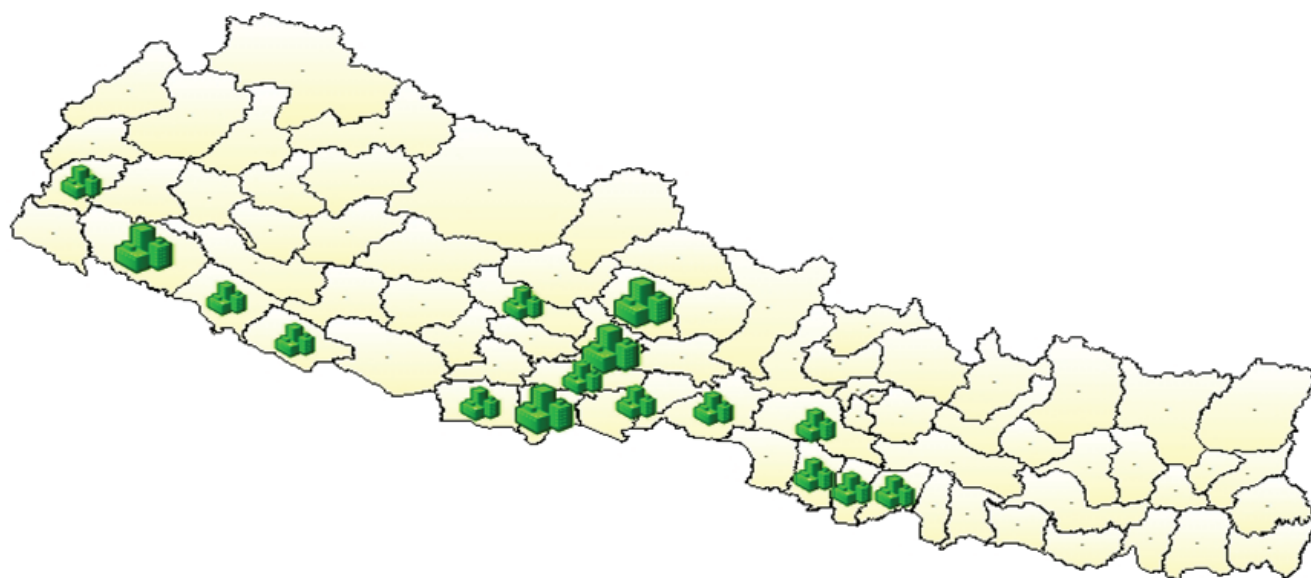


Project Completion Report on Local Governance Action Research (LGAR-II) Project

*Promoting Access to Fiscal and Governance Information of the Municipalities
(April 2014-March 2015)*

Submitted to
The Asia Foundation
Kathmandu



Prepared and Submitted by



Freedom Forum
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FOREWORD

Number of municipalities in Nepal has increased to 191 after Nepal government's recent declaration. Obviously, the expectation of the people residing in municipalities is relatively higher than that of village dwellers. Municipalities have different composition of population – more diverse, heterogeneous and dense. Management of urban units i.e. municipalities, thus, is more complex. Urban units where relatively educated and well-off section of society lives should showcase right governance practices to the villages.

Ideally, there should be a sense of competition among municipalities in terms of revenue generation and best use of resources for socio-economic development. Meaningful public participation in the development decision-making process, the trust-building between people and government and people's confidence on predictability component of governance and mutual cooperation are the important factors to make municipalities successful towards attaining the objective of socio-economic development and distributing fruits of best governance practices to the right-holders.

Symmetric access of citizens to fiscal and governance information is essential for meaningful public participation both in development process and for meaningful public scrutiny and oversight. Local Governance Action Research (LGAR-II) is the initiative to promote municipal governance by reducing information asymmetries. The project was implemented in 20 municipalities with capacity building and outreach activities including RTI trainings to demand and supply side, media communication training to information officers and journalists, demand side training and monitoring and tracking. Importantly, the intervention has come up with discernible outcome of increased demand of fiscal and governance information thereby improving responsive and accountable supply side in the municipality. The innovative approach of bringing together demand side and supply side of information has been successful in enabling environment for better municipal governance.

I am thankful to all trainers and resource persons for their time and expertise in the Freedom Forum-executed initiative. We owe our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, Executive Officers and Information Officers of Municipalities for their cooperation and taking buy-in and ownership of the programs. Cluster Managers of partner organization IGD and Local Coordinators also deserve gratitude from our end for their cooperation for conducting trainings. I am also thankful to Mr. Krishna Sapkota, Executive Director of Freedom Forum who has been involved in thematically designing the program and Anirudra Neupane for managing the entire initiative.

I appreciate the contribution of Australian Government and The Asia Foundation for extending cooperation in the pertinent area of access to information and municipal governance. We are thankful to both for choosing us as the implementing partner and allowing the opportunity to put systematic interventions for improving municipal governance.

Tara Nath Dahal
Chairperson



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1. PROJECT CONTEXT

Local bodies in Nepal are running without elected representatives for more than twelve years. Civil servants have been given both political and administrative duties to undertake and manage development programs at local level. Political mechanism formed after the restoration of democracy in 2006 drew flak from different quarters for mismanaging the public fund that resulted in the dismissal of the formal structure. However, political parties have important role in the formulation and implementation of the budget of the local bodies, including District Development Committee (DDC), Village Development Committee (VDC) and Municipality. The local bodies are being alleged of having inadequate governance stemming from limited scope of public participation and undue influence of political parties possessing authority without responsibility. Municipalities which are more autonomous in generating revenue and setting development priorities are also reeling under inefficient performance owing to asymmetric access of different stakeholders to strategic information considered to be important to promote transparency and meaningful participation of people at the local level development process.

In this context, Freedom Forum along with other partners jointly implemented a set of programs in five selected municipalities to assess the effectiveness of different social accountability tools in improving transparency and municipal governance as the first phase of Local Governance Action Research (LGAR) Project. After rigorous study and analysis it was found that RTI is the most effective tool both to empower the citizens and make local bodies more responsive. With this in background, the program was extended to 20 municipalities placing special emphasis on increasing access to fiscal and governance information held by municipalities.

Municipalities were selected by Institute for Development and Governance (IGD), Freedom Forum and The Asia Foundation in consultation with Ministry of Federal Affair and Local Development (MoFALD) based on geographic location, MCPM results, their budget, population, social and economic indicators and the experience of ministry regarding accountability related initiatives implemented earlier.

2. ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The Local Governance Action Research Project-II is a collaborative effort of the Asia Foundation, Freedom Forum and Institute for Governance and Development (IGD). Freedom Forum is mandated to promote the understanding and use of Right to Information for enhanced flow of information through proactive disclosure and by addressing the information requests. Basically, two initiatives were carried out by the project partners to reduce asymmetry on access to Fiscal and Governance Related Information among different sections of society residing in the

concerned municipalities. Among the interventions, Freedom Forum worked to build readiness of supply side to proactively disclose information and create strong and vibrant demand side of RTI for improved flow of information.

Twenty municipalities were selected for intervention in this phase. They were grouped into four clusters each spanning five municipalities – Hetauda, Pokhara, Butwal and Dhangadhi. The names of municipalities in each cluster are mentioned below.

