

# **FREEDOM FORUM**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2021-22  
(2078-79)**

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## Message from the Chairperson

The new constitution Nepal got six years back paved a way for formal institutionalization of federalism. With the federal democratic republic in place, the long unitary system came to an end. Three layers of government are made- local, provincial and federal. Although all three layers are making laws and rules, adequate laws and structures necessary to implement the changed context are yet to be made. In addition, governance faced various challenges such as twice dissolution of the parliament, formulation of regressive laws, shrinking civic space and civic rights.

Freedom Forum has been continuously showing concern and doing advocacy for the formulation of appropriate laws on freedom of expression and media regulation. Information Technology bill drafted to regulate and manage various issues surrounding internet is stuck at parliament for three years. The bill currently in the parliament is problematic one. FF has closely observed the bill and urged the parliamentarians to amend it in line with international human rights standards.

FF is also committed to promoting and protecting right to information and open data. Our activities this year also were focused on press freedom, making media friendly laws, freedom of expression and human rights friendly civic space.

Moreover, with the second local level elections round the corner, the political parties have intensified their campaigns across the country. Only free, fair and credible elections can pave strong foundation for functional democracy. Therefore, the activities of the political parties and government including constitutional body Election Commission (EC) - warrant attention and observation. To this, active role of civil society and media is expected. FF will always stand for accountable, transparent, open and sustainable democracy.

This report indicates FF's advocacy and efforts toward aforementioned issues in the past fiscal year 2021/22 along with its self-disclosure.

I on behalf of Freedom Forum would like to thank to all the national and international donors and activists for their immense support in accomplishment of the organization's goal.

Hari Binod Adhikari  
Chairperson

### **About the report**

This is an annual report containing major activities and achievements accomplished by Freedom Forum (FF) during a year-long period spanning from July 16, 2021 to July 16, 2022. The primary objective of the report is to disclose overall activities, learning, and outcomes of the organizational initiatives and demonstrate its track record and competence to execute ideas aligning the key themes of the organization. The report is expected to serve as a well-documentation of the key efforts of the organization to attain its objectives and a consolidated contribution FF made to the country's national development objective.

Information contained in this report have been widely extracted from the newsletters, project documents, project reports, press releases, website updates, meetings and discussion notes, media coverage and sharing on social media.

### **Who we are:**

Freedom Forum is an independent non-governmental organization, not-for-profit working for the institutionalization of democracy, protection and promotion of human rights, press freedom, freedom of expression, right to information and fiscal transparency in Nepal. Basically, the organization works in the area of policy research, evidence-based advocacy and campaign, capacity building and media mobilization.

This is a purely social organization registered with the District Administration Office of Kathmandu (Regd.127/062/063) and the Social Welfare Council (Affiliation No.18518) of Nepal. Its head office is in Kathmandu, Nepal. It has different representatives in regional and district sites to coordinate programs at local level.

It has 10-member Board of Directors, 65 general members, and 6 staffs. Its General Assembly is held every year. Board meetings are held twice a year. Freedom Forum has seven representatives/ stringers at seven provinces of Nepal.

#### **Executive Board members:**

Chairperson	Hari Binod Adhikari
Vice- Chairperson	Sahaj Man Shrestha
General Secretary	Dharmendra Jha
Joint Secretary	Yekraj Pathak
Secretary	Ram Maya Lamichhane
Treasurer	Kedar Dahal
Members	Bishnu Sharma
	Shiwaa Dahal
	Dr. Sudhamshu Dahal
	Bin Kumar Bishwakarma
	Narayan Bhattarai

### **Objectives:**

The key objectives of the organization are:-

- Protection and promotion of freedom expression and information
- Promotion and development of professional journalism
- Defending journalists, Right to Information activists and freedom of expression practitioners
- Promotion, protection and practice of the right to information

- Promotion of human rights and democratic norms and values
- Research/study, civic monitoring, oversight and education and advocacy for the guarantee of free and fair elections
- Promotion of the use of media, Right to Information, Open Data and Public Financial Management (PFM) tools to support the movement and campaign for social justice and development of disadvantaged people
- Contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through exchange of ideas, experience and learning at national and international level being focused on attaining the targets of Goal 16
- Affiliation and participation in regional and global networks related to transparency, right to information, freedom of expression, free and professional press, civic engagement and Open Government Partnership
- Undertake action research and study to draw evidences for advocacy in its core areas of works.

