

Final Report on

Strengthening Political Parties, Electoral and Legislative Process in Nepal

Prepared by

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BACKGROUND

The project "Strengthening Political Parties, Electoral and Legislative Process in Nepal" was begun at a time Nepal had witnessed political and constitutional vacuity triggered with the unceremonious demise of the first Constituent Assembly without deliver constitution. With the lack of constitutional set up on the one hand and the eroding public trust on the political parties on the other, a need to take initiative for strengthening political system was realized. It was also felt that once the political system grabs the normal track, it could improve democratic system by making active the electoral and legislative processes. In this very background in June 2013, the project funded by the Internews was launched, but in a downsized format. Freedom Forum was assigned to continue to manage and host the project site www.nepalelectionchannel.org covering electoral and political developments regarding election related issues. Similarly it was to continue updates in the site with original reports and facilitated discussions, news stories from major Nepali National dailies, expert opinion, reports, documents, international instruments, code of conduct related to media, elections and politics and crowdsource information from individual journalists trained under this project. Overall, one of the major goals of the project was aimed at strengthening the capacity for citizen input on the electoral process.

SUMMARY

It is the final report of the extended one year from June 15, 2013 to June 15, 2014. So, the report covers the activities carried out during this period. Freedom Forum, as mandated, focused especially on updates of election related news and opinions in both versions of the website. A total of 2,132 items were updated in the websites in a year alone thereby enriching the website with voluminous resources on election, legislative process (constitution writing), and the political and media developments. The news and opinion surged especially on the months nearing the date to the second Constituent Assembly, November 19, 2013. After the second CA elections, the update items gradually declined as the atmosphere of the election was over. During this period, the 122,663 people visited English version of the website- www.nepalelectionchannel.org/english while similar number of people 122,663 in the Nepali version- www.nepalelectionchannel.org. The extensive use of social media especially the facebook during the election period played a vital role to bring in light the website which obviously highlighted the issues and debates on democratic system of election and role of the representatives for writing the new constitution. Before the second CA election the number of facebook page likes was hardly 300 but it has now reached nearly 2,000. The stories updated in the website especially during the election were not only from capital city but from different parts of the country. FF should tell it that some the activities as updating public poll could not be updated from some constraints. It was informed that a separate website was developed to update the public poll.

PRINCIPAL GOALS

The principal goals of this project as agreed between Internews and FF were:

- Strengthening Capacity for Citizen Input on the Electoral Process and
- Media are better informed to cover election related issues at the national and district levels
- Media are utilized to facilitate debates on the results of national public opinion polling

TREND ANALYSIS

The ongoing transition in Nepal was further aggravated by the unceremonious demise of the first Constituent Assembly on May 27, 2012 thereby bringing forth despair among the people and political parties. But, the political situation gradually improved. Remaining aloof from the government, the political parties forged consensus to hand over the leadership of the bureaucratic government to the Chief Justice of Supreme Court. The government led by the Chief Justice became very successful to hold the second elections to the CA on November 19, 2013. Though the elections resulted in unexpected failure to some parties like the past rebellion Maoist party, it helped to ensure the political improvements thereby bringing the parties together in the CA and engross on drafting the new constitution again. The conflict surfaced on and off with the political parties with different ideologies and stands. However, they have come through the legitimate process to write the new constitution. Therefore, the constitution writing gradually took the pace and lately the political parties in the CA discussed on the crucial elements of the constitution as federalism and form of governance. The CA has the healthy debate among the people's representatives to give new constitution. Freedom Forum caught every points of the debates and updated as news and views (opinions) as brought by the print media. It has further helped people to debate on the views on the pressing issues of the constitution with the political development. The Freedom Forum updated the matters continuously so as to strengthen the capacity for citizens' input in the electoral process and enhance better media coverage on election/constitution writing.

ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT

With the downsizing of project, Freedom Forum focused especially on updates of news, opinions and press freedom violation in both versions of the website.

Daily newspapers were scanned; opinions, news, reports selected and updated in both versions of the website.

The Radio programs 'Loktantra Mantra', produced by the partner organization, Antenna Foundation, were uploaded up to 13 editions. However, the National Opinion Polls and monthly

dialogue papers could not be updated through the website as the project coordination side informed that a separate website was made for the updates.

The social media especially facebook and twitter were extensively utilized during the second election to the constituent assembly. To recapitulate here, the facebook page was extensively used during election.

The likes on facebook page of the website was increased after strategically selecting national and international media persons, organizations and political candidates of the CA election which helped to boost up the website visit.

The number of Facebook page of the website was liked by 1,822 at the last of 2013 which was around 1,000 in beginning of the October. Similarly, the number of facebook friends reached to 852 at the end of 2013 from around 170 in the beginning of October. This rising in visit and likes also showed the growing relevance of the website.

