



Free Expression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

RTI & OGD Pillars of Local Democracy

With the promulgation of the new constitution and the successful three-tier elections, Nepal has fully entered into the federal set up having governments in federal, provincial and local levels. The aspiration for change- the change with the transparency and accountability in the government side and informed and vibrant citizenry is therefore vocal. These three levels of governments are expected to deliver effective public service, maintaining transparent activities and abiding by the right to information and open data practice.

With this in the background, Freedom Forum organized a day long national workshop named "Promoting right to information and open government data in federal Nepal" in the capital city Kathmandu on March 23.

At a time when the transparency and accountability to ensure good governance is an urgent need in federal Nepal, the effective implementation of RTI and practice of open government data was underscored by the workshop. The workshop attended by 111 participants representing the government- Prime Minister's Office, National Information Commission, Central Bureau of Statistics, civil society on RTI and data community, research, academia not only shared their RTI and open data practices but also prodded the NIC and government bodies to be more active to RTI and open data practices in view of the growing roles of the local governments in the changed system.

The participants at the workshop pointed out the needs of technical manpower at local level, quick and smooth transfer of authority and resources to local level from centre to local levels, recognition to the works to data community by the government, and promptness of the National Information Commission among others. The workshop remained effective platform to share the experience on using the RTI, and open data practice. Government officials seemed confused on open government practices. There was no concrete



KEY POINTS

- **Access to reliable and accurate information and open data is critical for citizen to take part in local level decision making and hold their locally elected leader to account**
- **No common understanding and rigorous homework at the PM's office relating to open government data practice.**
- **Segregated data eg of local levels, and provinces utmost need**
- **Open data-an integral part of RTI**
- **OGD is watchdog of government activities**

plan for three levels on embracing OGD. Need of effective advocacy and lobbying at PM's office was realized to make it implement OGD action plan. RTI implementation coordination unit at PM's office could be made focal for the open government data implementation.

In the opening of the workshop, Tirza Theunissen from The Asia Foundation said, "In the context of federal Nepal, access to reliable and accurate information and open data- the data that can be used and re-used - is critical for citizen to take part in local level decision making and hold their locally elected leader to account." She underscored that information and open data are essential for citizens, media and civil society organizations to track local development progress and support provincial and local governments in making evidence based decisions, planning and resource allocations," she stressed.

Executive Chief of Freedom Forum, Mr Taranath Dahal, said the program was organized to ensure the rights of the people to be informed, easing

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Message from Executive Chief

Heed Media Rights

The government is learnt to have drafted the bill relating to mass communication in view of the changed context. The bill is to replace Press and Publication Act 2048, National Broadcasting Act 2049 and Working Journalists Act 2051. At a time when the mass media is need of being fair, independent, transparent and professional for boosting the inclusive democracy, the draft obviously draws the attention.



He draft however signals multifarious problems in the mass communication, thereby shrinking citizen's right to freedom of expression. It, if passed by the parliament, is likely to make government control the media. It is good that an initiative to bring an umbrella act that could address various challenges and concerns in the media. But, the way key terms as 'mass communication', 'journalists' and 'press representative' draw severe attention. It points out the need of conceptual clarity on these fundamental terms.

Although the bill proposes to establish an independent national mass communication authority to regulate the license and professional criteria of media, and promote archive and the self regulation system is a positive idea, the structure of the committee for the recommendation of the formation of authority does not ensure fair process. Once the process of appointments at authority is not fair, the authority would to be imbalanced and guided by unilateral domination. It means the authority, as the recruitment centre of the government, would act as per the interest of the government, rather than the need of entire media community and the policy debates. At such, comprehensive debate, discussion and consultations on the role and responsibilities given to the authority are imperative. Uniformity in understanding among all sides is therefore unavoidable.

The country is now a federal system. But, the rights to distribute all government advertisements assigned to the authority are very impractical and ludicrous. If any federal set up is broached by depriving rights of province and local governments, it undoubtedly invites conflict. It is ultimately a blemish on the spirit of federalism. Another worrying matter is that employees for the authority would be provided by government- the way the government control is deepened and autonomy of authority is blurred. When ministry's staffs are transferred to this authority, the very notion of autonomous and independent entity is ruptured. The absence of the concept of audit bureau of circulation in terms of classification of newspapers is another point drawing attention. Such absence unnecessary perpetuates the irrelevant role of Press Council. The draft also includes the provision that legitimate ban would be imposed on newspaper is contradictory to the constitutional provision of not cancelling the newspaper. The ditto lines on recording of newspapers from the previous versions of laws is equally worrying in the federal system, for the control on the record of the publications from local and provincial level is not imagined from central mechanism. Actually the registration of newspapers should be made easier rather than hassles of passing through various steps.

Separate certificate for registration and printing press reminds the rule before the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1950. Keeping printing business under the mass communications in this modern time is quite preposterous. It is actually the issue to be regulated by company and tax law. The broadcasting media has been divided into public, community and private, but without clear basis and definition. The draft signals that the community media would be forced to act in line with the local government, which egregiously ignores the role and relevance of the community media. People and their problems not government activities and directives should be at the centre of community media. Random allocation of time/term of the frequency license for radio and television is also impractical. Frequency is a public property in deed.

Going further, the online media operation directive is copy passed on the draft, to which Freedom Forum had already shown concern, arguing that it was not good to treat internet-based media as print media. In spite of exploring the innovative sides of information technology and facilitating freedom of expression, the registration and renewal provisions for online media objectionable. Objectionable is the intention to scrap the Working Journalists Act. FF, as an organization working untiringly for the protection and promotion of freedom of expression for over a decade, has observed this draft with the above reservation. However, FF is ready to collaborate and provide consultation how the draft bill on mass communication could be made inclusive, transparent and practical, thereby making it a document to boost the pillar of functional democracy in the changed federal setup.

Taranath Dahal

Nepal Improves Budget Transparency



Nepal has increased its score in Open Budget Index (OBI) – the world's only independent and comparative measure of budget transparency. According to the Open Budget Survey (OBS) global report, Nepal increased its budget openness score to 52 from 24 in 2015. Freedom Forum conducted OBS for Nepal as a representative of the International Budget Partnership (IBP). Each country receives a composite score (out of 100) that determines its ranking on the Open Budget Index. The biennial OBS assesses the country's budget transparency, people's participation in budget process and strengths of budget oversight agencies – the Supreme Audit Institution and Legislature.

Drawing on internationally accepted criteria developed by multilateral organizations, the Open Budget Survey uses 109 equally weighted indicators to measure budget transparency. These indicators assess whether the central government makes eight key budget documents available to the public online in a timely manner and whether these documents present budget information in a comprehensive and useful way. Nepal's 2017 OBS country summary report stated that Nepal's score of 52 out of 100 is moderately higher than the global average score of 42. With this Nepal has become the South Asian leader in regard to budget openness score followed by Afghanistan (49), India (48), Pakistan (44), Sri Lanka (44) and Bangladesh (41).

