newsletter. I hope that this 34th issue will help us reflect upon activities carried out and achievements made in July 2020, share with and learn from one another, cherish the collective results that we have achieved so far, and aspire to do more towards advancing the Nepali public interest. As with the previous issues, I anticipate that you will enjoy going through this edition and provide feedback on making future editions even more interesting and fruitful.

Happy reading!

Prem Raj Ojha
Deputy Chief of Party,
CS:MAP, FHI 360 Nepal

Amid escalating cases of infection and death from the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across the country, civil society organizations (CSOs) and media partners of Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) continued to scale up support to the government to fight the disease. Besides, CSOs also advocated with the provincial and local governments to improve state policies for effective public resource use and public service delivery. This report highlights the activities undertaken by CS:MAP partners across the project districts.

Strengthening Enabling Environment for Civil Society and Media Organizations in Nepal

Provincial Interactions on Civic Engagement in Law-making Process Organized

Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC) organized two interactions among parliamentarians and CSOs on the importance and status of civic engagement in the law-making process. These were held on July 28 and July 30, 2020 in Pokhara, Gandaki Province, and in Hetauda, Bagmati Province respectively. The objective was to sensitize stakeholders on the importance of civic participation in democratic law-making process.



INSEC shared a review of provincial law-making process and reflection of stakeholders on civic engagement in the law-making process in the provinces. The review had identified a gap in stakeholder's participation. Netra Nath Adhikari, Speaker of the Gandaki Provincial Assembly, said participation of citizens was essential in policy and law-making processes. 'Earlier, there was no direct interaction with stakeholders, but from now onwards, civil society will be involved based on their expertise and concern,' he said. CSO leaders urged the provincial parliamentarians to mandatorily involve CSOs while drafting laws and policies.

Sanu Kumar Shrestha, Speaker of the Bagmati Provincial Assembly, spoke about the provisions for civic participation in the provincial law-making process. The provincial parliamentarians expressed their commitment to consult with stakeholders. A total of 25 participants (9 female) including 11 members of parliament (MPs) of the Gandaki Province, and 25 (4 female) including 4 MPs

Civil Society Urges Province 2 Government to Amend Provisions in Media Bills

Freedom Forum organized a virtual discussion on 'Media Bills of Province 2 and Stakeholder Concerns' on July 14, 2020. The objective was to seek common understanding on conflicting provisions in the Bills, and pressurize the government and the Provincial Assembly to amend such provisions. Representatives of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) Chapter of Province 2 and media people, complained that their demands had not been heeded to in the drafting and tabling of these Bills in the Provincial Assembly. The two bills: Management and Regulation of Province Communication; and Operation of Provincial FM, Radio, and Television, have been criticized for provisions that contravene the freedom of expression enshrined in the constitution.

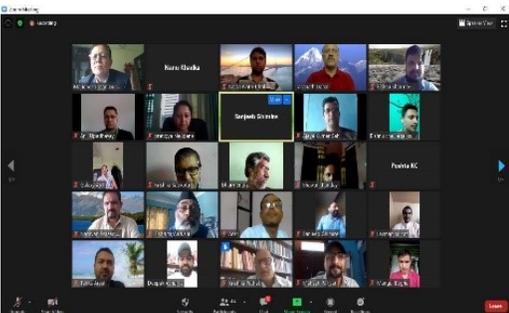


Participants criticized the government for not organizing prior consultations with provincial stakeholders and for ignoring their demands. They highlighted provisions that were inconsistent with the constitutional provisions of articles 17 and 19 related to freedom of expression, media freedom and right to information. Speakers expressed concern regarding numerous structures with multiple positions held by ministers and government officials. The Bills require all media outlets to register, acquire compulsory press pass for journalists, and aim to regulate foreign reporters, while they remain silent on the accountability of media towards people. There were 21 participants including three females.

Strategic Collaboration to Promote RTI Emphasized

Freedom Forum organized a virtual discussion on the 'Use of Right to Information, its Challenges, and Opportunities' on July 24, 2020. The objective was to bring together CSO representatives, and right to information (RTI) activists and practitioners in an attempt to strengthen joint efforts between CSO's, the National Information Commission (NIC) and RTI activists, and to strategically utilize opportunities and deal with challenges. RTI is a major component of open government partnership (OGP) that promotes transparency and accountability of the government. Speakers emphasized the need for proper implementation of RTI obligation by all public bodies, proactive disclosure, and ease of access to information, specifically during crisis.

