



Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project

CS:MAP Newsletter

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Words from the Chief of Party, Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project

It is my immense pleasure in bringing to you yet another issue of the Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) monthly newsletter. I sincerely hope that this 25th issue will help us reflect upon activities and achievements from the month of October 2019, share with and learn from one another, cherish the collective results that we have achieved this far, and aspire to do more towards advancing the Nepali public interest. As with the earlier issues, we anticipate that you will enjoy reading this edition, and provide feedback on making future editions even more interesting and fruitful.

Happy reading !

Bishnu Sapkota
Chief of Party, CS:MAP;
Country Director, FHI 360
Nepal

Strengthening Enabling Environment for Civil Society and Media Organizations in Nepal

Strategic Discussion Held on Public Service Broadcasting

Freedom Forum organized a strategic discussion on Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) and the proposed PSB Bill on October 25, 2019. The primary objective of the meeting was to share brief highlights of proposed PSB Bill and facilitate common understanding among stakeholders, mainly among trade union representatives of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television (NTV).



The meeting emphasized on revising conflicting provisions within the Bill to ensure that Nepal practices independent public service broadcasting enabled by PSB legislation. The proposed Bill has already been approved by the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. The Bill has been submitted to the Council of Ministers for final approval. It is proposed that this Bill will merge the existing government owned Radio Nepal and Nepal Television into one public service broadcasting entity.

The major issues related to the Bill that were discussed were the formation of the Council and its functions, formation and function of executive committee, formation of recommendation committee, dismissal of chair and members, revenue sources for the PSB, submission of the annual report and accountability measures, ensuring wide public access to PSB frequency, reflection of diversity, quality of the contents, editorial independence, and strategic partnerships among others. Freedom Forum Executive Director Tara Nath Dahal highlighted the issues of the draft bill and asked for participants to collaborate with stakeholders to reform the Bill on time.

Representatives from different trade unions from both Radio Nepal and NTV expressed their commitment for collaboration in supporting policy advocacy for reforming the Bill. They expressed solidarity and committed to collective

efforts on policy advocacy, lobbying, and creating awareness and common understanding among stakeholders on gaps in the Bill. Of the 20 participants at the discussion five were female 5.

Working Group Constituted for Good Governance Policy Formulation

Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) in partnership with Development Exchange Centre (DEC Nepal) organized an interaction among the representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) and media for possible collaboration and strategic partnership in Dhading on October 18, 2019. The objective of the interaction was to enhance collaboration among CSOs and media at the sub-national level to promote freedoms of association and expression. Additionally, the collaboration between the sectors was aimed at enhancing their role as watchdog in the functioning of the local governments.

The participants said that collaboration between civil society and media could contribute a lot to enhance the performance of local governments through watchdog role and partnership. They also agreed to support the local governments to draft good governance policy. Media representatives suggested that the civil society should take the lead role for the policy formulation and media would contribute regularly. Additionally, the media would monitor and publish the progress and implementation status of such policies.



CSO representatives said that establishing good governance and effective public service delivery were the primary tasks of the current local governments. Realizing the importance of the initiation, the participants at the interaction formed a working group of activists to facilitate and initiate the formulation of good governance policy at different local governments of Dhading district.

Advocate Radhika Sapkota; Chairperson of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Dhading, Rudra Bahadur Khatri; Central Committee Member of Nepal Disabled Association, Guna Raj Khatiwada; Chairperson of Dalit Sewa Sangh, Shyam Bahadur Magrati; and Chairperson of NGO Federation Dhading and Station Manager of Radio Dhading were inducted as the members of the working group. The working group will advocate for and support the local governments to form and implement good governance policy at the local level.

Similarly, the CSO and media representatives agreed to advocate to ensure the participation of people and stakeholders in the local development planning and policy formation process. The event was attended by 30 participants, of which 9 were female, representing different CSOs and media.

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

Civil Society and Media Stress on Joint Efforts to Strengthen Governance

Integrated Rural Development Society (IRDS) organized an interaction between civil society and media on October 23, 2019 at Sandhikharka, the district headquarters of Arghakhanchi. Representatives from civil society and media collectively emphasized that coordination between civil society and media was a must for strengthening governance in a democratic system.

“Continuous dialogue and coordination between media and civil society contributes to increasing accountability and transparency in public service delivery,” said Hem Lekali, President of Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) District Chapter.



“Because of continuous oversight by CSOs, the local governments have begun practicing the use of social accountability tools on a regular basis,” Lekali added. CSOs in Arghakhanchi are actively advocating for reducing arrears, strengthening governance and initiating joint actions on public interest issues in the district.

CSO Coalition Discusses Increasing Arrears at Local Level

A CSO coalition meeting in Gulmi district discussed the rising arrears in public expenditures of 12 local governments in the district on October 22, 2019. The meeting also decided to organize a district-level interaction on this issue to draw the attention of the concerned stakeholders. According to the District Treasury Controller Office in Gulmi, the 12 local governments have accrued approximately NRs.160 million in arrear in FY 2017/18 with Musikot municipality the highest at NRs. 43 million and Gulmi Durbar *gaunpalika* the lowest at NRs. 339,000 only.