"Open budget score for Nepal has changed over the time with 24 in 2015, 44 in 2012, 45 in 2010, 43 in 2008 and 36 in 2006", shared the report. However, the report reveals that Nepal still provides the public with limited budget information; offers few opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process and the legislature and supreme audit institution in Nepal provide limit oversight of the budget. Since 2015, Nepal has increased the availability of budget information by publishing the Executive Budget Proposal in a timely manner. However, as in other rounds of budget survey, Nepal has failed to make progress in producing a Pre-Budget Statement and a Citizens Budget. According to the report, the Executive's Budget Proposal was not provided to legislators at least two months before the start of the budget year; legislative committees did not examine and publish reports on their analyses of the EBP online. To measure public participation, the Survey assesses the degree to which the government provides opportunities for the public to engage in budget processes. Such opportunities should be provided throughout the budget cycle by the executive, the legislature, and the supreme audit institution.

The OBS also examines the role that legislatures, supreme audit institutions, and independent fiscal institutions play in the budget process and the extent to which they are able to provide effective oversight of the budget. These institutions play a critical role — often enshrined in national constitutions or laws — in planning budgets and overseeing their implementation. Nepal's Legislature-Parliament provided limited oversight during the budget cycle. This score reflects that the legislature provided weak oversight during the planning stage and implementation stage of the budget cycle. The supreme audit institution provided adequate budget oversight. Under the law, it has full discretion to undertake audits. Nepal does not have an Independent Fiscal Institution. While IFIs are not yet widespread globally, they are increasingly recognized as an important source of independent, nonpartisan information.

Press Freedom Violations

Reporting with Police Escorting

Reporter's Diary

Dukuchap village is 45 minutes' motorcycle ride from Lagaenkhel bus park of Lalitpur district. There is Danuwar community in this village. We decided a day before to visit it on Saturday to bring the news about the daily lifestyle of the community.

At 10 am next day, Ramhari Karki (Editor of dainiknews.com) and I met at Satdobato. Passing through Bhaisepati, Khokana and Bungmati we saw Bagmati and Khahare Rivers on the right side of the street. It could be easily observed that the rivers' courses were deviated, and the sand being extracted from the riverbank. I asked Ramhari Karki to limit the speed so that I could take some pictures of human encroachment upon the natural flow of the rivers. Yes, I took 2-3 pictures.

A person standing near sand mine in black sunglasses saw us take pictures. Ramhari Karki started the bike after I took the pictures. After a short while, I saw four bikes following us. At first, I thought they were travelling for personal work, but they continued following us taking the way we were on. We stopped our motorcycle near Danuwar settlement. Four following bikes also stopped there. Now, it was undoubtedly, we were under their scan. I hurriedly and surreptitiously managed to telephone the Metropolitan Police Range Jawlakhel Senior Superintendent of Police, Mr Ganesh Aaire and asked for the security. When they saw me talking over phone, they came near me. Seven people surrounded us and began speaking foul words. They kept on asking why we were there; why we were taking the pictures; and who we were etc. They threatened us to immediately leave the place otherwise, be kept under control. "We do not permit journalists to enter inside this area," they warned. In order to keep ourselves in safe side, we initially told them that we were not journalists but they did not believe us because we had taken the pictures of the sand mine.

While they were grilling us, police persons arrived in motorbike. Seeing the police, they got dispersed. We felt safe after seeing the police. We agreed not to go to the Danuwar



Reporter Shibahari Ghimire

"We do not permit journalists to enter inside this area," they warned. In order to keep ourselves in safe side, we initially told them that we were not journalists but they did not believe us because we had taken the pictures of the sand mine.

settlement, rather went to the illegal sand extraction site for reporting. Under police security, we took some more pictures and noted down the vehicle numbers used for sand smuggling. Mine owners were watching us. We left the sand mine site. After travelling for seven minutes, again seven motorbikes suddenly appeared before us. Ward Chair of Godawari Municipality, Suak Bahadur Lama was one of those in the motorcycle. They blocked our way. They shouted if we were journalists. We didn't respond. Being aggressive, some approached us, intending to fight. Police intervened scene preventing the assault. We somehow managed to escape. The police were behind us. The gang followed us up to Bhaisepati. We reached Jawlakhel under police escorting.

Source Nagarik Daily, April 1 2018.

Local Rep, Smuggler Threaten Reporter

Reporter to the Nagarik daily, Shibahari Ghimire, and reporter to the dainiknews.com online news portal, Ramhari Karki, received threat of physical attack from a group of people operating illegal sand excavation in Lalitpur district of the Kathmandu Valley on March 31.

According to reporter Ghimire, four people in two motorcycles followed them while heading to remote Dukuchap of Lalitpur where the illegal sand excavation was rampant avoiding administration's attention. "Four people followed us after I took some photos of the sand mine area and some other people gheraoed us and started questioning why we took photos. They threatened us to leave the site immediately," he added. The two journalists however managed to call Lalitpur Police seeking help for rescue from the gang. Two police persons including Sub Inspector Krishna Sitaula rescued the two journalists from the group and provided security for reporting on the illegal sand excavation, according to Ghimire.

While returning from the area, yet again, another group blocked their way and started enquiring whether they were journalists. According to Ghimire the two police however told the group that they were not journalists 'to avoid further tensions'. The police finally escorted the reporters to their offices. Importantly, Chairman of Godawari Municipality Ward No 8, Suk Bahadur Lama, was also in the group comprising sand smugglers, according to the journalists. Earlier, Ghimire had received death threat from unknown persons after reporting about rampant illegal sand mining in the area last year also.

The incident shows journalists reporting the corruption, crime and irregularities are targeted by the various untoward elements. It is quite abhorring that people's representative is also in the gang to threat journalists. (with inputs from Ashok Dahal)

Attack

A. Representative for Province-4, Rajan Upadhyay, reported that a journalist associated with Adarsha Samaj national daily, Prakash Dhakal, received injury during police intimidation while reporting. The incident occurred in Pokhara on February 6. Pokhara lies in Province-4.

Quoting journalist Dhakal, representative Upadhyay explained that despite informing the police that he was a journalist, the police attacked him with sticks while dispersing a demonstration in the street. As a result, he received bruise in his leg.

The incident occurred after student union started demonstration against the death of Bodhraj Dhakal in a road accident. Journalist Dhakal was there to report the incident. The police should maintain restraint while controlling mob, and should separate journalists from protesters.

B. Ashok Dahal, FF representative for Province-3, reported that two journalists were beaten and their camera snatched by the organizer of a religious function on the premises of the Pashupatinath in Kathmandu on February 25 for reporting the function.

Journalist Raju Pokhrel and camera person Meghraj Pahadi affiliated to www.pariwartankhabar.com news portal were beaten by the organizer. The journalists had reached the program venue after a complaint of fraud in organizing the function. Sharing the incident with representative Dahal, cameraperson Pahadi said, "Dispute erupted among the organizers belonging to a religious Hindu youth group and we were capturing it. When we asked why the donation was sought even from the children in the function, the main priest in the function instructed his men to attack us."

According to him, they had to rush to the nearby police station after a group of 50 youths manhandled and chased them away. "We have registered a complaint against the organizer at Gausala police office," he informed. The police helped to bring their seized camera. But, according to journalist Pokhrel, their memory card with the photos and video of the incident and camera batteries were not returned.