Hetauda Cluster	Pokhara Cluster
1. Malangawa Municipality 2. Gaur Municipality 3. Kalaiya Municipality 4. Hetauda Sub-metropolitan City 5. Bharatpur Sub-metropolitan City	1. Lekhnath Municipality 2. Baglung Municipality 3. Putalibajar Municipality 4. Waling Municipality 5. Pokhara Sub-metropolitan City
Butwal cluster	Dhangadhi Cluster
1. Butwal Sub-metropolitan City 2. Siddharthanagar Municipality 3. Kapilvastu Municipality 4. Tansen Municipality 5. Ramgram Municipality	1. Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City 2. Gulariya Municipality 3. Tikapur Municipality 4. Dhangadhi Municipality 5. Amargadhi Municipality

2.1. KEY OBJECTIVE OF THE INITIATIVE

- To promote municipal governance through reduced information asymmetries among key stakeholders of municipal budgeting and program implementation process

2.2. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Improved readiness and capacity of municipalities to proactively disclose fiscal information of the municipalities
- Enhanced demand for fiscal and governance information among citizenry including political party representatives
- Improved flow of fiscal and governance information of municipalities through proactive supply side of information

2.3. OUTPUTS

- 645 persons including political party representatives, key municipality officials and civil society representatives trained on RTI
- 60 youth activists capacitated on RTI
- 20 journalists and 20 information officers trained on media communication
- Increased volume of information requests and information dissemination
- Increased number of documents proactively disclosed through different medium.

2.4. PLANNED ACTIVITIES

- Trainings to Municipality Officials, Political Party Representatives and Civil Society Representatives on RTI
- Training/Workshop on Media Communication to Journalists and Information Officers of the project-implemented municipalities
- Trainings to Youths on RTI
- Monitoring, Tracking and Assessment

3. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

As one of the implementing partners, Freedom Forum executed the programs focused on increasing demand for, as well as supply of information in the selected municipalities. The major activities were;

1. 20 trainings on use of RTI to promote municipal governance, one each for twenty municipalities' officials, political party representatives and civil society representatives
2. Training cum workshop on Media Communication (MC) to 20 Journalists and 20 Information Officers representing project-implemented municipalities
3. Two slots of trainings to youths on use of RTI
4. Monitoring, Tracking and Assessment of the initiative

3.1. RTI TRAININGS AT THE MUNICIPALITIES

Imparting RTI trainings were the main intervention of

Freedom Forum in this phase. Capacity development of demand side to seek important fiscal and governance related information and of supply side to proactively disclose important information were the key aspects of the training. Training had been designed to build enabling environment for equal access of different stakeholders to information of planning, budgeting, public procurement and oversight stage of local budget and development process. Trainings were also meant to build common understanding among key local development actors on the need for improved access to information for better governance. The unique feature of this training was that it had created interface between political parties, civil society and officials in each training event.

3.1.1 TRAINING OUTCOMES

The expected outcomes of the training as set by Freedom Forum were as follows.

- Improved flow of all kinds of information at the municipalities
- Enhanced demand side of Right to Information
- Improved record management and in house flow of information.
- Timely update and improved status of proactive disclosure of information built
- Conducive environment prepared for citizens engagement in the development process through

Participants of Nepalgunj, Kalaiya, Hetauda and Ramgram Training



better disclosure of fiscal and program related information

- Political parties and their cadre involved in promoting access to information at municipality competitively
- Asymmetry among different stakeholders regarding access to fiscal information reduced

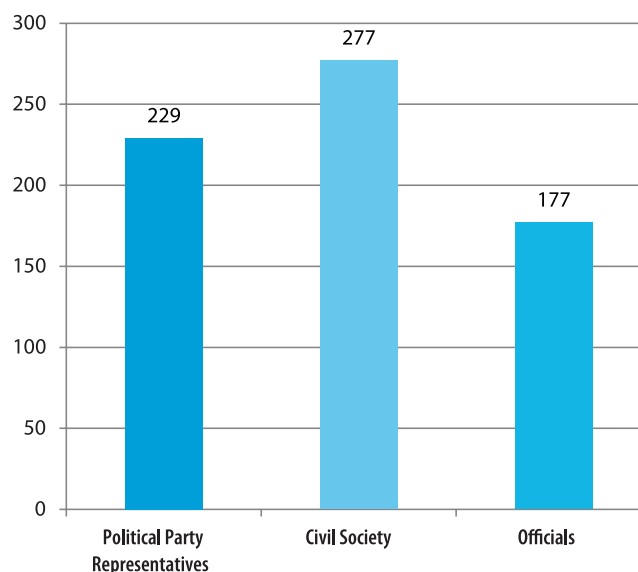
3.1.2. TRAINING DATES PARTICIPATION

Trainings on Right to information were delivered in at

all municipalities during August 2014-January 2015. The political parties representing the board meeting of the municipalities, senior officials of the municipalities including Executive Officer and representatives of civil society organizations and journalists had participated in the two-day training. Dates and participation of each slot of training is presented in the tabular form below.

Municipality	Training Dates	Participation			
		Political Party Representatives	Civil Society	Officials	Total
Malangawa	5-6 Aug. 2014	11	9	7	27
Gaur	7-8 Aug. 2014	15	15	6	36
Kalaiya	6-7 Dec. 2014	18	12	15	45
Hetauda	17-18 Jan. 2015	6	17	15	38
Bharatpur	8-9 Dec. 2014	5	15	15	35
Baglung	20-21 Aug. 2014	7	11	9	27
Waling	6-7 Nov. 2014	8	24	8	40
Lekhnath	22-23 Aug. 2014	11	13	6	30
Pokhara	24-25 Aug. 2014	5	16	5	26
Putalibajar	8-9 Nov. 2014	9	13	8	30
Tansen	23-24 Dec. 2014	8	25	11	44
Kapilvastu	23-24 Sept. 2014	16	17	6	39
Siddharthanagar	28-29 Dec. 2014	15	10	10	35
Butwal	25-26 Dec. 2014	8	12	5	25
Ramgram	21-22 Sept 2014	15	9	6	30
Nepalgunj	15-16 Dec. 2014	14	17	11	42
Gulariya	13-14 Dec. 2014	18	12	15	45
Tikapur	13-14 Dec. 2014	13	7	6	26
Dhangadhi	11-12 Dec 2014	21	7	7	35
Amargadhi	18-19 Dec. 2014	6	16	6	28
Total		229	277	177	683

The score of participants planned for the trainings was 645 including 30-35 from each municipality based on number of political parties representing the board meetings of concerned municipalities. FF had asked all the municipalities for ensuring participation of at least 6 senior officials including Executive Officer, Information Officer, Account Officer, Administration Officer and Planning Officer in the training with flexibility to accommodate more officers. The participation of each group is presented in the chart below;



Participation was inclusive in terms of political representation and representation of different ethnic community. However it could not be as expected in terms of women participation. It was found that only two out of 20 Information Officers were women. It was found that most of the political party representatives nominated for participation of board meetings were gentlemen. The presence of women from civil society was weak though it was relatively better than other groups. Former Mayors, chairperson of major political parties and senior civil society representatives and Executive Officer had attended the training during two whole days in some municipalities. In Waling and Lekhnath municipality, ex-Mayor had participated in the training while Gaur saw the participation of member of parliament. Senior local leaders and office bearers of the local political parties actively engaged in the training.