Mahendra Man Gurung, Chief Information Commissioner, said about 75% of public agencies had appointed Information Officers, and 25% had been proactively disclosing information, as mandated by law. Low level of awareness on both demand and supply sides; the propensity to hide information; weak data protection mechanisms failure to effectively utilize information technology; lack of incentives for RTI stakeholders; and classification of information were discussed as major challenges. Participants demanded for the development of



strategic and innovative mechanisms for RTI; for e-court and video conferencing; for the audit of status of proactive disclosure of information by public bodies; and for strategic collaboration between CSOs, RTI practitioners and NIC. Speakers included Tara Nath Dahal, Dharmendra Jha, Krishna Pathak, Tanka Aryal, Krishna Sapkota, and Umid Bagchand, among others. Out of 53 participants, eight were female.

Civil Society Leaders Discuss CSO Accreditation Indicators

GoGo Foundation organized a virtual discussion on the final draft of CSO Accreditation Indicators and its further process, among CSO and media leaders in Kathmandu on July 30, 2020. The objective was to discuss and adopt an acceptable accreditation process to improve CSO's image in Nepal, and to discuss on the final draft indicators. Kedar Khadka, Executive Director, GoGo Foundation, shared the framework on internal governance and self-regulation, its importance and CSO accreditation indicators. Padam Prasad Khatiwada shared detailed indicators on CSO accreditation and the recommendation for formation of an independent CSO accreditation board/committee. Binod Bhattarai of Transparency International Nepal said the major problem for CSOs in Nepal was the lack of transparency and accountability.

CSO accreditation was discussed as one of the best accountability tools for public image building of CSOs. However, community-based organizations may not always be able to fulfill the minimum requirements of CSO accreditation, he added. Babita Basnet said the common objective was to change the perception towards CSOs by promoting their transparency and accountability. Jit Ram Lama, President, NGO Federation of Nepal, said CSO accreditation was one of the tested tools to improve CSO governance and reduce public grievances toward CSOs. Altogether, 40 CSO and media leaders participated in the discussion from different parts of country.

Civil Society and Media Engagement with Government for Effective Public Resource Use and Service Delivery

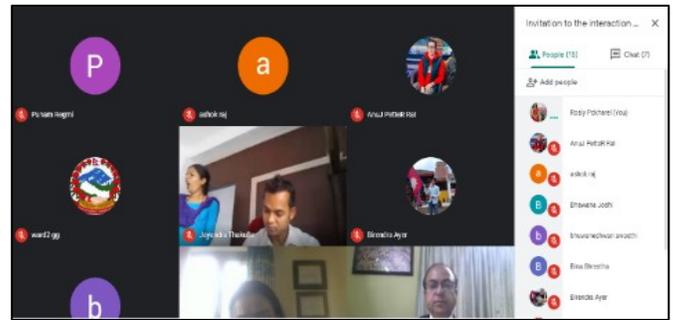
Acquiring Citizenship Certificate Elates Manju and her Daughter

Ruchi Mishra, 20, a resident of Nepalgunj sub-metropolis Ward 9 received citizenship certificate through her mother on July 23, 2020. This was because of the unceasing efforts of Information and Human Rights Research Centre (IHRC). Ruchi's mother Manju Devi Baniya had been fighting for her daughter's citizenship certificate for four years. After being tired of frequently visiting the District Administration Office (DAO) of Banke, she filed a case at the Tulsipur High Court on August 6, 2019 with the help of IHRC. The court ordered the DAO, Banke to issue citizenship certificate to Ruchi Mishra through her mother. After Manju returned empty-handed despite visiting the DAO along with a copy of the court order, she contacted IHRC.

On July 22, 2020 IHRC conducted a virtual "Radio Dialogue" on the issues of citizenship where Manju Devi also participated. The Chief District officer (CDO) of Banke was one of the panelists. Manju shared her struggle and the plight of her daughter. The CDO asked Manju to visit him the next day at his office. Manju and Ruchi visited the CDO the next day and they acquired the citizenship certificate. Now their happiness knows no bounds. An elated Manju says, "My daughter's future is bright. She is determined to contribute to the development of the nation."