C. FF representative for Province-1 Bikram Niraula reported that Ilam based Chiyabari FM technicians Krishna Pathak and Prakash Neupane were attacked on March 7 by an unknown gang.



Krishna Pathak receiving treatment

Quoting FM station manager Prem Adhikari, representative Niraula stated that the technicians were attacked while they were returning home from Radio station at 9 pm, however, the reason for the attack is unknown.

Technician Krishna Pathak was seriously injured and received treatment at Birta City Hospital, Birtamod. According to representative Niraula, a complaint was lodged at District Police Office Ilam. Police arrested three attackers on March 8 who were involved in attacking and looting the media persons.

Rabin Magar, 19, of Ilam Municipality 6; Manoj Magar, 22, and Kishor Limbu, 18 from the same locality were arrested in connection with the incident. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Ramesh Basnet, one of the attackers escaping arrest is being searched. As per Chiyabari station manager PremAdhikari, the group also robbed Rs 45,000 and a mobile set of the media persons.

D. Rajan Upadhyay, FF representative for Province 4, reported that Kaski based Journalist, Ghanshyam Pandey, was injured in a bomb blast at Bijaypur, Kaski, on February 20. Journalist Pandey is a station manager at Radio Gandaki and associated with Gandaki television.

Journalist Pandey had reached Bijaypur to report the discovery of a bomb like object in the area. He received injury in right side of his neck and head due to the blast. Police Officer Kul Bahadur Khatri also received injury in the same incident. The incident occurred after the Biplob-led Maoist group declared general strike on the day.



Journalist Dhakal being rescued from injury with police baton.

Death Threat to Reporter

A. FF representative from Province No 3, Ashok Dahal, reported that journalists Rajesh Bhandari and Madan Babu Bhandari were issued death threat by a police person for reporting about his alleged connection in gold smuggling in Kathmandu on March 25. Rajesh Bhandari is affiliated with www.ratopati.com- an online news portal- and Madan Babu Bhandari is affiliated with Kathmandu based Sushasan weekly and www.suvadin.com online media.

"A police person working at the crime investigation division, who was close to me, shared information that Assistant Sub Inspector of Nepal Police Balkrishna Sanjel told his colleagues to shoot him if he wrote news about him (police person)," said representative Dahal quoting reporter Bhandari.

Then, the journalists complained at the Metropolitan Police Crime Investigation Division of receiving death threat from Assistant Sub Inspector of Nepal Police Balkrishna Sanjel.

Journalist duo had published the news story about the internal investigation of the police for alleged connection of Sanjel with the gold smuggling racket on Ratopati.com and Shuvadin.com online news portals.

According to Dahal, Madan had been receiving threat from the same police through various channels.

Sanjel was irked by the journalists for the news connecting him to a gold smuggler Chudamani Upreti. According to the news reports, police has formed a four-member committee to probe Sanjel's contact with the racket.

B. FF representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, reported that Raj Kamal Singh, reporter with Aarthik Aabhiyan daily received death threat from the government officials of Janakpur Custom Office on February 1 in Janakpur.

Reporter Singh had written news entitled 'involvement of customs officials in smuggling' exposing officials Hem Chand Sharma and Jagdish Das for their involvement in custom smuggling and tax evasion in Janakpur area.

Quoting reporter Singh, representative Singh informed that the official Chand and his driver Prakash Yadav (working on contract basis) had called the reporter in their office after reading the news published against them. Immediately after reaching the office, officials threatened the reporter not to write news against them or they would use goons to kill him. They

also forcefully took another journalist Sumeet Mishra to other room and threatened him along with reporter Singh.

C. Similarly, in a separate incident in the same province, Rautahat-based journalists Rabindra Saha, Rajendra Chhetri and Sanjay Sahani received death threat by the newly elected people's representative Anil Kumar Jha.

According to representative Singh, reporter Sahani was issued threat of attack over phone by Jha through the mobile number 9851050357 on February 16. Sahani is the editor of online news portal www.aajtakmadhesh.com. He had written the news relating to Jha few days ago.

Later on February 21, a letter addressing FNJ Rautahat Chapter's President was found in the premise of the office. The letter written in the name of underground group 'Santosh Mishra

(Barood)' threatened to kill the journalists Saha and Chhetri within three days.

D. Moreover, representative for Province No. 4, Rajan Upadhyaya, reported that Parbat-based correspondent to Nagarik daily, Chhabilal Tiwari, received a death threat from a contractor for writing news on March 15.

According to the representative, contractor Rajendra Bhandari issued death threat to the reporter calling from the mobile number 9851010433. Quoting reporter Tiwari, representative Upadhyay informed that he had written the news about Bhandari few days ago that the construction of Motorable Bridge was delayed.

Following the death threat, Tiwari has registered application at the District Administration Office, Parbat urging for the safety and action against the culprit. 

Obstruction

A. The Supreme Court barred journalists from different media from getting access to hearing on different benches on March 4, reported Province-3 representative of FF, Ashok Dahal.

Quoting Ms Shova Sharma, a legal reporter with the www.setopati.com news portal, Dahal said security persons at the court gate barred the journalists from entering into the hearing of important cases, citing the order from the 'top officials.' 'Earlier, the Supreme Court used to allow journalists having special press pass issued by the court to access the benches. But, they obstructed those having special pass from getting in for reporting on hearing,' she said to representative Dahal.

B. Similarly, journalists were barred from reporting in Bharatpur, Chitwan, a city in the southern plains of Province No 3 in Nepal. Many reporters affiliated to different media were barred from entering the Bharatpur Metropolitan Office for news coverage on March 27.

Reporters Prabin Kumar Dutta, Ramesh Kumar Poudel and Nawaraj Mishra of Kantipur Media, Sabita Shrestha of Nagarik daily, Tulman Gurung of Annapurna Post daily, Gita Gurung of Kalika FM and Shiva Acharya of Sauraha online

news portal were asked enter the office, while a delegation of business persons in the district had been to office to submit a memorandum on the newly executed tax rules in the Metropolis. The administrative staff at the office, Prem Raj Joshi, told the journalists not to attend the program.

Mayor apologizes over obstructing journalists

Following this incident on March 30 Metropolis Mayor Renu Dahal apologized for the mistreatment to the media persons and pledged cooperation and coordination with the media in the days to come.

C. Repeated incidents of press freedom violations during public protests and strikes against the provisional Provincial Capital were recorded in Province No. 5.

FF's representative for Province No. 5, Sudeep Gautam, reported that vehicle carrying journalists was stopped by agitating public on January 20 in Dang. The protests and strikes were intensified demanding provincial capitals as per the people's demand.

According to representative Gautam, a group of media persons had reached the site to cover news on the highway-centered protests and their demands. As soon as the journalists reached the place, agitating public stopped the jeep and even wiped out the press sticker.

Editors Dilli Malla (Jana Ubhar weekly), Narendra KC (Naya Youg Bodh daily) and

Aazad Khadka (www.khabartokari.com) and a photo journalist Kuldeep Neupane were stuck for an hour in the vehicle and return without reporting.