Padam Prasad Pandey, a CSO coalition member, said that civil society needed to discuss and interact in order to make all the local level governments responsible for reducing these arrears. Bishnu Prasad Bhandari, President of NGO Federation Gulmi District Chapter, said that they would share this agenda

with all CSOs and media through a district-level meeting.

The 56th Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General has highlighted how arrears of all audited agencies during fiscal year 2017/18 had increased by 36.7 per cent, to NRs. 683 billion, compared to the previous fiscal 2016/17, when the arrears were NRs. 500 billion. Provincial governments had recorded more arrears (NRs. 190 billion) than the federal government (NRs. 106 billion). The local governments had arrears of NRs. 24 billion.

Civil Society Monitors Paddy Fields in Pyuthan

CSOs jointly monitored paddy fields in the Pyuthan district as the farmers complained that their paddies had not grown fully and were not bearing grains. Farmers in Sarumarani *gaunpalika* had been distributed hybrid paddy seeds which they had planted in their fields in July. They were worried when the paddies did not grow fully while farmers in other *gaunpalikas* were already harvesting their crops.

“Last year I planted a different type of paddy which gave me a good harvest,” said Jit Bahadur Gurung, a farmer of Sarumarani *gaunpalika*, “I planted ‘*Garima*’, a hybrid paddy, this year which has not even fully grown and shows no sign of bearing grains. My fellow farmers who planted other hybrid paddies are now busy harvesting crops”, he added.



CSOs in Pyuthan took up this issue seriously and organized interactions with farmers, agrovet operators, the agriculture unit at the *gaunpalika*, and other concerned stakeholders. Agrovet operators in Pyuthan district had distributed the hybrid paddy ‘*Garima*’ to the local farmers for plantation. Ward chair Basanta Jaishi said that they would monitor paddy fields and initiate the process for compensating the farmers if their crops failed.

Earthquake-damaged Schools in Ramechhap Near Completion

The 2015 earthquake damaged 409 school buildings in Ramechhap district alone. Reconstruction of these school buildings has gained momentum partly because of the advocacy of CSOs. Now the total number of damaged school buildings stands at 389 after merger. Except for 31 schools, all these damaged school buildings are in the final stage of completion. Out of these 31, only 20 have sought reconstruction while 11 schools have been merged with other schools.

School reconstruction in Ramechhap is financially supported by different organizations. Seventeen schools are supported by Asian Development Bank, 21 by reconstruction entrepreneurs, 9 by the Indian Embassy, 208 by Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform (HRRP) and the rest are being reconstructed by school management committees. “These newly reconstructed school buildings will be completed soon with good facilities,” said Nirmal Kumar Ghimire, Chief of National Reconstruction Authority.



Joint advocacy campaigns by CSOs in Ramechhap district through interactions, delegations, press meets, media broadcasts and publication of news on delayed reconstruction put pressure on the concerned authorities which accelerated the construction work and they are now in the final stage of completion. Civil society initiatives contributed to draw the attention of Kailash Dhungel, Minister for Economic Affairs and Planning of Province 3.

Hemanta Budhathoki, Chief of Education Department of Manthali municipality, gives the credit to CS:MAP for carrying out continuous advocacy campaigns on the issue. CSO coalition coordinator Pandav Prasai said the campaign had a positive impact on the reconstruction of school buildings in Ramechhap district.

CSO Coalition Discusses Corporate Social Responsibility

Samudayik Sarathi organized a strategic coalition building meeting between CSOs and media in Kavre district on October 20, 2019. The objective of the meeting was to discuss Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of financial institutions working in the district.



In the meeting, participants said that nobody knew the status of CSR of financial institutions working in Kavre district. As per the policy, banks must invest at least one percent of their profit as CSR for the welfare and other social benefits.

To take the issue further and raise awareness on how banks are spending this amount, CSO coalition meeting has decided to organize an interaction on CSR in Dhulikhel very soon. The meeting also decided to conduct regular meeting between CSO and media to promote good governance and transparency.

Strategic Coalition Building Meeting to Advance Local Solutions

DEC Nepal, NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) and FNJ jointly, organized a strategic-coalition building meeting to initiate joint action in the Makwanpur and Dhading districts. The meeting held on October 16, 2019 in Hetauda, decided to conduct interaction between local governments, CSOs and media and share responsibility for coordination and preparation. Chaired by Ramila Sapkota, Vice-chair of NFN, 20 participants from different networks along with FNJ participated in the meeting. The meetings focused on collaboration between media and CSOs and discussed on the importance of joint initiatives at district and municipal levels. The following issues were raised during the meeting: implementation of the commitment of Bus Operator Committees to address unfair bus fares in Dhadingbesi; management of roads, landslides and floods; addressing three layers of taxes (local, province and federal) on community forests in Makwanpur and Dhading districts; and child marriage issues in Makwanpur.