Technical Support Provided to Local Government to Develop GESI Policy

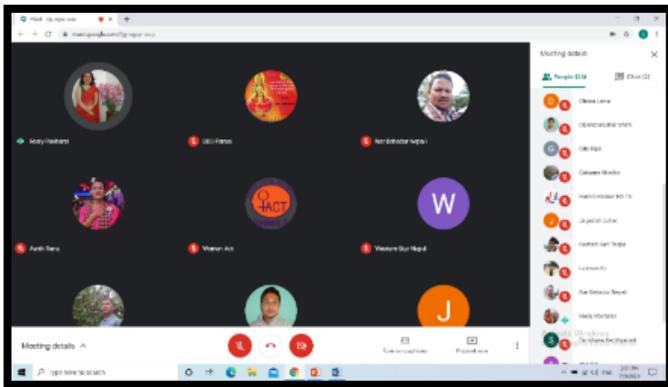
In an effort to promote policy-level commitment to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Women Act drafted a GESI policy for the local government. The policy was drafted aligning with the federal governance system and as per the mandate and jurisdiction of local level government as per the constitution and the Local Government Operation Act, 2017. Women Act also held a virtual interaction with officials of Gauriganga municipality, Kailali and representatives of CSOs to share and discuss the draft GESI Policy on July 30, 2020.



A representative from the sexual and gender minority community raised a concern over the lack of data on sexual and gender minorities. While it is important to have data, the lack thereof should not form basis for exclusion, he added. Officials appreciated the initiative to support the local government and pledged to call for an executive committee meeting to further discuss the draft GESI policy to render it more specific.

Interactions on Human Rights Situation of Women and Sexual and Gender Minorities Held

Women Act held a virtual interaction on human rights situation of women and sexual and gender minorities among activists and CSOs of West Rukum and Saptari districts on July 9, 2020. The objective was to sensitize people to human rights violations faced by the vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also called for collaborative advocacy efforts to protect their rights in the unusual circumstances. Participants shared accounts of gross violation of human rights of women and sexual and gender minorities and their challenges in seeking and accessing support due to the lockdown and lack of information. They said COVID-19 had increased inequalities and hit them harder.



According to a participant, Manish Yadav, the first trans person to have a test-tube baby, committed suicide due to dire financial situation worsened by COVID-19. In West Rukum, the local police refused to register a case of violence against women, citing the pandemic as a reason. The impact of COVID-19 on girls' education due to increased household workload was also discussed. Participants urged civil society to hold the government accountable to protect the rights of women, girls and sexual and gender minorities. Altogether 27 people took part in the events.

Interaction on Citizenship Amendment Bill Held

Women Act organized a webinar on citizenship law and the proposed citizenship amendment Bill on July 15, 2020. The objective was to sensitize the state and non-state actors and stakeholders to gender discrimination and biases in the Bill.

Laxman Lal Karna, Federal Parliamentarian, said the proposed provisions reinforced discrimination against foreign women married to Nepali men. He said the Parliamentary State Affairs and Good Governance Committee's decision to impose seven years' waiting period was impractical.



Pushpa Bhusal, Federal Parliamentarian, said the proposed Bill does not address the discriminatory provision against sexual and gender minorities, which requires medical proof to obtain citizenship based on their gender identity. Sabin Shrestha, advocate, urged the government to pass the Bill immediately, despite its discriminatory provisions against women and sexual and gender minority, as the delay had rendered people stateless. There were altogether 82 participants, including policy makers, legal practitioners, civil society representatives, human rights advocates, women and sexual and gender minority activists.

LDAG and HEAD Representatives Discuss Sustainability of Local Structures

The Institute of Human Rights and Communication, Nepal (IHRICON) organized an interaction with the representatives of Listening, Dialogue and Action Group (LDAG) and Health, Education, Agriculture and Disaster Risk Reduction (HEAD) coalition in Bhaktapur on July 17, 2020. The objective was to collect information on activities carried out by different local structures in Suryabinayak and Changunarayan municipalities, and to discuss the sustainability of local structures facilitated by CS:MAP in Bhaktapur district.

They also explored the possibility of conducting in-person meetings in the field, possible activities in response to COVID-19, and plans of local structures. Ganesh Wagle, Coordinator of Gundu LDAG, requested for more intensive training and exposure to LDAG members to make those structures more efficient. The meeting also decided to continue organizing field meetings of different structures in Bhaktapur, abiding with government directives to avoid COVID-19 transmission.



Similarly, IHRICON organized an interaction with HEAD coalition members in Lalitpur district on July 24 to discuss issues related to local governments' response to COVID-19, effective public service delivery, resource allocation and governance.