Similarly, in a separate incident a vehicle carrying Nayapatrika daily for distribution was obstructed in Tulsipur Dang by the agitators on January 18. The vehicle resumed after 1.5 hours with police escorting.

D. FF representative for Province-3 reported that Office of the President barred the photo and video journalists of private media from covering the swearing-in ceremony of governors (Provincial Chiefs) of seven provinces on January 19.

Quoting Nagarik Daily's photojournalist Dinesh Gole, representative Ashok Dahal explained that on reaching Sheetal Niwas to cover the event, security persons stopped them by entering into the oath-taking hall after checking identity cards. Photo and video journalists of State owned media outlets including the National News Agency (RSS), Gorkhapatra daily and Nepal Television were however allowed inside the Office of the President with their cameras. "But over two dozen journalists from private media were stopped at media center in the premises of the President office" informed Dahal quoting Gole.

Mr Dahal observed, "The President Office used to be media friendly until few years ago, but its behaviour to the media especially independent and private has changed recently." 

12.69% female source in 1,060 news

Nanu Maiya Khadka



Nepali media made significant stride following 1990 People's movement, which was further augmented after the second people's movement of 2006. With this, the issues of women, backward and marginalized community witnessed unprecedented attention. Of course, the media's role to this remained mostly positive. Media, as the major source of information to the public, is responsible to create debate on any pertinent issue like gender equality and women empowerment. Despite vibrant slogans and rights movements, women representation in political parties, State mechanism, and private sector is comparatively low in Nepal.

At such, why not a study on women's representation in media be done to bring forth data that helps analyse this pertinent issue. In this in mind, Freedom Forum began studying the major print one and half year back. It has been conducting monitoring since January 2017 on main news contents from the major nine national dailies namely, Kantipur, Gorkhapatra, Nagarik, Annapurna Post, Naya Patrika, The Kathmandu Post, The Rising Nepal, The Himalayan Times and Republica.

A recently published report by FF on it states that 1 among approximately 4 males is female writer/ columnist on the Op-Ed pages of the national dailies while 1 among every 10 male bylines is female on the main news of the dailies. Similarly, among 1,970 news sources quoted in 1,060 news monitored from January to March 2017 only 12.69% are female.

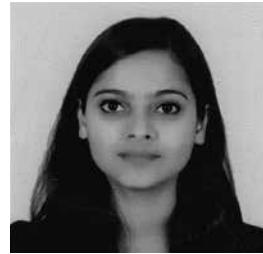
Earlier, at an interface held during dissemination of the monitoring reports, Director at Department of Information Ms. Suman Bajracharya informed that among 5,312 journalists provided accreditation, only 11.16% are females. She also recommended media to make a policy for at least 33% mandatory recruitment of female journalists in their media as done in public services.

The reports published every three months show gradual improvement in the statistics for women's presence in media contents. However, their presence in contents is yet not as visible as their overall actual presence in media. Reports again conclude that one of the daily having less than 3 female bylines in three months in the initial period of monitoring has raised up to 7 female byline. Also remarkable is that percentage of women quoted as news sources on the monitored national dailies show increase by approximately 3% from the last year.

Additionally, one report quotes an editor saying, "Only after discussing with FF on the reports we realized women's presence in our media. Now, we are keen on increasing female workspace in our media house." This signifies the editorial level realization is also important to ponder on the gender balance in their media as well as contents. On the other hand, female journalists have argued that they were ready to work during odd hours if the organizations ensured their safety and security issues. 

Sanitary Pad to Men! Yes, to men.

Ashmita Pokharel



Gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the most important areas focused by the UN along with other national and international agencies working in the field of women's issue. Although all the conventions and covenants mention no discrimination in terms of sex and gender, world is still divided into two dimensions- men and women. It is an accepted fact that except biology nothing should be different yet achieving equality is a far cry. Empowering women has become a core issue, because at some point of time, women were left behind men and from that point competition to maintain equality has begun. The concept of competition would not have been emerged if there were no discriminatory practices at the first place.

When the world, including we- Nepalis, was celebrating the International Women's Day on March 8 this year, a girl on remote area of Kailali district was severely tortured for her alleged involvement in witchcraft. A girl becomes a victim of rape every other day; a girl dies now and then when she stays in a chaugoth (an outhouse for girls and women to get them excluded from family during their menstruation).

There are many examples women are treated inhumane. Now we need a way out from the problems that we face and this is only possible when a woman is empowered. Empowering women and maintaining gender equality is only possible when male counterpart recognize their role as an equal contributor in any step- be it a house making, policy making, and development practices. From ages, women have been standing 'for the men'. But in the changed context, role of men has been imperative for respect to and rights of the women. When men and women come together for each other and support each other, the world can certainly become a better place to live in.

8th
March,
IWD

Being inspired by the Free Press Unlimited initiatives, Freedom Forum also marked this March 8 giving a creative and powerful symbolic message- men's only march for women! Collecting more than 20 organizations, men's march took the main street where the men folks were distributed sanitary pad. Sanitary pads to men?! Of course, to men. It was aimed at making men folks aware about women's health and hygiene. It seems small and even trivial for many, but once one cogitates on it, it is important that this female biological phenomenon must not be ignored.

When I remember the moment a man shrugged off after taking the sanitary pad, it still brings me humour. But, the reality he embraced after brief talk was praiseworthy- he put the sanitary pad in his bag with comfort, said he would give it to his spouse as a unique gift. The pad, the male ones had to give to their female members after reaching the family. We believed that a small but new initiative would help men generate respect to women. Once the respect is shown, it gradually inspire for collaboration and equal participation and rights. Isn't it a quick message-laden work far better than a grand seminar on women's rights in a big city hotel? 

Local Govt Not Receptive to RTI Act

People's representatives are found reluctant to implement the right to information (RTI) Act, one of the effective tools to promoting good governance and controlling corruption, a report shows.

According to a study report prepared with the analyses of the data of last seven months Freedom Forum found that local governments were yet to embrace RTI Act wholeheartedly.

Of the total 753 local levels, only 198 have implemented the right to information, said the report. The local levels that have put into action the right to information include Madhyapur Thimi Municipality, Ilam Municipality, Mahalaxmi Municipality (Lalitpur), Jugal Rural Municipality (Sindhupalchok), Kamalamai Municipality (Sindhuli), Kirtipur Municipality (Kathmandu), Panchkhal Municipality (Kavrepalanchok) and Shivaraj Municipality (Kapilvastu).

As defined by the RTI Act -2007, the "Right to Information" means the right to ask for and obtain information of public importance held in the public bodies and this term shall also include the right to study or observation of any written document/materials held in public body, to obtain a verified copy of such document, to visit or observe the place where any construction of public importance is going on and to obtain verified sample of any material or to obtain information held in any type of machine.

According to the report, Province 1 is in the forefront in terms of the implementation of the RTI. Out of 137 local levels in Province 1, 47 levels or 34.50 percent have provided information while the situation of the RTI implementation is the weakest in Province 2 as only nine levels, out of 136, have disseminated information. The study shows that 46 levels, out of 119, in Province 3; 21 levels, out of 85, in Province 4; 28 levels, out of 109, in Province 5; 18 levels, out of 69 in Province 6 and 22 levels, out of 88, in Province 7 have implemented the RTI Act.