3.1.2. TRAINING CONTENTS

Following were the issues covered in different sessions during the two-day training.

- Basic concepts of RTI
- Evolution and international development of RTI
- Nepal's constitutional development in regard to RTI
- Introduction to legal mechanisms of RTI including RTI Act 2007, RTI regulation 2009 and RTI directives
- Proactive disclosure, its principles and tools in local context
- Record management and its linkage with information dissemination
- Role of head of the organization (public agency) and information officer for in-house and outside flow of information
- Information classification and protection
- Budget process, fiscal information and budget transparency
- Relation of RTI and access to information to transparency and governance
- RTI success stories from Nepal and India in promoting transparency and accountability
- Information seeking process and addressing process
- Complaints, appeals and role of National Information Commission (NIC)

3.1.3 TRAINING METHOD

Trainings were conducted using participatory approach. Power point presentation, group exercise, games, role play, maximum memorization (MM) technique, group work, group presentation and feedback, experience sharing, discussions and application writing exercise tools, among others, were used during the trainings. Issues identification and information request writing exercise were done in group so that it will inculcate a solid learning and skills among participants to demand information from public agencies through process.

Short formal opening and closing sessions were arranged in almost all the municipalities on presence of guests including Chief District Officer (CDO), Local Development

Officer (LDO) or Executive Officer of the concerned municipalities based on their time availability. Opening sessions were utilized to create positive training ambience while closing session was to garner their commitment for action to promote municipal governance through improved access to fiscal information.

Game, Yoga, video and RTI songs were used to ensure active participation and engagement in the training. Different subgroups of political parties and civil society and officials were formed for RTI application writing exercise. Similarly, information officers and other officials were included in a group to study the cases to make then able to categorize the information subject to protection and disclosure. The strategy for group formation was that participants were divided into five groups namely Information, Rights, Transparency, Participation and Governance so as to concentrate them on the discussion to serve training objectives.

3.1.3 TRAINERS/RESOURCE PERSONS

Freedom Forum Chairperson Mr. Taranath Dahal, one of the prominent figures of access to information movement in Nepal and Mr Dharmendra Jha, former chairperson of Federation of Nepali Journalists and experienced facilitator were the key trainers. They had led the sessions on both theoretical and practical perspective of right to information. Mr. Haribinod Adhikari, Chiranjibi Kafle, Bipul Pokhrel, Ms. Bishnu Sharma and Sanjib Gimire had contributed to prepare training resource materials and also deliver sessions when required. RTI activists and executive officers of the municipalities had contributed to the training as facilitators in some cases. Mr. Krishna Sapkota, Mr. Nayan Bahadur Khadka and Anirudra Neupane had contributed in designing resource materials and delivering the trainings on fiscal information, local governance, budget transparency, record management and their linkage to access to information, transparency, public engagement and participatory governance.

3.1.4 GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Training participants were asked to share their learning and observations from the trainings along with their action points after the training. The observations and feedback had been collected in the form of short speech. Following were some of the major feedbacks.

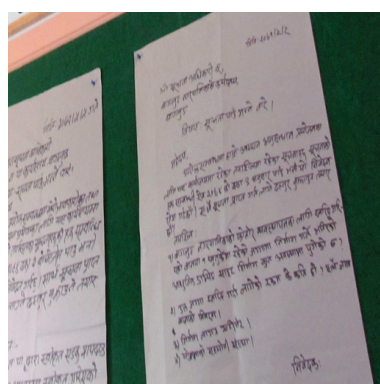
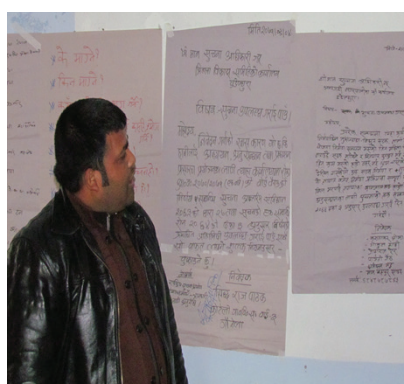
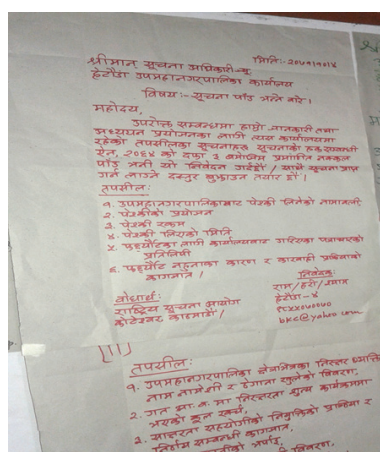
- Most of the political representatives and officials of municipalities except executive officer shared that training was the first forum offering opportunity to become aware of basic concept of RTI and its importance for promoting governance. Training turned to be an opportunity to know RTI for the first time in life.
- They shared that access to information can make people informed, empowered and responsible citizenry who can constructively engage in the planning and development process.
- Learned about the meaning of public agencies and information of private and public concern, duties

- They shared that their knowledge and skills enhanced for identifying the strategic information with public agencies, making RTI applications, filing complaints with chief, appeals and complaints with National Information Commission
- Some of the political party representatives including in Baglung, Lekhnath, Waling, Hetauda, Dhangadhi, Tikapur and Siddharthanagar admitted that they had made some mistakes in the past thinking that information held by their offices would never get published. They added, 'RTI training made them more responsible to people.'
- Representatives from small political party at Malangawa and Ramgram and even large political parties in Gulariya Municipality said that they never had access to important budgetary information. They said, 'RTI could be a supporting instrument in making municipality officials more responsive.'

Trainers of the trainings were asked to provide reports incorporating their observations being specific to training participants, status of access to information in the respective municipalities and critical issues if any on

- Information officers had not been appointed in some municipalities namely Lekhnath and Waling before the training.
- Some of the municipalities were found to have designated junior employee as the Information Officer against the provision of amended RTI Regulations-2012, which states the IO should be senior staff next to head of the public agency. The junior staffs were not capable to access important information from different sections and disseminate to the people proactively and on request. Ramgram, Hetauda and Nepalgunj are the examples.
- Example of presenting other official as information officer was observed in Kalaiya. Mr. Mustak Ansari was found to have been appointed as information officer but Mr. Kiran Adhikari serving the information section was being familiarized as information officer probably due to busy time schedule of Mr. Ansari as Account Officer.
- Very good relation among the political parties and officials was observed in most of the municipalities that both sides remained reluctant to discuss the existing status of public participation and governance in the municipalities.
- Municipality officials during informal meetings with trainers said that they did not get support from local employees as and when any initiative is taken