Coalition Meets to Enhance Advocacy Efforts

DEC Nepal organized a coalition building meeting in Makwanpur district on October 20, 2019. It focused on three major agendas: progress on advocacy, different issues of the district and good governance policy. District Program Coordinator of DEC Nepal presented the status of advocacy in the district and its progress. Participants raised the

issues of three layers of tax on community forests, child marriage, legal provision for operating sawmill and expired food items being sold by the local shopkeepers and discussed on them.



Project Director of DEC Nepal made a presentation on the need of good governance policy at local level and shared its summary draft to the coalition members. The meeting decided to form a five-member taskforce for the preparation, understanding and facilitating the local governments to formulate the policy. The policy formulation will be started from Manahari *gaunpalika*. Capacity Building Specialist of Mitra Samaj provided technical support. Chaired by Bol Bahadur Karki, Secretary of NFN Makwanpur Chapter, the meeting was attended by representatives from Nagarik Samaj Manch (*civil society forum*), NFN, FNJ, and Federation of Community Forests Users Nepal, among others.

Gauriganga Municipality Pledges to Ensure Civic Participation

Gauriganga municipality invited Media for Development and Social Change (FMDC) to discuss on agenda raised by civil society representatives and conducted a meeting with Mayor Bhim Bahadur Deuba, Deputy Mayor Anchala Chaudhary, Executive Officer Bir Bahadur Shahi, and Information Officer Dataram Joshi of the municipality.

The meeting focused its discussion on service delivery, meeting people's expectations of ensuring availability of resources and addressing the grievances to the municipality. FMDC raised the following agenda for municipality and CSOs and media collaborations: all the existing media in the municipality should have a common understanding for reformative news coverage on the activities undertaken by the municipality; municipality should organize monthly press meet and publish quarterly bulletins to update on recently implemented activities; encourage CSOs and media for participation, feedback and support to municipality's efforts; encourage to apply and adopt social accountability tools at Ward level as per guidelines; encourage the public to access the municipal information; engage civil society and media in local level planning and implementation process; and form and review local policies and laws in participation with civil society and media organizations.



The municipal team committed to discuss the recommendations in the upcoming municipal meeting and the Mayor also committed to continue discussion with CSOs and media and to start discussion in each Ward under the leadership of Ward chairs and elected representatives.

RWDC Conducts Institutional Social Audit

Rural Women Development Centre (RWDC) conducted its institutional social audit on October 24, 2019 in Dang following the Social Audit Guidelines 2067 BS of Nepal Government. The social auditors (facilitators) had a focus group discussion with the beneficiaries and representatives of the government agencies of the project conducted by the organization. A preliminary social audit report was presented by social auditors and feedback was collected from the government agencies and beneficiaries. RWDC presented the overall performance of the organization and shared a brief concept of social audit and its process along with strengths, lessons learned, challenges and future plans of the organization.

The audit gave a positive message to the stakeholders in Dang district. Elected representatives said that the social audit conducted by RWDC should be taken as an example by other CSOs in the district to promote accountability and transparency. Deputy Mayor of the sub-metropolis Sita Sigdel Neupane committed to conduct social audit of the sub-metropolis this year. Similarly, CSO representatives also committed to conduct social audits of their organization in coming days.

A total of 105 representatives from District Coordination Committee, Ward Chair; Health, Education, Agriculture, and Disaster Risk Reduction (HEAD) coalition; target beneficiaries; community people; CSO and media representatives; common assemblies; Listening, Discussion and Action Groups (LDAGs) members; and HEAD sectoral government units participated in the social audit.



Listening and Discussion Action Groups Inspire Reform-oriented Action

Inspired by discussions around information they receive on CS:MAP's flagship radio program *Sajha Boli*, LDAGs plan and execute steps to address local issues of public interest – especially concerned with public resource use and service delivery. Having triggered significant changes in their communities over the past few years, they continue to plan creative and action-oriented activities for improving local governance. On October 14, *Gairigaun* LDAG, Okahldhunga conducted a clean-up campaign to clear roads obstructed by heavy rains. Participating actively in development activities undertaken by the municipality, they recently cleaned the source of drinking water in the village. As a result, 21 households now have access to clean drinking water, as explained by LDAG facilitator Srijana KC.

LDAG members also actively encourage young students in schools, colleges and communities in civic activism. The *Ugratara* LDAG in Dadeldhura district initiated the formation of an agricultural group to help local farmers lobby with the local government for the introduction of programs to support agriculture, and to seek funding support. As a result, a Dalit community that was hitherto unaware of government's agricultural support programs, has been able to access support in the form of potato seeds and seeds of other seasonal vegetables. 'Since the formation of the group, it has been comparatively easier for us to seek support from the government's agricultural program as we are now aware of benefits of commercial farming' said Laxmi Gairal, chair of the group. The *Karkigaun* LDAG in *Chhedagaad* municipality found out that an elected representative had formed a users' committee comprising of his relatives and family members for constructing a temple with a budget of NRs. 50,000. This has been put on hold after the LDAG intervened. There are several other stories where the LDAGs have acted as agents of change and disrupted ongoing malpractices. It is very evident that if young people, like those in the LDAG groups are provided with capacity support, they will become change-agents in transforming our societies.

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