FF Executive Chief Taranath Dahal who has been fighting for the RTI in Nepal for long said the implementation of the RTI Act would help establish and strengthen relations between the citizens and local government based on trust and constructive support, but the local levels,



Kumar Chaulagain

though not all, are yet to be committed and serious towards enforcing this Act recognised as the fundamental right of the citizens.

During the study, information was sought from local governments to make people and local representatives aware of national practices regarding the RTI, importance of RTI in the context of Nepal and its essentiality for development and good governance, but unwillingness to entertain the idea reflects the reluctance of local levels to promote good governance and transparency in office activities.

According to Commissioner at the National Information Commission, Mr Kiran Pokhrel, 10 years has passed since the RTI Act was brought

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A total of 103 countries of the world have so far brought the RTI Act into practice. Although Nepal's Constitution-1990 had guaranteed the RTI as the fundamental right, the country had to wait for around two decades for the formulation of the RTI Act.

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into practice in Nepal and it is a matter of grave concern that public bodies are still indifferent towards its implementation. Such bodies shall be compelled to abide by the Act.

The FF had, on August 21 last year, coinciding with the National Information Day, demanded 18 points information of the same nature from the local governments in all seven provinces. The RTI Act ensures the provision relating to appointment of an information officer at every local level.

Information about whether they have appointed an information officer, how proactive disclosure (without any request) of certain 20 types of information in every three months as guaranteed by the Act is taking place, whether they conduct public hearing as per the Good Governance Act-2006, whether the office has formulated any directives or policies and laws for the information management were sought from them.

Likewise, information was sought on various issues including whether the office has kept citizen's charter, whether it has its official website, whether details of elected people's representatives and employees have been collected.

Similarly, information was demanded about budget allocated for office construction, supplies and advertisement related to services in current fiscal year, about the policy and programme for advertisement, whether the office has policy to keep hoarding board at project site for transparency and whether the has formulated legal or policy-level structure to guarantee people's participation in its activities.

A total of 103 countries of the world have so far brought the RTI Act into practice. Although Nepal's Constitution-1990 had guaranteed the RTI as the fundamental right, the country had to wait for around two decades for the formulation of the RTI Act.

Though the Act related to the right to information was issued in 2007, it has not been fully implemented yet. So, Nepali society is still unknown about the importance of the right to information and its power. 

RTI Watch

A. Death threat to Information Seeker

It was alarming that an information seeker, Awrongzeb Ansari, received death threat by a principal of a school named Shree Siddharth Secondary School in Birgunj city on February 12. The school's principal used another person named Sameer Ansari to issue death threat to Mr. Awrongzeb over a telephonic conversation merely for requesting the information related to the expense of the budget in school. The information was sought in line with Right to Information, the right guaranteed under the Constitution of Nepal.

He had requested for the information about the budget allocated by District Education Office in the name of the School, expenses by the school, number of student provided scholarship and other facilities, and types of scholarship among others in the recent fiscal year.

B. RTI applications not registered

Two journalists were barred from entering into the Kailali District Treasury Controller Office in Dhangadi for news reporting on January 16. The office also declined to register Right to Information (RTI) application from the two

journalists, barring the citizens from using their constitutional right to access information held by public agency.

Acting head of the office Dammar Singh Thagunna obstructed district correspondent of Nagarik National daily Dil Bahadur Chhatyal and journalist Pushpa Raj Joshi when the two visited the office to collect some information from the office. According to the journalists, they had sought details of approval of Transportation Allowances and Dearness Allowances for government employees in recent months following a complaint of irregularities in the office. Quoting correspondent Chhatyal, FF's representative Ashok Dahal explained, "Thagunna and office accountant Mahadev Panta warned journalists to leave the office stating that the office doesn't permit any journalists to visit for news reporting."

C. RTI awareness campaign in backward villages

RTI campaigner Dhruva Kumar Jha from southern plains of Nepal has recently conducted Right to Information awareness programs in the remote municipalities and rural municipal-

ties of Mahottari district. The programs were organized in coordination with local activist and political leader Sarbesh Jha. FF's booklet on RTI and informative pamphlets on RTI in Maithili language were distributed during the campaigns.

During the 10-day campaign, campaigner Jha distributed around 20 thousand pamphlets to the public in the remote areas including Halkhori, Bathnaha, Chakawa, Kataiya, Sandha, Manara, Manara Kattit, Gairdabhetpur, Gonerpura, Madai, Jaaukh, Maruwaahi, Sakari, Madhawa Prakauli, Sanukhara. The campaign also included discussion on RTI among newly elected local representatives.

The campaign was very helpful to sensitize citizens in the underdeveloped district about RTI for the first time. The local representatives were excited about the program, said campaigner Jha. In such underdeveloped areas, involving locals to this initiative would protect and promote RTI, he added. According to Jha, interaction with journalists including FNJ Mahottari Chapter's President Kamalesh Mandal was held in addition to the distribution of informative books during the campaign.

RTI Nepal App download reaches 750

The number of the RTI Nepal App download has reached more than 750 by the end of March 2018. The app, first of its kind from the civil society organization in Nepal, was launched by FF in the last week of December 2017.

In order to evaluate the use of RTI Nepal App, FF developed short questionnaire and collected feedback from 50 Public Information Officers (PIOs) from 11 districts of Province No 6 and 7 in February 2018. All 50 PIOs were the participants in the 3-day training workshop in two phases- first in Birendranagar, Surkhet, from February 17 to 19, and next in Dhangadhi, Kailali, from February 20-22, 2018.

On the basis of evaluation, 83% Public Information Officers reported that RTI Nepal App is very useful and remaining 17%

reported partially useful. Likewise, among the 50 participants (PIOs), 47 (94%) downloaded the app and remaining 3 did not download it for they were using iOS phone set.

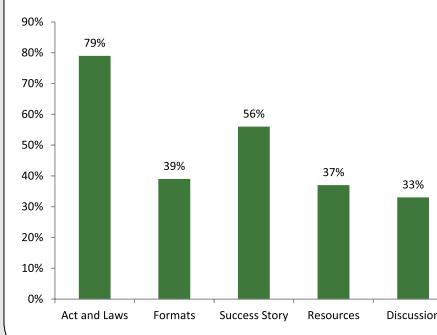
Among the concerned respondents, most of

them (79%) reported act and laws were useful which is followed by success story (56%), various format (39%), RTI related resources (37%) and discussions (33%). Most of (95%) the respondents (PIOs) used the app during the training sessions.

The app, an integrated package on several dimensions of RTI, from principles to practice, is aimed at making public and the media persons aware on use of RTI and its benefit for contributing to the good governance endeavor in the country. FF encourages everyone including media person to use the app. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.yipl.rtinepal&hl=en>

The app can download directly from the Playstore in android smart gadgets.

Likes of content in the app



FF's Concern on Mass Communication Bill

Freedom Forum submitted a 24-point attention letter to the Ministry of Information and Communications on 9 February, showing concern over the draft bill of the proposed "Mass Communication Act, 2018". The letter was submitted to MoIC's Secretary, Kedar Bahadur Adhikari.