श्री सूर्यनाथ जामका
 चौकीपुर गगरपालिका मिनि: २०७१
 विषय: सूर्यनाथ पाउ बारे
 महोदय,
 मैरो व्यक्तितगत जानकारी कालो
 त्यस कार्यालयमा रहेका तपदिल कोजी
 का सूर्याहो सूर्यनाथ हो सम्बन्धि र्थन
 २०६४ को कडाई कसोनीमा पाउ श्री यो
 निवेदन गर्दछु। कसो सूर्यनाथ प्राप्त उपलब्ध
 (तल्लो कडाई तमोर हो)
 तपदिल
 १. कसो कसो का त्यस कर्णनयले कति हयुम फो
 लोहो जामो ?
 २. ति हयुम पाउमा कुन सन्तुषाभा कडाई कार
 र्णनदि भयो ?
 ३. हयुम पाउमा र्णनदिमा कति र्णन भयो र
 कडाई प्रयोग भएका हुन ?
 तिने
 नाम: महाका तिपिल्लो
 पता: - श्री १. १. ६ कैलाश
 फोन: ०११-४०६०६०



to enhance transparency through disclosure of information about development process

- Due to absence of strong civil society, public oversight was found to be very weak in municipalities including in Ramgram, Malangawa and Dhangadhi.
- Information officers of most of the municipalities were found to be unaware of their legal obligations and that they were reportedly designated as the information officer for formality.
- Information officers were found to have given number of responsibilities and, therefore, record management and information disclosure practices were observed to be placed in less priority job.
- Some of the information officers were found to explore better ways for serving the people by fulfilling their responsibilities. Information Officer of Gaur, Siddharthanagar, Tansen, Bharatpur and Putalibajar said that they were eager to emphatically fulfill their responsibilities before undertaking other obligations. Information officers of other municipalities were also found to be positive towards implementing Right to Information. However, they shared that several hindrances including knowledge and resource constraints are the barriers to disclosure of information.
- Officials of some municipalities noted that information disclosed by them are being captured by elites including political parties and thus prevented people from access
- Participants from the marginalized group and women shared that budget allocated for spending in the programs of target groups were being expended in general programs due to influence of local political leaders.
- Participants from civil society in most of the case complained that the records of plans and programs proposed from ward level meetings have not been maintained and projects have been selected discretionary decision and vested interests of major officials and political party leaders.
- According to majority of the participants from civil society, public audit, public hearing and social audit have been merely carried out just to serve for formality. They voiced their concern that same group of people who usually involve in project implementation through users' groups are visible in course of afore-mentioned programs. They said the accountability tools are being used as a means to secure score on MCPM.
- Most of the participants said that even an audit report of the municipalities is not subject to disclosure.

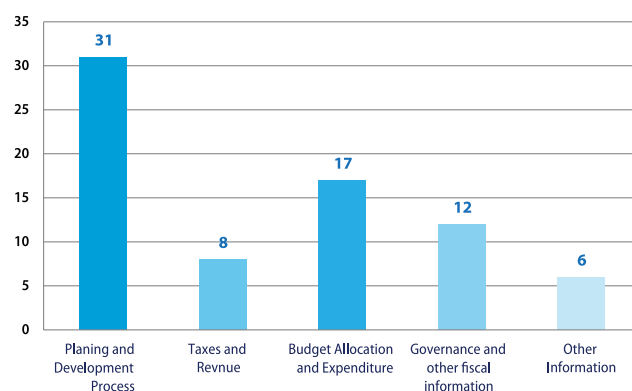
3.1.6. INFORMATION OF PUBLIC INTEREST

One of the important aspects of the training was group exercise meant to identify the issues on which citizens have interest but not the access. Participants in a group had been asked to make sample RTI application to public agencies including concerned municipality to seek information based on the cases documented by them. Participants identified high value fiscal information of different phases of planning and budgeting process. They had identified more than one issue as important for promoting citizens engagement and public oversight.

After the completion of training sessions participants were divided into sub groups to prepare sample RTI applications in all slots of the trainings to test whether they turned to be capable to identify crucial information and the process of seeking information from public agencies. The image below shows samples of the applications prepared by the participants.

The issues mentioned in the sample applications had presented the request for information which were not proactively disclosed by the municipalities. During the practical session, political parties and civil society representatives had asked the participating municipality officers to proactively disclose these information while Municipality Officials had pledged to share these and similar information through websites and other publication measures.

Information of public interest as identified by training participants is presented below.



Participants representing political parties and civil society had said that they do not have access to information listed above. Municipality officials claimed that they had at least disclosed information related to allocation and expenditure through annual publications and website. This shows that information are either not published or some information published also do not reach out to the political party and civil society representatives.

Planning and development related information includes details of priority determination process inclusive of the plans coming from the wards before finalizing the annual budget, contracting process, authorization process, installment of release of fund, cost estimate, bill of quantity (BOQ), technical evaluation report and other information concerning budget execution.

Tax and revenue information includes monthly revenue estimate vs. receipts, revenue arrears, ward-wise disaggregated information, revenues generated from specific revenue head such as house map approval process and house rents.

Budget allocation and expenditure related information includes information related to allocation of budget for particular project, target groups and spending status at

different point in time. General allocation and expenditure related information had also been identified as information which is not within the reach of citizens.

Governance related information includes information concerning appointment of employees, travel details of officials, minutes of board meetings and meeting of any committee. Other fiscal information includes details of purchase and use of fuel and stationery, travel and daily allowances and audit report.

Other information includes copies of house map and recommendations, demographic information of the municipalities, property of municipalities and security measures to protect official assets and other relevant information that do not have direct financial implications.

Out of total 74 different cases noted, about 40% were of planning and development. This shows that planning, budgeting and public procurement processes involved in the municipalities are not transparent enough. Enhanced proactive disclosure mechanism and use of the information by political party representatives, civil society and people at large would contribute to improve municipal governance.

3.1.7. TRAINING OUTCOMES

Training has made far-reaching effects towards building functional collaboration among key stakeholders of the municipalities to promote accountability through improved access to information. Municipality officials had assessed the status of citizens' access to important fiscal and governance related information and identified agenda for change to improve the situation of availability, accessibility, timeliness and comprehensiveness of concerned information. Some of the impacts have already been observed within a short period of time of intervention.

Following are the key outcomes of the trainings;

- 229 political party representatives, most probably for the first time, became aware of RTI and its essence for governance and politics. They have already started demanding certified documents from municipalities

by using RTI. The cases of Gaur, Malangawa are some of the examples.

- Information officers themselves have become aware of their designated role and responsibilities and are able to ensure their access to important information within the municipalities. They made the remarks that all sections including planning and accounts have become supportive in terms of proactive disclosure of information. Thus, enabling environment for in-house flow of information has been built in almost all the municipalities as experienced by Information Officers.
- Best practices of record management have been started by some municipalities. Record of demand for and supply of information, even verbally, have been started by some municipalities including Tikapur and Putalibajar. All the minutes of board meetings have been digitized by Dhangadhi municipality as a part of their record management. Gaur municipality has digitally archived most of the historical documents including maps.
- Demand side of information improved after the training as reflected in the form of RTI applications and the municipalities have also started addressing demand with cent per cent response. 44 RTI applications were filed to municipalities during September 2014-January 2015. Information requests were filed to 14 municipalities out of 20 that includes 10 applications to Dhangadhi municipality, five to Ramgram, four to Siddharthanagar and three to Gaur. There was hardly any experience of RTI request in the municipalities except Nepalgunj and Gaur before the training.
- Many of the municipalities have immediately updated their websites after the training. Website of Malangawa and Waling turned to be functional immediately after the training. These website were not working before.
- Some municipalities have started taking budgetary information i.e. budget ceiling to the ward level meetings. Kapiulvastu Municipality has initiated the practice.
- Some municipalities have endorsed access to information as one of the promotional programs from their council meeting. Bharatpur Municipality for instance has started the practice.