### **Our Mission:**

To safeguard the fundamental freedoms of citizens in full adherence to modern democratic norms and values.

### **Our Vision:**

To make sincere and collective efforts towards the resolution of conflict, restoration of peace and establishment of an ‘inclusive’ democracy in Nepal. For this press freedom, human rights and civil liberty are quite essential.

### **Ongoing Projects:**

Overview of the partnership projects being executed this fiscal year:-

SN	Name of project	Funding agency	Duration	Project Site	Financial grant
1.	Driving Audit Accountability: Audit Report for Collective Action to Strengthen Government Responsiveness (DAA)	International Budget Partnership (IBP)	September 2019 to September 2021	Kathmandu	\$55,000
2.	Mainstreaming Human Rights in Cyber security and Cybercrime policy (MHRC)	Global Partners' Digital	January 2020 to September 30 2022	Kathmandu	\$49,500
3.	Consultancy service for Development of Citizen Engagement Strategy in Nepalese Public Finance Management (PFM)	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Secretariat (PEFA)	December 2020 to December 2021	Kathmandu	NPR 24,88,200
4.	Open Budget Survey, Support to IBP in Developing Capacity Building Materials for civil Society Organizations	IBP	December 2020 to November 2022	Kathmandu	\$28,150
5.	Contributing to the atmosphere conducive for FoE and Information along with journalists& safety, justice, and policy reform/change	International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)	October 2021- June 2022	Kathmandu	\$20,059
6.	Training on Citizen Participation in Performance Audit	PSRD	December 2021- April 2022	Biratnagar and Nepalgunj	NPR 11,77,000
7.	Advocacy of the Open Data Perspective in the National Statistic Bill	TAF (The Asia Foundation)	August 2021- September 2021	Kathmandu	NPR 6,46,050
8.	Contributing to create atmosphere for free expression and reduction of impunity on crimes against journalists	IFEX	October 2020 to July 2021	Kathmandu	\$15,000
9.	Consultancy service for digital workshop on Media Content Monitoring for Gender, Bangladesh	Free Press Unlimited	March- December 2021	Kathmandu (Virtual)	702 GBP



## Programmes under the projects:

### 1. Driving Audit Accountability: Audit Report for Collective Action to Strengthen Government Responsiveness (DAA)

#### a. Focus group discussion:-

Discussion with locals and participants from government and CSOs was organized as part of this project in a field visit of road construction works carried by users' group named "Sitalbasti Tinpile Sadak Nirman Upabhokta Samitee" at Patalekhel of Dhulikhel Municipality. The field visit was carried out on 13<sup>th</sup> September with participation from OAG, Federal Public Accounts Committee, Bagmati Province Assembly Members, CSOs, media persons and Freedom Forum. There were total 15 participants for visit from Kathmandu and Dhulikhel.



#### b. Virtual Meeting on Users' Group Work, Current Situations, Changes in Way Forward:-

The meeting was conducted on January 14 among Federal and seven provincial Public Accounts Committee members through Zoom platform.