Sanjeevani Nepal Assesses Its GESI Policies

Sanjeevani Nepal reviewed its organizational policies on GESI from July 14-15, 2020. The objective was to review organizational policies and strategy and analyze organization's programs implementation. The organization also looked into its promotional materials and publications; documentation of good practices; organizational culture and value; lessons learned, and gaps in GESI policies. Ten people including board members and staff participated in the assessment. They decided to formulate a child protection policy; improve office management; establish complaint mechanisms; develop a quarterly activity calendar; document best practices; and affiliate with GESI networks. They developed an action plan to review eight existing policies. Neetu Bhatta, Executive Director of Sanjeevani Nepal, facilitated the assessment.

Sajhedari Manch Organizes a Meeting in Baitadi

Dasharath Chand municipality, Baitadi organized a meeting of *Sajhedari Manch* (Partnership Forum) on July 28, 2020 to engage civil society and other stakeholders in local development process. Neetu Bhatta, Executive Director of Sanjeevani Nepal, reviewed the decision of previous meetings and shared the progress of the forum. Representative of NGO Federation of Nepal, Federation of Nepali Journalists and other civil society leaders raised the issues related to local governments' response to COVID-19.



They asked the municipality to disclose the detail of expenses and to revise Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) policy incorporating the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic. CSOs and media demanded that the municipality organize social audits and public hearings. CSO coalition of Baitadi submitted a 12-point memorandum to the mayor to improve public service delivery, public resource use, transparency and accountability of the municipality. The mayor, Ward chairs and chief administrative officer pledged to disclose all expenses related to the COVID-19 response, organize social audits and public hearings as per the government's guideline, and to revise the DRRM policy.

Similarly, Sanjeevani Nepal in partnership with Amargadhi municipality organized *Sajhedari Manch* (Partnership Forum) meeting in Dadeldhura on July 28, 2020. Participants requested the municipality to distribute social security allowance through Ward offices because of the COVID-19 crisis. Bishweshor Prasad Ojha, Mayor, agreed to the request. Representatives from governmental and non-governmental organizations, media, CA and other stakeholders participated.



Support to Develop Curriculum in Tharu Language

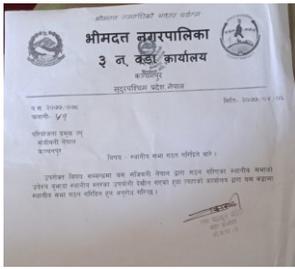
Ghorahi sub-metropolis will implement curriculum in the Tharu language from class one to three from academic year 2020/21. In this regard, the sub-metropolis organized an interaction among stakeholders to collect feedback on a draft curriculum, in coordination with various Tharu organizations including Rural Women Development Center (RWDC), on July 6, 2020. Participants said that was a positive step to provide education in mother tongue in public schools which would enhance the learning achievement of Tharu students. Mayor of Ghorahi sub-metropolis said they had allocated budget for publishing books and managing teachers. RWDC had prepared a Participatory and Evidence-based Action Research (PEAR) report on the need for such a curriculum and submitted it to the sub-metropolis. There were 20 participants from various CSOs, media, communities and government schools.

घोराही, २२ असार । घोराही उपमहानगरपालिकामा धारु भाषाको पाठ्यक्रम तय हुने भएको छ । घोराही उपमहानगरपालिकाले स्थानिय भाषामा पाठ्यक्रम निर्माण गर्न क्रममा धारु भाषाको पाठ्यक्रम (कक्षा १ देखि ३ सम्म) निर्माण गर्ने लागेको हो । यसैविच आइतबार पाठ्यक्रमको प्रारम्भमाथि सर्वोकारवाहदरु विच छलफल गरिएको छ ।



Replication of Common Assembly in Bhimdutta Municipality

Bhimdutta municipality (a local government not within CS:MAP working area) of Kanchanpur district replicated the Common Assembly (CA) practice in its different Wards. At the request of the municipality, Sanjeevani Nepal provided technical support to form three CAs in Wards 3, 5 and 11. The municipality has planned to expand it to all Wards and to allocate budget for the operation of CAs. Previously, CS:MAP had supported to form a CA in Krishnapur municipality of the district. The CA performed well, and its reputation spread across the district. The members of youth club, farmers group, women/mothers' group, forest users' group and elected representatives participated in CA meetings and agreed to replicate the CA to other Wards to promote good governance effectively engaging with local governments. The municipality has also formulated a CA guideline to institutionalize it.