Guests and Participants of MC training, 31 Jan - 1 Feb 2015, Kathmandu



- Information officers have been appointed in Waling and Lekhnath Municipality after the training.
- Waling municipality have put up citizen charter after RTI application was registered asking reason for not installing information display board. A firm running slaughter house at Gulariya on contract with the municipality has started cleaning the affected area after contract became public after the response of RTI application.
- Local media covered news of RTI trainings. Special reports were broadcasted by radio stations. Interviews with resource persons of trainings were published and broadcasted. Training activities, proactive disclosure situations, voices of information officers, participants and trainers became a part of radio and television programs developed by Freedom Forum which got aired from 8 television stations and 15 radio stations including Himalaya Television and Radio Nepal across the country. It can be expected that thousands of people have become aware of RTI and issues of municipal governance through these media.
- Major two outcomes of the training are 1) Positive environment has been created for record management, in-house flow of information, proactive disclosure and response to information seekers in almost all the municipalities & 2) The competitive demand for RTI has created.

3.2. MEDIA COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Media communication training/workshop was an effort to build common understanding on public demand for information and possible effective measures for improving citizens access to fiscal and governance information. The program was planned to build and enhance capacity of journalists and information Officers of the concerned municipalities in demanding, disseminating and using information. Improving journalists' access to information held by the municipalities and strengthening their skill to analyze, demystify and disseminate information competitively through their respective media. Information officers are yet to be empowered to establish functional relation with media for proactive disclosure and dissemination of information.

3.2.1 BROAD OBJECTIVE

To develop functional and effective relation between journalists and information officer to strategically promote transparency and openness for better municipal governance

3.2.1. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Build common understanding between information officers and journalists about RTI
- Establish functional relation between journalists performing the role of making people well informed and information officers obliged to update and disseminate information to the people
- Improve skill of information officers to effectively disseminate the information subjected to proactive disclosure through media
- Provide skills to journalists to use information

proactively disclosed by municipalities as per the RTI Act 2007 for their news report.

- Encourage both sides to use media as a tool for proactive disclosure of information
- Reduce information asymmetry through joint effort of information officers and journalists
- Build enabling environment for meaningful public participation in the budget process through improved access to information.

3.2.2. TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

Information Officers of all twenty municipalities and a journalist each from municipality had taken part in the training. Most of the information officers were senior officials of the municipalities while few were only the employees serving with concerned section as acting information officers. Majority of journalists were affiliated with both national and local media while some of them were local journalists having experience of writing news and stories on municipality issues. 100% of the targeted participants had participated at the program.

3.2.3. CONTENTS AND METHODS

Two-day training/workshop was carried out in a dialogue modality. Short presentation, speech and discussions were made during different sessions. Experience sharing, group discussion, self assessment, action plan development, review and feedback were the key methods used for the program. The program had three broad elements;

- Identifying uniformity and differences in understanding of RTI between journalists and IOs
- Flow of information through the media
- Common media strategy development

3.2.4 OPENING SESSION

The program formally started with the inaugural session in presence of Chief Commissioner of National Information Commission (NIC) as the chief guest. Training facilitator Dharmendra Jha highlighted the objective of MC training with the background of RTI trainings in all 20 municipalities. Freedom Forum's Executive Director Krishna Sapkota welcomed the participants and shed light on the rational and relevance of the training. Likewise, Freedom Forum Program Manager Anirudra Neupane shared interesting insights and experience of trainings organized in 20 municipalities. Mr. Mukti Rijal from Institute for Governance and Development (IGD) delivered experience on supply side intervention regarding development of RTI friendly websites for the municipalities. Freedom Forum Chair Taranath Dahal shared the experience from LGAR-I and inspired participants to compete for transparency.

Chief Guest, Mr. Baskota said that there are no information to be protected by municipalities as per the RTI Act 2007. He requested information officers to adopt transparent practices and serve for people as a change agent. He further said that the National Information Commission is the top most agency to decide whether or not the information should be provided or protected, adding Information Officers should not be influenced by any

pressure for disclosure of information citing their decisive capacity on flow of information. He shared the participants the essence of RTI in promoting responsiveness of public agencies on one hand and enhancing a career of officials as change champions.

3.2.5. TEST OF UNDERSTANDING OF RTI

Participants were distributed questionnaire with 25 multiple choice to test their understanding of RTI and essential information of the municipalities that are required to disclose periodically. The responses to the questionnaire are presented in the following table.

SN	Questions asked about RTI	Information Officers		Journalists	
		Correct Response	Percentage	Correct Response	Percentage
1	Concept of Information	18	90	16	80
2	Concept of RTI	17	85	13	65
3	First RTI Law	5	25	6	30
4	Components of RTI	15	75	16	80
5	Constitutional Guarantee of RTI in Nepal	11	55	12	60
6	Classification of Information	3	15	3	15
7	Public Agencies	14	70	17	85
8	Proactive Disclosure	12	60	8	40
9	Role of Information Officers	19	95	18	90
10	Time available to address RTI request	18	90	16	80
11	Social Audit of Municipality	15	75	9	45
12	Indicators of Budget Transparency	6	30	5	25
13	Citizens Budget	16	80	7	35
14	Information related to physical safety	11	55	12	60
15	Pages of documents to be provided free of cost	18	90	17	85
16	First appeal (complaints)	15	75	18	90
17	Role of information officer if information could not be provided	18	90	17	85
18	Functions of National Information Commission	15	75	20	100
19	Number of commissioners in NIC	13	65	11	55
20	Timeframe for granting decision by NIC on appeal	2	10	5	25
21	Action against IO and Head of Organization for denial to provide information	15	75	11	55
22	Disclosure of third party information	13	65	15	75
23	Classification committee	10	50	7	35
24	Information that should be provided by municipalities	17	85	19	95
25	Information that should be disclosed through hoarding board	19	95	18	90

Questionnaire had been designed to make sure that all the participants have basic understanding of RTI so that they would capture the essence of Access to Information. Most of the participants had articulated their basic understanding of RTI while only a few participants had rightly responded to the questions on history of RTI, information classification provision and NIC structure.

Group	Right Responses out of 25			
	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25
Information Officers	1	2	15	2
Journalists	1	11	5	3

It was found that most of the information officers have adequate understanding of RTI as 17 out of 20 Information Officers gave more than 15 right answers. The trained Information Officers were found to have more knowledge on RTI than journalists. In the session, resource persons briefed about the concepts, constitutional provisions, legal instruments and use of RTI for improving relationship between public agencies with people. Journalists were briefed about the use of RTI in making investigative stories and discussions were made based on questionnaire.