The meeting was useful to grasp the current works and PACs actions on this part of public



finance. It also helped us to tackle the current situation about the mismanagement and accountability of the Public Finance of the country.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/daa-user-group-meeting/?wpdmdl=5380&refresh=6477096fb50d71685522799>

c. Meeting with municipal associations:

The meeting was held among FF staffs and municipal association's chairs. Taranath Dahal, Krishna Prasad Sapkota, Subash Dahal from Freedom Forum, Rajendra Pyakurel (Executive Director, National Association of Rural Municipalities of Nepal) and Sarita Sapkota (Legal Officer, Municipal Association of Nepal) discussed upon FF's intervention in collaboration with OAG Nepal and PAC in promoting audit accountability particularly in the field of users' group and advocacy for implementation of recommendations from OAG Annual Report. The meeting was also useful to plan for future collaborations among FF and associations.

d. Involvement in MOFAGA taskforce as civil society representative:

Taranath Dahal and Krishna Sapkota from FF participated as resource person in the taskforce formed by Ministry of Federal Affairs & General Administration to provide their inputs on behalf of civil society sector to the ministry. The taskforce formed on November 14, 2021 incorporated recommendations on OAG report with inputs from NARMIN and MuAN, shared their findings during the taskforce meetings and submitted a report to the ministry. The taskforce duty was important to identify logical, practical and policy driven solutions which can be framed to curb the mismanagement in user group's works.

## 2. Mainstreaming Human Rights in Cyber security and Cybercrime policy (MHRC)

a. Dialogue on 'Human Rights on Internet/Cyberspace'

Freedom Forum organized a program on 'Human Rights on Internet/Cyberspace' in Kathmandu on November 15, drawing the participation of 36 people from different sectors. Multifarious issues surfaced during the discussion.

They were need of digital literacy, promotion and protection of FoE, and privacy, data protection, accountability of ISPS, and urgent need of transparency on algorithm used by NTA to filter content, discriminatory digital space, non-participatory policy-making, multi-stakeholders approach to deal with internet issues, amendment of existing laws and policies, access to affordability of internet etc.



For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/stress-on-inclusive-participatory-cyber-policy-making-promotion-of-foe-privacy-online/>

#### b. Review of the Information Technology Bill

Freedom Forum published a policy analysis paper reviewing the bill and its provisions. The paper also provides recommendation for the amendment and improvement of the bill, addressing freedom of expression and protection of human rights on internet. In the analysis, IT bill was reviewed in line with Nepal's constitution, existing laws, international instruments on human rights (UDHR, ICCPR, etc.) and the Budapest Convention.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/ffs-review-on-the-information-technology-bill>

### 3. Consultancy service for Development of Citizen Engagement Strategy in Nepalese Public Finance Management

#### a. Submission of report on national strategy & action plan for citizen engagement in PFM:



Freedom Forum prepared and formally handed over National Strategy & Action Plan for Citizen Engagement in Public Financial Management in Nepal to PEFA Coordinator Mr. Than Prasad Pangyani in a meeting at PEFA Premises in Anamnagar on March 6, 2022.

The submission included the National Strategy & Action Plan for Citizen

Engagement in Public Financial Management in Nepal (English & Nepali) for all three tiers of governments in Nepal along with the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan and Diagnostic Report in Citizen Engagement in PFM in Nepal. The strategy papers can be found on the website of PEFA secretariat.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/cpa-in-pfm-nepal/>

#### 4. Open Budget Survey:

##### a. Release of 'Open Budget Survey' report 2021:

The International Budget Partnership (IBP) unveiled its 2021 Open Budget Survey global and Nepal report, which found that most countries preserved accountable spending practices in their annual budget processes during the pandemic. According to the OBS report, budget transparency score of Nepal has dropped in the year 2021 in comparison to the 2019 round of survey. Nepal did not produce pre-budget statement and citizen budget out of key eight budget documents used to assess the budget openness, the survey report states. Freedom Forum works in partnership with IBP to generate data for Nepal's budget survey.



For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/obs-nepal-2021/>

##### b. Report release- Transparency and accountability of covid fiscal management 2020:

The report highlights findings of our assessment in Nepal which indicates the overall transparency of the stimulus, limited response and minimal mechanisms for citizen engagement in their formulation and implementation.