The letter mentioned that FF identified several points, which would make mass communication law impractical, unconstitutional and irrational therefore have suggested the Ministry keeping the provisions within constitutional standards and uphold democratic practice.

FF showed it concerns as – the proposed bill aims to revoke three existing acts related to communications sector namely, Press and Publication Act, 2048 BS, National Broadcasting Act 2048 BS and Working Journalist Act, 2051 BS. Although the draft bill is said to be consolidated, aiming to keep mass communications sector fair, independent, transparent and professional in order to uphold the democratic practice, revoking these acts would tamper working journalists' rights.

Full text of the concern —

The Government of Nepal has come up with a draft bill of "Mass Communications Act" that aims to revoke three existing acts related to communications sector namely, Press and Publication Act 2048 BS, National Broadcasting Act 2048 BS and Working Journalist Act 2051 BS. As an institution working in the field of freedom of expression, communications and information for over a decade, Freedom Forum has serious concern over the draft bill. The bill is said to be consolidated, aiming to keep mass communications sector fair, independent, transparent and professional in order to uphold democratic practice. Freedom Forum has following concerns regarding the draft bill-

- 1) This draft bill has been consolidated to regulate the entire communications sector in a single umbrella act. This is a positive and welcome step.
- 2) FF has reservation towards definition of the words like 'mass communications', 'journalist' and 'press representative'. It needs correction.
- 3) The bill has envisioned the establishment of National Mass Communications Authority for regulating license and professional ethics and promoting achieve and self-regulation. Although the concept of establishing authority is positive, the committee responsible for recommending the establishment of authority seems biased. Stakeholders must be consulted to determine rights, duties and responsibilities of the authority.
- 4) The draft bill has proposed that the authority shall have the right to distribute government advertisement. It is irrational and ludicrous in the context of current governance set up.
- 5) FF has concern over the provision that mentions employees to the authority shall be provided by the State. This hampers the autonomy and independence of the authority.
- 6) Although the provision relating to new system of recording the newspaper is positive, old registration method has made it difficult. Also the documentation of publications from provincial and local level is centralized.
- 7) Proposed segregation made in relation to the management of newspaper has not considered the concept of Audit Bureau of Circulation which might continue government interferences and questions the relevance and existence of Press Council. This issue must be addressed seriously.
- 8) The bill provides ground for control of newspaper reasoning the legitimate restriction which is against the constitutional ground protection of newspaper.
- 9) Traditional and irrelevant provisions as compelling registration of printing press, issuance of certificate have been incorporated in the bill. Placing printing business under the regulation of mass communications in today's world is deplorable.
- 10) Some of the provisions in the draft bill aim at discouraging the creative use of new technology in broadcasting sector.
- 11) Double taxation system for fees and royalties in broadcasting sector has been continued in this bill as well.
- 12) Draft bill provides ground for the cancellation of permission letter for broadcasting banned news which draws serious concern.
- 13) Although broadcasting medium has been segregated as public broadcasting, community broadcasting and private broadcasting, there is no proper definition and ground for segregation. Also, community broadcasting has been made mandatory to advertise about local government.
- 14) Although the provision entitles consent for the periodic permission of radio, television frequency, the period classified seems improper and irrational.
- 15) One of the serious concerns over the bill is incorporation of controversial Online Media Operation Directive. The provision that compels for the registration, renewal, certification and commercialization of the online media platform draws a serious concern.
- 16) Bill revokes Working Journalist Act 2051 BS. With the annulment, rights of the journalists are also revoked. Although the act has been revoked, the committee formed to determine minimum wage for journalists still remains operational. This issue needs to be discussed thoroughly.
- 17) Section 45 of the bill has the positive provision relating to self regulation by the media house. But if this provision is invoked, there is no need and relevance of Press Council. But, still, the Council Act has not been revoked by this bill. This kind of double standard is irrelevant.
- 18) Another provision that draws serious concern is the provision for the press representative. The provision is same as before. Keeping the similar provision for certification of press representative by government creates accreditation in the media sector. This is against the fundamental norm of press freedom. This bill supports the provision of declaring the journalist by the State, which is an undemocratic practice.
- 19) Bill has similar provision for restriction regarding publication and broadcasting as per the constitutional standards, yet regulation of such restrictions is not mentioned clearly. Similarly, broadcasting against the restricted provisions is termed as criminal offence and treated as State party offence.
- 20) The bill has envisioned new institution such as mass communication training foundation, communication museum, information bank, journalist welfare fund etc which might create unnecessary financial burden to the government.
- 21) If this bill gets the status of an Act, currently operating media should also get re-registration. This provision invites unnecessary government interference.
- 22) This bill has incorporated many provisions relating to media, though the provisions are ambiguous and vague, which gives ground for the drafting of many by-laws and regulations that would ultimately suppress press/media freedom.
- 23) After the commencement of this Act, Press Council Act becomes irrelevant. Thus Press Council Act must also be revoked.
- 24) As per it, the books written in Nepal must also be registered which is again an irrational and ridiculous provision.

Policy
Watch

This is FF's initial response to the proposed Mass Communications Bill 2018. This bill needs to be discussed seriously; hence FF has initiated thorough study on it. This issue needs serious concern from the media fraternities, FoE advocates, citizen and political parties too. 

50 PIOs Implementing RTI to Build Good Governance

Freedom Forum trained 50 Public Information Officers on Right to Information conducting 3-day training workshop in two phases- first in Birendranagar, Surkhet from February 17 to 19, and next in Dhangadhi, Kailali from February 20-22.

The objective of the training workshop was to make aware the Public Information Officer (PIOs) on right to information act and its provision for maintaining transparency and accountability in the public agencies. The training comprised of concept, meaning, principles, of RTI and rights and duties of Information Officers, importance of right to information, proactive disclosure, process of handling information request, right to information as a tool of change, promoting good governance in local government and so on.

Meanwhile, discussion was held on RTI App developed by Freedom Forum, where participants could easily figure out about the process



Training in Birendranagar, Surkhet.

of information request and response, legal provisions, success stories as well.

Freedom Forum's Chairperson Mr Haribinod Adhikari, General Secretary Mr Dharmendra Jha and FNJ's Vice President Mr Bipul Pokharel were the facilitators of the training. The trainers conducted sessions using audio visuals, group exercises, lecture and interaction, question- answer method for delivering the content.

In the training organized under the project "Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)" with the support of USAID and implemented by FHI360, most of the participants were from local level governments and others from central government offices.

During the trainings the PIOs shared their problems and committed to work for improvement of the local governance in line with RTI. 

Men March for Women's Rights, Respect

Sanitary Pads Distributed to Men to Make Them Aware on Women's Health, Rights

Celebration of Women's Day every year across the globe is a common phenomenon. Demands as respect women, provide equal rights and no discrimination, among others are the slogans contextualizing the country status. The observation ranges from seminar to rallies, talk show to demonstration bearing somehow similar style. Breaking the traditional approach, more than 20 organizations including Freedom Forum and NEFEJ this year gathered 400 plus men and organized a men-only march named 'Men for Women' on March 8, where the men were distributed sanitary pads used by women during their monthly cycle. There were neither lectures nor the presentation of working papers, but the sanitary pads prodding males to realize the biological phenomenon of women and the cooperation men could extend for their health and rights.