3.2.6. EXPERIENCE FROM THE FIELD

In this session both the groups had been asked to share their experience from the respective municipalities regarding RTI and media being based on following two sets of questions

Questions to Journalists	Questions to Information Officers
Have you ever made the news based on press conference, website, public hearing and publications of municipality?	Details of information requests filed at the concerned municipality before and after the training?
Have you ever asked for information using RTI? If yes, what type of information was requested and what was the response?	Effect of addressing demand on record management and good governance.
Have you taken part in municipality council?	Existing practice of in-house flow of information and any changes made after the training
Have you made news about budget of municipality? If yes, what type of budget news was made?	Proactive disclosure measures tools and information being disclosed by using those tools
Do you know the media strategy of your municipality? If yes what do you know about it?	Media communication policy, strategy and practice

Information officers reported that 44 new RTI applications demanding budget related information were registered in the municipalities after the RTI trainings. They shared examples of not taking charge for copying the documents from requesters as part of their commitment to smooth RTI implementation. IOs said that they have started maintaining records of information provided to the seekers. Some of them shared that verbally demanded information are also being recorded. Information Officer of Tikapur Municipality said, "They came to know about how the municipality-owned land are being encroached by a group of people when an information seeker asked about the detailed agreement on land use". Similar case was in Lekhnath Municipality.

Tikapur and Putalibajer shared that they have started keeping records of dissemination of information verbally requested. Representatives from municipalities including Siddharthanagar, Tikapur and Gaur said that they have developed standard format for proactive disclosure adhering the RTI Act 2007.

Information officers said, "Most of the problems occurring with regard to in-house flow of information were solved after the training and IOs were receiving support from all the sections". According to them section head have become RTI friendly with few exception.

All the IOs said that website has been basic tool of proactive disclosure. Notice board, public hearing, public audit, citizen charter and social audit were presented as common tool. Radio programs, television programs, print advertisement, press release, press conference, SMS, digital board were also found to be used as tool of proactive disclosure. Bharatpur municipality was found to have approved the policy of proactive disclosure from municipality council which shows the visible impact of RTI training.

Journalists were found to have used verbal measures for seeking information. Journalists were also found to be using information received via press conference, public hearing and municipal council. They were found to have limited experience of taking documents for developing investigative stories. According to them, they do not use website for information because they are not newsworthy and updated. Journalist were found to have access to municipality council meeting. They were found to have experience of making the news regarding allocation and expenditure but not the in-depth stories on process of budget formulation and execution. None of them were found to have made stories based on audit reports or monitoring reports. Few journalists were found to have making news and stories related to arrears and taxes based on verbal source.

Both journalists and Information Officers said that none of the municipalities had developed media strategies or policies. Some journalists accused municipalities of distributing resources to the media based on access. Some municipalities were found to be distributing advertisement on rotation basis. Some six of twenty municipalities were found to have practice of awarding journalists. Hetauda municipality was found to have appropriated specified percentage of total expenditure under the heading of media mobilization. Some municipalities were found to have spent on capacity development of journalists. Some of them have given the role of conducting public hearing to district federation of Nepali journalists. Nepalgunj municipality was found to have announced information friendly municipality campaign.

3.2.7. BUILDING COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Participants were divided into five different groups to discuss on important provisions of RTI. The groups had been given the following subjects for discussion

- Public agencies, their roles and responsibilities
- Record management, proactive disclosure and process of proactive disclosure
- Information requesting process and addressing process
- Fiscal information and their disclosure
- Municipal websites

Each group had discussed both about the legal provisions and practical issues based on the above themes. Websites of Malanagawa Municipality, Siddarthanagar Municipality and Pokhara Sub-metropolitan City had been studied to test whether they were updated and had contained adequate information for citizens. Each group made presentation after group work and resource person provided feedback on them. After the session, participants reached to the common understanding on the role of municipalities to ensure citizens' access to information. They also identified the key fiscal information including budget allocation and expenditure, forecasted taxation and actual tax, technical and financial progress reports and timing of publishing the information. Journalists had presented themselves as the demand side while information officers as supply side during the discussion session following the group presentations.

3.2.8. MEDIA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

After serious discussions four group comprising two of journalists and two of information officers outline of proposed media strategy was developed. Resource persons had facilitated the group discussion. Journalists had been asked for their information requirements to make the municipality issues newsworthy while information officers to make the strategy so that they could optimally use the media for promoting their outreach to the people. The fifth group consisting journalists and information officers had summarized the proposal of all four groups to come up with common media strategy.

Outline of the strategy named Strategy for Selection and Use of Media for Maximum Disclosure of Information has the following features;

- Different media have been suggested for disclosure of different information
- Joint trainings to journalists and Information Officers by municipality itself from the budget allocated on media communication
- Websites, social media, brochure, bulletins, audio notice, review meetings with journalists should be used to check effectiveness of the media
- Cultural programs, seminars, meetings, cultural groups, street drama should also be used to inform different audiences
- Meetings with journalists and media associations for strategic discussions could also help increase the reach.

3.2.9. OUTCOME

- Media communication training has been rated as one of the most efficient programs at the end of the training. All information officers made Godawari declaration to promote access to information. A media strategy has been drafted for municipalities which can be developed as common media communication strategy for all municipalities and DDCs as well. It can be expected that journalists can strategically use the information if they are disseminated timely from various ways.
- Journalists participated at MC and RTI training have started writing on several issues of municipalities based on fiscal and governance related information acquired from the respective municipalities. It is expected that the reporting will be further enhanced by using different sources of information in a strategic manner

3.3. DEMAND SIDE TRAINING

Political parties and civil society representatives who were trained through the first phase of training became aware on RTI, understood the essence of access to information in promoting good governance and started seeking information from municipalities and other public agencies by using RTI. However, political parties who were expected to be most influential demand side of

Trainers and Participants of Demand Side Training



information presented themselves as supply side in many cases because they are involving in the decision making process of municipalities and are part of the board meeting. Political party representatives were found to have strong tie among themselves probably due to consensus based local politics. Such scenario was observed during training sessions and after it.

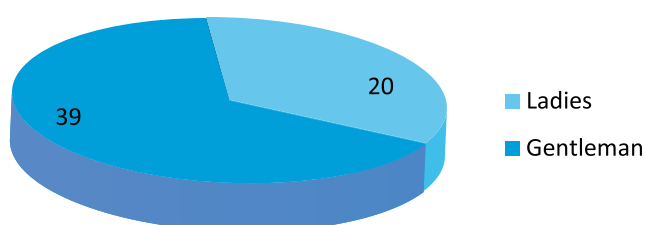
Based on experience of Freedom Forum and trainers of RTI trainings of 20 municipalities, it was recommended that additional intervention for promoting demand side of information was required for municipalities to promote information culture. Moreover, almost all the journalists and Information Officers participated at the MC training suggested for the expansion of such programs to enhance demand side. Thus the new demand side trainings were added to the original intervention.

3.3.1. ABOUT THE TRAINING

The demand side training was conducted during fourth week of February 2015 in Kathmandu in two slots. Three participants from each of 20 municipalities were selected based on recommendation of local coordinators of Freedom Forum and interview with them directly by FF secretariat. The 3-day trainings had been completely focused on promoting demand for information from the municipalities which are strategic in terms of enhancing public participation in the budget formulation, execution and oversight process of municipalities.

3.3.2. TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

Trainings were conducted in two slots. There were 33 participants from 19 municipalities in the first slot and 26 participants from 19 municipalities in the second slots. 59 participants consisting of three from each municipality had taken part in the training. Four participants were accommodated from Kapilvastu on special request of local coordinator and three participants from Tikapur and Pokhara did not attend the training. The participation was inclusive from the perspective of women participation as FF had asked for at least woman representation from each municipality. Some 12 out of 33 were female on the first slot and 8 out of 26 on the second. However, participation of ladies could not be made from Waling, Putalibajar and Baglung. Participants were basically youths below 35. Students, women activists and representatives of local CSOs had taken part in the training.