Report can be downloaded here: <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/managing-covid-funds-nepal-brief/?wpdmdl=4778&refresh=646f3a6b34e2a1685011051>

#### 5. Contributing to the atmosphere conducive for FoE and Information along with journalists& safety, justice, and policy reform/change :

##### a. Stakeholders' discussion on amendment of National Broadcasting Regulation:



Freedom Forum and rights defenders expressed severe concern over the amendment of 10 Rules of the National Broadcasting Regulation, 2052. They expressed such concern during a discussion organized jointly by Freedom Forum and Digital Rights Nepal in Kathmandu on March 7.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/amendment-of-the-national-broadcasting-regulation-2052-intended-to-curtail-free-speech-in-nepal/>

#### b. Celebration of 'World Press Freedom Day 2022'

Freedom Forum organized a program marking the World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2022, where it made three presentations- a policy analyses prepared on the basis of IT Bill, a study report on court verdicts on 100 cybercrime cases, and annual press freedom report-2022.



Representatives from Nepal Police, Nepal Bar Association, media, human rights and civil society organizations gathered on the day in the heart of Kathmandu city to share their views and greetings on the special day for journalists and media professionals. The event witnessed presence of 48 participants, including 15 women.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/challenges-to-freedom-of-expression-continues-in-nepal-may-3/>



c. Multi-stakeholder discussion on 'Digital threat to Nepali Journalists':



Freedom Forum conducted a multi-stakeholder discussion on Digital threat to Nepali Journalists in Kathmandu on July 8. The discussion was organized to discuss upon various threats and challenges media and journalists face while working in online space.

The program supported by International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) network gathered 43 participants (20 female) including representatives from National Women's Commission (NWC), National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Nepal police, Press Council Nepal (PCN), Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), academia, media, civil society organizations, and researchers and law professionals.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/digital-threats/>

d. Publication of report- Urgency of digital safety to Nepali journalists

The report presents the findings of the study conducted among 100 Nepali journalists to understand the status of digital safety.

Link to download: <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/urgency-of-digital-safety-to-nepali-journalists/?wpdmdl=5084&refresh=646f24ae57be21685005486>

e. Publication of Digital safety toolkit for journalists:

The toolkit is published on the basis of findings of FF's survey on digital threat among Nepali journalists. It consists of various safety measures journalist can follow to keep their data and devices safe on online space.

Link to download: <https://shorturl.at/asJ69>



f. Media reports 2021/22:

FF published two reports- May 3 2022 and annual media freedom report 2021 in this period.

Reports can be downloaded at: <https://freedomforum.org.np/publications/reports/>

6. Training on Citizen Participation in Performance Audit:

95 Citizen Auditors produced to enhance civic participation in performance audit

A training program “Citizen Participation in Performance Audit”, was conducted in collaboration with the Office of the Auditor General of Nepal, was successfully completed in Biratnagar and Nepalgunj. The training program had produced 95 active citizen auditors as well as facilitated the process of forming a nationwide informal network of civil society organizations (CSO) working in the field of performance audit.



On the occasion, representatives CSOs working for improve transparency, accountability and civil rights had expressed their commitment to take this issue forward in the coming days. As many as 47 CSO representatives from Province-1, Madhes Province and Bagmati Province were trained in Biratnagar-based training from April 20 to 22 while 48 representatives from Gandaki Province, Lumbini Province, Karnali Province and Sudurpaschim Provinces took part in the training held at Nepalgunj from April 24-26. Among the participants were 36 women i.e. 39 percent.

7. Advocacy of the Open Data Perspective in the National Statistic Bill

Freedom Forum organized a discussion program on amendment of National Statistics Bill in line with open data concept and importance on September 26. The program was held as part of

the project, Advocacy of the open-data perspective in the National Statistics Bill, supported by The Asia Foundation.

The program gathered a total of 16 participants representing civil society organizations, legislative management committee, open data community and academia.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/stakeholders-call-for-joint-advocacy-for-amendment-of-the-national-statistics-bill-through-open-data-context/>

### **Additional activities:**

#### **1. Advocacy campaigns and day celebrations:**

a. Access to Information day: Freedom Forum prepared the RTI-focused podcast based on a discussion among RTI experts, RTI activists, political leader and journalist including Taranath Dahal, Narayan Ghimire, Aditya Dahal and Shashi Bikram Karki to mark the day.