During this period, a total of 2,132 items ranging from election stories to the opinions were updated.

Time	Updates
June 2013	83
July	87
August	106
September	113
October	326
November	235
December	303
January 2014	279
February	200
March	148
April	110
May	61
June	81
Total	2,132

Segregating the updates, in the recent nine months, the updates categories were:

October 2013

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	31	105	136	326
2	Nepali	60	130	190	

November 2013

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	40	66	106	235
2	Nepali	64	65	129	

December (till 24) 2013

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	48	94	142	296
2	Nepali	65	89	154	

January 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	35	91	126	279
2	Nepali	82	71	153	

February 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	23	55	78	200
2	Nepali	60	62	122	

March (till 25) 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	16	56	72	148
2	Nepali	24	52	76	

April 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	14	32	36	110
2	Nepali	34	30	64	

May 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Total	Grand Total
1	English	7	28	35	61
2	Nepali	13	13	26	

June (till 24) 2014

SN	Version	Expert Views	Stories	Press Freedom Violation	Total	Grand Total
1	English	14	28	1	43	84
2	Nepali	15	26	-	41	

Moreover, we produced the two annual media monitoring reports (English)- one on Jan 1 2014, and another on May 3, 2014. And these reports are updated

The reports are updated in the website www.nepalelectionchannel.org/english. The link for the reports is

<http://www.nepalelectionchannel.org/english/media-watch/press-freedom-watch.html>

CHALLENGES AND LEARNING

As the project was in the downsized scale, the coordination among the project implementing partners was not smooth as expected. Similarly, the technical parts of the website had not repaired time and again, which the FF could not do without assistance from software developer.

Because of the complexity of the format of the radio program 'Loktantra Mantra' produced by Antenna Foundation, FF could not upload more than 13 editions - that too with the special help of the technical person- the website developer.

Another challenge- indeed perennial for some years- is load shedding. Because of the load shedding, the updates in the website and social media were not timely.

For the lack of proper link with the journalists trained by the Antenna Foundation, it was difficult for the FF to extensively mobilize them so that they could send the news reports from the field, which the FF could update in the website.

Political development in Nepal is not in tune with expectation, but in continuous swings. Sometime, the politics changes as if it yields good result very quickly while sometime it protracted on minor issues.

Based on the challenges mentioned above, what can be taken as learning is that the technical literacy among the journalists and even in the public is essential. Technically sound knowledge could further strengthen what the quality social media users.

Interestingly, it is also the learning that the concept of the facebook use among the Nepali is focused more on sharing views/news than debating on it.

Smooth political development affects everyone's mindsets- of voter, of political leader and of critics on politics. If the political and legislative developments had gone smoothly, the aim of reaching the public and strengthening their capacity for debates and inputs on electoral process and constitution writing could be easier.

OUTCOME/ACHIEVEMENTS

During a year's reporting from June 15, 2013 to June 15, 2014,

1. A total of 122,663 people's visits to the English version of the website- www.nepalelectionchannel.org/english
2. A total of 122,663 people's visits to the Nepali version of the website- www.nepalelectionchannel.org
3. Increment in facebook page like- 1909 to the website,
4. With the constant updates of the new items, and growing number of visitors, the website has been a centre of knowledge generation on election, constitution making process and media.
5. It helped people make healthy public opinion and exercise their right to vote for selecting good representative.
6. A resourceful site developed on electoral process, legislative activities (constitution writing) and media and political development

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

1. Regular updates of the news and views on election, constitution making and media and political developments.
2. Popularize the website with effective use of social media especially facebook, as facebook is more familiar than others in Nepal

CONCLUSION

The project in the extended period of a year though with minimized task (updating news stories and views on the electoral, political and legislative process) remained effective and very useful, also because Nepal held the elections to the Constituent Assembly for the second time in November 19, 2013. The upload of the relevant news and views in both versions of the website and the social media publicity obviously helped the growing relevance of the website. The updates during the second CA elections were really the hot cakes in the social media, which augmented the visibility of the website. To bring in light the issues related to the Constituent Assembly which is drafting the constitution and make the people aware, the upload of the news and views on the legislative is necessary. As the major work of constitution writing is going on in the country, the debates on special sectors and issues as form of governance, state restructuring and federalism are common. In order to reach such debates to the people and ensure citizens' participation in the constitution writing, the publicity with broader utilization of the social media carries meaning. Moreover, Nepal is holding the elections at local levels which bring vibes in the local bodies as in the central level. Activities relating to the local elections from the preparations to its holding and results are things that need to be promoted through the website.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Twelve (12) updates sheets from June 2013 to June 2014
2. Google tracking record