3.3.1. TAINTING CONTENTS

Contents of the training had been set around the theory and practice of Right to Information in relation to municipal governance. The contents of the trainings were

somehow similar to RTI trainings for municipalities as mentioned below;

- Concepts and importance of RTI
- Constitutional and legal instruments of RTI
- Proactive disclosure
- Role of public agencies, information officer and head of organization
- Information classification
- Information request, complaints and appeals
- Role of National Information Commission
- Budget process and fiscal information of the municipalities
- Important information with municipalities
- Issue identification and Information request writing exercise
- Plan of action for promoting demand for information

3.3.3. TAINTING METHODS

Participants' engagement had been focused in most of the training sessions. Theoretical understanding of RTI through power point presentation, discussions and success story presentation were the tools for enriching participants' knowledge and understandings. On the second day participants were given the file of RTI requests and information received from different agencies for case study presentation. Through the file study method the participants were made aware about the process of seeking information, writing complains and appeals to the concerned agencies. Audio visual methods were used frequently. Individual exercise was also the part of the training.

3.3.4. IMPORTANT PUBLIC INTEREST INFORMATION

Each participant had been asked to identify the key information with the municipalities based on their field level experience and learning from different sessions. 225 cases were identified by them and at least two RTI applications were prepared by each of the participants. Cases identified were related to budget allocation and expenditure of target group for specified period, contracts of municipality awarded to contractors or user groups, details of fuel, stationery and other administrative expenditure, revenue generation from public parking, staff and consultant hiring process, contracts for running public parks/bus parks, expenditure for sanitation, public lighting and related fiscal and governance information.

3.3.4 TRAINING OUTCOMES

- After the training a group of vibrant and proactive young people capable of demanding information and accountability have been formed
- Supply side of information i.e. municipality officials have shown strong verbal commitment to promote access to information for accountability and transparency. Following the training to youths the opportunity has come to test whether these are real commitment
- Within a month of training youths have already started filing RTI applications to municipalities on

critical development issues and processes. Ramgram, Nepalgunj, Gulariya, Tikapur, Kalaiya, Siddharthanagar and Dhangadhi municipalities have experienced enhancing demand side.

- RTI applications have been filed by youths in almost all the municipalities. They have started forming network of RTI practitioners in some municipalities including Baglung.

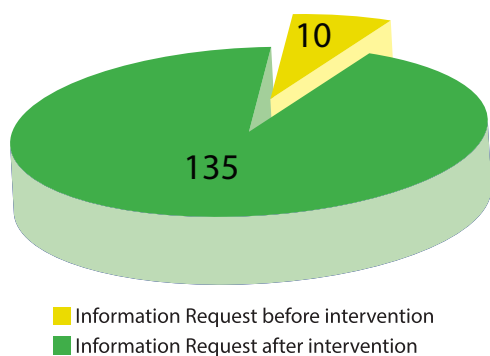
3.5. MONITORING, TRACKING AND ASSESSMENT

Freedom Forum has undertaken field visit, focus group discussion, conversation with officials and information seekers and interview with information officer to document the impact from all three assessment. The objectives of this task were to;

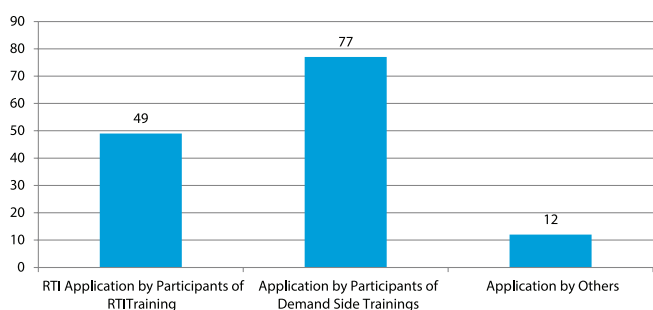
- Assess the status of demand for information reflected in the form of RTI requests
- Assess the impact of initiative on record management, proactive disclosure of information and response to the RTI request
- Record impact of RTI on governance and accountability after training

3.5.1 DEMAND FOR INFORMATION

Before the training, the demand side of RTI was very weak in all the municipalities. There were hardly any example of seeking documents and evidences in the municipalities with little exception. Only two applications were registered at Gaur, two at Kapilvastu, one at Hetauda, two at Pokhara, one at Bharatpur and two at Dhangadhi before the training totaling 10. After trainings, number of information requests increased

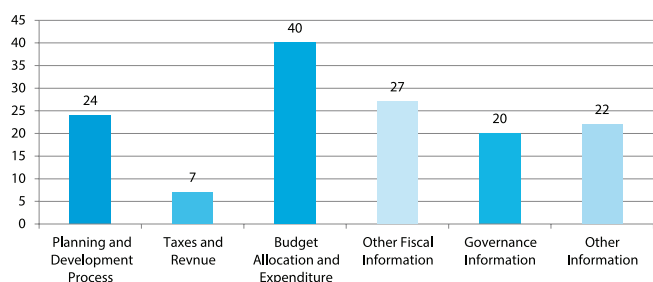


Disaggregation of RTI application according to category of applicants is presented below 19 municipalities (except Hetauda) as reflected by the chart below.



Political parties have also started to seek documents using RTI application including that at Malanagawa, Gaur, Kalaiya and Siuddharthanagar and Tansen.

Information requesters have mostly sought the information related to budget allocation to specific sector or project, expenditure and payment details. Out of 143 information requested through 138 applications, 40 are related to allocation and expenditure along with payment details. 27 information requests are related to expenditure on fuel, stationeries, travel allowances of staffs, purchase of office furniture including bills and receipts. 24 information requests are related to development process including quality specification, physical progress, technical and financial progress. Governance information includes minutes of board meeting, public property protection mechanism, rules, regulations and guidelines. Other information includes list of public property, maps, unauthorized parking etc. Tax rates and agreement with individuals regarding the amount to pay to municipality for using halls, rooms and public space are included within revenue category.



Some of the municipalities were found to have provided information on timely manner. For example, Kalaiya municipality gave all the information within specified time period. All the information requests filed before demand side training were found to have been addressed. Putalibajar, Waling, Dhangadhi and Siddharthanagar were found to have addressed all the applications before 15 days of request, agencies except Kapilvastu have reported to have prepared the information and informed to the requesters. Municipalities have reported that the trend of verbally seeking documents have increased mainly from political parties. 70 verbal requests for information have been reported by seventeen municipalities.

Training participants have also filed information requests from several other agencies. Some 11 RTI applications have been filed by participants of Gulariya, 1 by that of Malangawa, 1 by participant of Gaur, 2 by participants of Butwal, 2 by participants of Ramgram, 5 of Siddharthanagar, 4 of Nepalgunj, 2 of Kapilvastu, 8 of Kalaiya, 5 of Amargadhi, 2 of Baglung, 1 of Pokhara and 8 of Dhangadhi totaling 52. This shows that proactive demand side has emerged in the municipalities who can demand for transparency and accountability.