Former Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha inaugurated the march from Maitighar Mandala. Addressing briefly to the participants carrying placards and banners, he said, "Irrespective of the change

brought forth by the science and technology, and the modernity implemented in Nepal's life, the violence against women is still not declined- so disgracing." He underscored that time had come for all to work in unison to end gender discrimination and violence. According to him, such rally gathering people from diverse sectors could create awareness on women's rights and men's role for women empowerment. The former Chief Justice however said man is not synonymous to violence against women.

The march begun from Maitighar Mandala went to Shantibatika carrying placards and banner that were telling men folks to be aware of women's problems. The slogans in the placards were urging the males to pay attention and play active role to ease the lives of women.

Sanitary pads were symbolic message that men should change their patriarchal attitude toward women and embolden society to shed the stigma. The march got massive media coverage. Freedom Forum had also made substantial



social media publicity of the program. The growing number of people and the organizations as compared to the rally last year shows that issue- men's engagement for women- is getting pertinent. The M4W campaign is indeed a collaborative approach to realize women's empowerment and to change society by challenging the ingrained stereotype. If such program is expanded to the provincial level, it is likely to garner wider support for nationwide awareness and movement. 

Internet and its Safe Use

Internet has brought forth many opportunities that we had never expected. Whether it is for communication, commerce, innovation and research, internet is unavoidable. The use of internet has not only disrupted the traditional mode of communication, but forced every other sector as teaching learning, management, advertisement and diplomacy for change. Once put in place the necessary infrastructures, it is undoubted that internet is to facilitate the daily lives enhancing the speed and convenience of work.

The ICT wonder is therefore engaging more and more people, especially the youths and teenagers. It is not unusual if a baby is founding entertaining on a tab or school students doing homework on computer and searching new thing on internet.

More than half the world population is connected to the internet, regarded as the network of the networks, while Nepal Telecommunications Authority's report has put the internet penetration at 62 percent. In Nepal too, as the fastest and easiest medium of communications, internet has propelled the freedom of expression online. However, time has come for the State to ponder the safe use of internet. The misuse of this open universe of communication-internet- should be taken into account especially in case of the children, who are the shapers of the livable future.

Putting this into mind, Freedom Forum has recently published a booklet which touches upon multifarious issues relating to internet and encourages every teacher, parent and the internet users to make the internet a safe medium for vibrant communications online. The booklet titled "Internet and Its Safe Use" also draws the attention of the policy makers, school textbook writers, curriculum developers, educationists and security bodies that atmosphere for healthy online communication was essential with the guarantee of safe use of internet to children.

The booklet makes aware the internet users about the digital risks, measures to avoid these. It has finely made elaborate the national legislation and international instruments guiding the freedom of expression online. Published in Nepali language, the booklet suggests that the school curricula incorporated the chapters on



importance of internet for FoE and measures to keep children's use of internet safe, because the formal education on such pressing issue can help prepare aware digital natives.

The booklet is divided into six chapters i.e. introduction of internet, access to internet, internet misuse and cybercrime, internet and law, safe use of internet, and internet and school education. The booklet includes introduction, evolution, functions, controlling mechanism of internet, internet freedom, access to internet and digital device, human right and internet, social media, cyber crime, role of parents and teachers. FF strongly encourages the school teachers, guardians and the students as well to utilize the knowledge the booklet provides for the safe FoE practices to better perform in their fields. The booklet prepared with the assistance of IFEX is available at: <http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/booklets/>

Similarly, FF also made a review of school textbooks to know whether the use of internet and computer is well mentioned along with the freedom of expression. The review has found that the school curriculum (Grade 5 to 12 textbooks) have mentioned very little about the safe use of computer and internet along with the freedom of expression.

The review thoroughly checks the chapters and analyzes the relevant texts and makes recommendations accordingly. It has strongly recommended the policy makers and curriculum developers to prioritize the importance of internet and its safe use, so that it could contribute to creating healthy atmosphere for practice of freedom of expression online. Find the full review report at :- <http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/>

Dahal honoured with National RTI Award

Freedom Forum's Executive Chief Mr Taranath Dahal has been honoured with the Sastikadevi Right to Information National Award in recognition to his significant role on promotion of the right to information. The award was conferred by the Federation of Nepali journalists (FNJ) Morang Chapter on March 30, the Establishment Day of the FNJ. The award carries a purse of Rs 51,000 along with a letter of felicitation.

The FNJ Morang Chapter informed that Mr Dahal was awarded for his tremendous efforts for bringing the RTI Act, and lobbying for establishing the National Information Commission in Nepal, and the untiring campaign for the implementation of the RTI with the creation of vibrant demand and supply sides. With this, his efforts concentrated on exposing huge corruption and irregularities in a bid to build the good governance regime across the country.

Meanwhile, Executive Chief Dahal is being conferred on the Press Freedom Fighter Award for his role on promotion and protection of press freedom and journalists' safety.

The Award to be given by the FNJ Panchthar Chapter carries a purse of Rs 22,222 along with a felicitation letter. The award is being given on coming Republic Day of Nepal- Jesta 15.

Freedom Forum congratulates Mr Dahal on his achievement, and wishes his continued zeal for the protection and promotion of RTI and press freedom in the country.



...Continued from page 1

their access to data, statistics and documents from all three tiers of the government in the context of changed state structure. "We believe that adoption of transparency, openness and accountability with high priority by those governments in their structures, policies and practices would help any governments in the future to be open, transparent and accountable," he added.

Similarly, Director General of Central Bureau of Statistics, Mr Suman Raj Aryal, said the CBS was receiving many questions and assistance from the provincial and local governments that they needed statistics on various sectors in their respective provinces and local levels, but we had not. According to him, the CBS was conducting the economic census for the first time in Nepal as per the federal set up and need of diversified data in the local and provincial levels. Information Officer at the Office of the Prime Minister, Mr Chirinjibi Paudel, said a common understanding among all sides on the open data would help further debate and practices for the transparent culture. There was not rigorous homework at the PM's office relating to open government data practice.

Chief Information Commissioner, Mr Krishna Hari Baskota, said the OGD is the watchdog for the activities of the government. It promotes good governance. He reminded that the countries as Netherland, Denmark, UK and others have been benefited by the OGD. "Demand and supply of the data itself cannot be accessible unless supported by the legal provision. We need to adopt policy on OGD to make headway to developed nation. It is necessary for empowering the citizens in democracy," he underlined.

In his presentation on 'Sub-National Governance Situation and Data Needs', Program Director at the Asia Foundation, Bishnu Adhikari, said actual transition had just begun with three governments starting their works. However, actual physical transfer of data and resources from the central level is yet to be realized, he added. There is the need of re-organization of the process of delivering service. It might take 2-3 years for the proper functioning of the government. Capacity, Infrastructure and resources play a vital role in the re-structuring process. As the transition is likely to prolong, it may create the gap in service delivery. General Secretary of FF, Mr Dharmendra Jha stressed that the self disclosure was the soul of RTI. He suggested that in the federal level the PMO could devise strong mechanism to monitor RTI and open data practice. Similarly, NIC was suggested for effective monitoring, clear order and punishment.