Link of podcast: <https://shorturl.at/myJW5>

b. SDG 16 People's Forum Nepal: Freedom Forum hosted a discussion program entitled, 'Overcoming threats of Media Freedom, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information' on August 19, 2021 as a part of 2021 Nepal Peoples' Forum on SDG 16+. The forum was organized by National Campaign for Sustainable Development (NACASUD-Nepal), a collective initiative of citizens to achieve SDGs at local level. The program conducted through Zoom online platform recorded the participation of 22 females and 45 males.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/stakeholders-collaboration-stressed-to-achieve-sdgs-16-10/>

c. National Constitution Day: Freedom Forum conducted a dialogue on 'implementation of media rights in Federal, Province and Local level' on online platform Zoom on September 18. Around 40 experts from diverse sectors including media, rights advocacy, civil society and academia from different provinces participated in the discussion.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/implementation-of-laws-governing-media-a-major-challenge-in-federal-structure-stakeholders-stress/>

#### **2. Legal support to journalists:**

FF provided legal support to journalists Sunita Rawal, Prakash Bam and Chakra Kunwar who were dismissed from Radio Nepal's Province Broadcasting Center at Dipayal. The case was sub-judice in the Labour Court Kathmandu which delivered its verdict on August 26, 2021.



The court ordered the broadcasting center's chief administrative officer Moti Bahadur Karki to reinstate three journalists back to their job along with promotion.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/4807-2/>

### 3. Right to Information campaign



RTI is an effective tool to ensure transparency at the government offices and hence, to hold the public authorities accountable towards good governance. With this view, FF continues its campaign to promote use of RTI thus, making citizens' informed and aware of the public issues through its RTI Nepal application.

News, articles and important information related to RTI are regularly updated on the application available on both android and iOS systems. The application can be downloaded from play store of android devices and App Store of iOS devices.

### 4. Freedom Chautary podcasts:

FF has been producing themes as right to democratic rights in both fiscal year, FF produced 17 published on FF's website and



various podcasts based on its concerned information, freedom of expression and Nepali and English languages. In this episodes of podcasts which were also social media handles.

All the episodes can be accessed here: <http://freedomforum.org.np/podcast/>

### 5. Newsletters:

As its core activity, the newsletter- Free Expression- is published every three months. The newsletter covers updates on the thematic issues FF has been working on.

Total four issues of newsletter were published this year. All the issues are published on the official website of Freedom Forum and can be accessed through this link:

<https://freedomforum.org.np/publications/newsletters/>



## **6. Social media updates:**

FF has its official Facebook and Twitter accounts through which it disseminates and publishes its publications, advocacy campaigns and important information.

Facebook id: Freedom Forum Nepal

Twitter id: @forumfreedom

## **7. Regular updates and operation of Nepal Press Freedom website:**

FF has its own press freedom dedicated website. On this website, incidents of violation of press freedom, freedom of expression and right to information are updated along with data presentation and disseminated. The website is important to gather data and analyze current press freedom and freedom of expression status in Nepal. The website also covers incidents of violations faced by the civilians for exercising right to information and free expression rights in Nepal.

Total 55 news and press statements have been updated on the website in last fiscal year.

The website's link is <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/>.

## **8. Press Releases:**

FF also issues attention letters and press statements on the issues around media rights, open budget, freedom of expression, journalists' safety and other contemporary issues. In this fiscal year, total 14 statements were issued, submitted at the concerned authority and also published on FF's official website.

## **9. Publications:**

Total twelve reports and books were published in this fiscal year.

All the publications can be accessed and downloaded at:

<https://freedomforum.org.np/publications>



# **FREEDOM FORUM**

"A Nepali CSO (civil society organization) dedicated to democracy, human rights and governance"