3.5.2. RECORD MANAGEMENT AND PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE

Information officers had been asked whether they have kept the record of information requests and response. All 18 municipalities said that they have maintained all the details of information including information of requesters in case of municipalities. Municipalities except Kapilvastu, Waling and Baglung have given the name lists of information requesters and description of such requests. This shows that they have improved record management. Putalibabaji and Tikapur municipalities have shared about the practice of making separate logbook for verbal information requests. Dhangadhi and Gaur municipalities were found to have prepared digital folders of historical documents including board meeting minutes and maps.

Bharatpur municipality is reported to have approved proactive disclosure as one of the priority areas to act upon from its recent municipality council meeting. Meeting has also designated responsibility to Information officer to work to promote proactive disclosure. Butwal has reportedly started sending SMS to the applicants with regard to the process involved in house map approval. All the information officers have reported to have made their website updated after the training. Websites of Malanga and Waling became functional and updated. Tikapur has recently started publishing price list and tax rates through local newspapers; Siddharthnagar has become more proactive in information disclosure. The municipality office has updated information including policies and guidelines related to municipalities along with financial details. Municipalities including Baglung have started conducting press meet in specific time interval and installing name plate of information officer in most of the cases. Social media has also been used as a tool of proactive disclosure by some of the municipalities including Gaur.

3.5.3. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the information seekers namely Krishna Raj Panta filed RTI application to Gulariya Municipality asking for the process of and contract between municipality and contractor in renting the slaughterhouse when it was observed that the contracting company was not properly managing the garbage produced by it. Municipality provided the information. News was published in Kalpristha Daily brought out from Nepalgunj and Kantipur national daily regarding pollution caused by company neglecting the terms of contract with municipality. Municipality then made company alert regarding the public health. Public pressure increased on the company based on TOR of contract which came to public through RTI and finally community affected by slaughterhouse and a formal agreement was reached between the municipality and slaughterhouse for the construction of landfill site within F/Y 2014/15.

In Siddharthnagar, information seeker Mr. Rambikash Chaudhari asked information related to arrears of municipality along with the name list of individuals and institutions. Municipality provided information to requester in a timely manner. The information received

became news for local newspapers and local radio as it has the name list of officials, political parties and government agencies that are part of such arrears. As an impact of media naming and shaming, the arrears are being settled within a month of information disclosure.

Kapilvastu municipality started taking budget ceiling to the ward level planning meeting as pre-budget information. This has resulted in decreased number of projects coming from the wards. According to officials it has resulted in improved budgeting process as priorities have been set based on resource availability.

Municipalities have reported that participation in the public hearing and meetings have increased as an effect of improved proactive disclosure after training. According to Information Officers, political parties have reduced piling undue pressure during budget formulation and contracting process as they are now aware that contract documents and documents related to user groups are in the access of citizens as provisioned by RTI Act 2007.

The above cases are the examples that the initiative has tangible impact on governance and budgeting process. Some municipalities such as Malanga and Ramgram which are being accused of being non-transparent have still not shown improvement on governance. According to news published at the Kantipur national daily, Malanga municipality spends annual one million under the heading of fuel expenditure even though it has not possessed its own vehicle which candidly demonstrates prevalence of weak accountability situation. According to a resident of Malanga people feel insecure to demand accountability from the municipality. Though, improvements have been observed regarding record management, proactive disclosure and response to RTI request the municipality lags behind providing minimum standard of accountability.

4. WAY FORWARD

The second phase of the local governance action research project has been successful in bringing together major development actors to discuss on the real issues of transparency, accountability and right governance in and around municipalities. Based on the experience, as stated in the earlier chapter, it can be concluded that tangible improvements have been made on demand for information, supply of information, transparency and accountability of municipalities even in the short period of time and within the constraint that new website could not be launched by the stipulated time period. Overwhelming support and cooperation from municipalities on FF-implemented programs, political participation and their proactive actions and innovations towards building more transparent urban governance are among others success indicator of the initiative.

Based on results and experiences of Freedom Forum, following action points are recommended for different actors further promoting municipal governance.

MINISTRY OF FEDERAL AFFAIR AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (MOFALD)

- Ministry should play coordinating role in making existing or new websites of municipalities populated with fiscal and governance information and make them interactive from the perspective of the essence of proactive disclosure.
- Interactive websites should be built for all 191 municipalities to competitively promote practice of proactive disclosure
- Record management, rate of addressing information demand and status of proactive disclosure of information should be added as an important indicator for MCPM
- Local development training academy should be used to enhance capacity of municipality officials to make them able to promote access to information and link them with development and governance.

MUNICIPALITIES

- Several tools of proactive disclosure have been identified. Municipalities should use most effective tools for proactive disclosure of information in the specific local context
- Social and new media should be used as a tool of proactive disclosure
- Internal flow of information should be augmented
- Annual internal assessment of information management and disclosure and refreshers to officials should be done by the municipalities themselves.
- Social audit, public hearing, public audit, social mobilization and other social accountability tools should be implemented after mechanizing proper disclosure and dissemination of information to the concerned audiences
- Governance information including meeting minutes, meeting agendas, roles and responsibility of officials and performance related information should be made open and publicly available
- Information officers should be well equipped with resources, capacity and support from co-workers and executive officer.
- Strategic partnership should be developed with media for publicity as well as imparting right information to the people
- Municipalities should make their own policies and plans on information disclosure, accountability and transparency.
- A system should be put in place to respond to the information requests positively and proactively.
- Best practice of one municipality should be shared among each other.

POLITICAL PARTIES

- Local political representatives should be trained on RTI and governance as a part of their internal schooling.
- Internal check and control mechanism should be built to make their party representative nominated to take part in municipality decision-making process accountable.
- Party cadre and people should be made aware of access to information and be mobilized for promoting demand for accountability utilizing their robust network

MEDIA

- Local media should have separate municipality beat to give space to the issues of municipal governance
- Journalists should use proactively disclosed information and RTI request for making investigative stories related to municipal governance

CIVIL SOCIETY

- They should contribute to create awareness to citizens regarding their rights and duties to demand accountability and check the municipalities through information requests
- Social accountability tools being used by civil society should be linked to access to information to make them result oriented
- They should collaborate with local media to better inform people with the information they obtained through RTI use
- They should build effective collaboration with ward citizen forum and citizen awareness center for their capacity enhancement and make their role effective in local development and governance
- Fact based advocacy should be done through RTI using variety of method and by making and sharing success stories
- They should support to and make partnership with municipalities for promoting transparency regime

DONOR AGENCIES

- RTI should be taken as one of the major and cross-cutting tools for local governance projects planned for municipalities
- LGCDP and other programs designed on local governance should place right priority to agenda of access to information including RTI as an important tool
- Long term partnership should be built with municipalities to promote them as a model because municipalities including Hetauda and Bharatpur have proposed their own reform agenda requiring financial and technical support.

ANNEXES

- 1) Municipality Level Training Reports
- 2) Field Monitoring Reports
- 3) Media Coverage of Training
- 4) Training Manuals/Courses
- 5) Attendance Register of Training Participants
- 6) Sample Monitoring/Tracking Form
- 7) Sample Training Evaluation Form
- 8) Outline of Media Communication Strategy
- 9) List of Research Persons and Local Coordinators



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