HEAD Coalition Urges Local Governments to Revise their DRR Policy

Community Development Center, Nepal organized a meeting of the HEAD coalition in Bidur, Nuwakot on July 23, 2020. The objective was to share the local and district-level issues related to HEAD and to review the local-level Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policy based on the present COVID-19 scenario. The meeting decided to provide feedback to local units of working *gaunpalikas* to amend their DRR policies in the context of the pandemic, develop working guideline of HEAD coalition, and request *palikas* to publicize the expenses incurred to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Coalition members pledged support to implement advocacy issues. A total of 16 participants including Devaki Poudel, Chair of the Women Human Rights Organization; Gokarna Prasad Nepal, Vice chair of the NGO Federation district chapter; and Kapildev Khanal Chair of the Federation of Nepali Journalists Nuwakot chapter, among others, took part.



CSOs Jointly Oversee Flood-affected Areas, Health Post

CSOs in Sindhupalchowk conducted a joint oversight of landslide and flood-affected areas of Sindhupalchowk district on July 30, 2020. They went to Jammu bazar, in Ward 5 of Barhabise municipality which was worst affected by landslide and flash flood. They met with citizens and survivors, and discussed how relief, rescue and rehabilitation were being provided to them by the local government. Immediately after the landslide, Barhabise municipality and local CSOs jointly distributed relief materials to 545 affected households.



The civil society team also met with elected officials of the municipality and discussed how they could jointly support the survivors to rehabilitate them in safer places. "We have provided relief to the victims and also updated the figures so that we can support them in reconstructing their houses," said Sushila Pakhrin, Deputy Mayor. Before conducting the oversight, HEAD coalition in Chautara, the district headquarters of Sindhupalchowk, had organized a meeting on July 20, 2020 with CSOs to discuss about flood and landslide in the district. The meeting agreed to conduct a joint oversight of the landslide-affected areas and discuss with the local government about rescue, relief and rehabilitation.

CSOs in Pyuthan also carried out public service oversight in Hansapur Health Post at Sarumarani-3 of the district on July 19, 2020. The team discussed with the health post team and found that health post was providing regular services, properly arranging water and soap, treating pregnant women, and maintaining proper lab services. The health post had also been providing home services to 14 patients aged 84. The team also found some lapses in maintaining citizen charter, providing information on the free medicine list, allocating separate rooms for patients with infectious diseases, making 31 types of medicines available and fulltime staff presence. After the oversight, the team conducted a meeting with Jhag Bahadur Bishwokarma, chair of the *gaunpalika* and shared the findings with him. Then the chairperson instructed the coordinator of the health post to improve those things in future. He also promised to regularly discuss with health post staff to improve quality of services and correct the lapses.

Civil Society Urges Local Governments to be Transparent and Accountable

Integrated Rural Development Society (IRDS) organized a district-level interaction on 'Transparency and Accountability of Local Governments During COVID-19 Pandemic' in Tamghas, Gulmi on July 31, 2020. Participants from civil society, media, academia, legal fraternity including private sector discussed how local governments should promote transparency and accountability in its actions toward containing the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants raised the issue of transparency in expenditures made in responding to COVID-19 and to publicize full details of the budget for the fiscal year 2020/21 through governments' websites.



They also discussed the importance of social accountability tools such as public hearing, public audits, and social audits in promoting transparency and accountability. They decided to handover a memorandum to the District Coordination Committee (DCC) to maintain transparency in expenses for COVID-19, publicize details of budget for fiscal year 2020/21 on their websites, and to promote the use of social accountability tools. Accepting the memorandum, DCC chair Laxman Parajuli pledged to share the issues raised by civil society with all local governments. Padam Prasad Pandey, a civil society activist, urged local governments to be transparent and accountable. A total of 25 people (14 females) participated in the discussion.

Editorial Team

Prem Raj Ojha, Deputy Chief of Party, CS:MAP, FHI 360 Nepal

Nirmal Rijal, Ph.D., Media Director, CS:MAP, Equal Access International

Ram Sharan Sedhai, Development Communication Manager, CS:MAP, FHI 360 Nepal

This newsletter is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this newsletter are the sole responsibility of FHI 360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

For Further Information Contact:

Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) | FHI 360 Nepal

GPO Box 8830, Gopal Bhawan, Anamika Galli, Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Tel: 977.1.4437173 | Fax: 977.1.4117475

Web: <https://www.fhi360.org/countries/nepal>