Chief Executive Officer of Bikas Udyami, Santosh Gartaula, said his organization was ready to provide help to anyone to access database in any format he/ she wants to use.

KEY POINTS

- **If the transition of governance system is delayed, it is likely to cause gap in service delivery in local level**
- **Self disclosure is soul of RTI**
- **Lack of technical human resources at local level was a hindrance.**
- **The data community were making the government data available in open data format to ease the access to information**
- **All steps of budget making process were not followed in Nepal**
- **Apps ensuring two-way communication in hill district Dhading**

Chief Executive Officer at Young Innovation, Mr Bibhusan Bista, on his presentation, 'Making open data a reality at the local government level,' shared the experience of Young Innovation that various open data program could be made to facilitate the local government on open data, but the lack of technical human resources at local level was a hindrance. Freedom Forum's Krishna Sapkota made presentation on 'Open data and right to information: Some initiative's focused FF's activities as Open Budget Survey 2017, Nepal's Citizens' climate budget, and RTI campaign at local government.

Similarly, data scientist at Kathmandu Living Lab, Mr Arogya Koirala, mentioned about Kathmandu Living Lab's journey from the earthquake as data collection, management and publication initiatives. Each of us has different information, but there is the need to channelize the information and sharing of the information with each other. During the question and answer session, the participants also worried for the CSO activities in Nepal. Gender expert, Ms Saru Shrestha said, "We talk only about the access to data but do we use the available data while planning and policy-making?"

Sagar Prasai, one representing disabled community, wondered whether open government data websites were accessible for visually impaired persons.

LLB student Sabin Pokhrel wondered, "NIC was working with the system like that of inside-Singhadurbar (central administrative centre of the

country) people, because I waited for 22-23 days to receive information- that too incomplete."

During the workshop, four groups were formed and discussion held on numerous issues as that are barriers to promotion of RTI and open data at local, provincial and federal levels. They also mulled the activities needed to address the problems and exercised for identifying the actors.

Group A was named: Promoting the right to information and public disclosure, while Group B: Identifying local level data needs and filling gaps, Group C: Enhancing data literacy, and Group D: Building capacity to use data at local level.

For not having the promotion of RTI, Group A discussion argued that there were three challenges- institutional, attitudinal and the capacity related ones. Lack of conceptual clarity about RTI on both demand and supply side, barrier of language (one/two language dominated), no archiving, no digitization, low level of RTI awareness among public citizens, NIC's just ritual inspection, no users-friendly information, no research on demand and supply sides' need etc belonged to these challenges.

Similarly, Group B argued that the flow of data and information in Nepal was still traditional.

Group C pointed out the need of digital literacy, reform in education system, provision of reward and incentive for RTI campaigners and data community in all three communities.

Moreover, Group D said in order for stakeholder groups (e.g. governments, CSOs, media etc.) at local sphere to be able to use data, their capacity needs to be strengthened. Conclusion could be drawn that clarity on the OGD among government officials was imperative, so that a concrete plan to embrace OGD could be made. NIC was found making continuous efforts for the government to implement the open government data action plan. It was found that through the provision of proactive disclosure of RTI it was prodding public agencies. Overall, government key stakeholders need to be identified for the open government data implementation. Orientation and lobbying could be upped in this regard.

As it is the policy formation time in the local and provincial governments, CSOs can collaborate with certain local and provincial governments on formulating policy on RTI and open government data and implementation. They can be trained for it by the CSO.

Need of regular interface between CSOs and government agencies was realized to create synergic efforts. 

Opportunity Towards Accountable Local Governance

In order to foster engagement of women and marginalized groups in local democratic processes, Freedom Forum as a national partner of Sustainable Use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN) Project is undertaking its lead role in the areas of capacity building, public awareness raising, research, GESI policy implementation and backstopping to district CSOs.

This project is being implemented in two local structures (seven Rural Municipalities; four Municipalities and a sub-metropolitan) of each six districts (Achham, Bajhang, Dadeldhura, Kailali, Lalitpur and Sindhupalchowk).

As part of the capacity building component, Freedom Forum conducted a five-day Training of Trainers (ToT) from 26 February to 02 March 2018 in Sanfebagar, Achham with the objective of enhancing capacity of citizens/ WMG to participate in and influence decision making processes at local government levels, through integrated technologies.

The training had developed competencies of some local level facilitator to deliver training by using integrated technologies for the promotion of civic participation in governance and accountability. Mainly the trainers had developed their understanding and competencies on thematic areas of open data (right to information and proactive disclosure), budget transparency, citizen reporting and complaint redress. Besides, they also enhanced their skills and knowledge on the issues of governance and local govern-



Training of Trainers

ment structure and process, spaces of citizen-state engagement, provision and delivery of public services, existing tools and mechanisms of social accountability at local government.

Importantly, the participants comprising district project team members had also enhanced their understanding and skill on municipal data portal including the sets of five integrated technology i.e. digitization of municipal plan, decisions and budget; municipal e-profile; human resource database and group messaging system; municipal-citizen interface and mapping of municipal point of Interest, basic data skill and video editing skill to the DCSOs.

Towards developing gender and social inclusion awareness materials for WMG on leadership/ democratic participation and integrated technologies, the Forum designed three materials

i.e. PSA (Radio), Poster and Illustrated Graphics as training

resource materials. Likewise, the Poster has presented local government flowchart (structure, governance process, spaces for citizen engagement and decision making/ leadership). The illustrated graphics has content on Right to Information, grievances redress mechanisms, leadership and participation, public hearing and information section (Information as the initial instrument for empowerment/ empowering the WMG to take self-lead to advocate for their rights and entitlements.

Other activities including concluding Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) on citizen-state engagement, Open Data Initiative Mapping and Analysis, thematic manual refinements, capacity building to women leaders are underway.

FF in International Forum

Executive Chief Mr. Taranath Dahal, Narayan Ghimire and Gender Monitoring officer Ms Nanu Maiya Khadka participated in Asia Partner Meeting organized by Free Press Unlimited (FPU) in Negombo of Sri Lanka from 8 to 12 January. The meeting was also attended by the partners from Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Planning and Policy Advisor Mr. Krishna Prasad Sapkota participated on regional dialogue on climate resilient growth and development program organized by UNDP Bangkok regional

hub in Bangkok, Thailand from 20 to 22 February. On the occasion Mr Sapkota presented key points of Nepal's citizen climate budget booklet prepared by Freedom Forum.

Executive Chief Mr. Taranath Dahal also participated on a program themed "Women and the Right of Access to Information: Inform Women, Transform Lives" that was held from February 14 to 15 at Atlanta, USA. The program focused on the value of transparency and access to information for women and advancing women's right

to information and the role of international institutions and instruments. It was organized by The Carter Center.

General Secretary Mr. Dharmendra Jha participated in South Asia Media talk and Odissa Media Award Distribution program on February 28 held in Bhubaneshwar of India as a special guest. Mr Jha made presentation on common people in media, and the community media connecting women, children and disadvantaged groups right. He also distributed the Odissa Media award on the occasion.

24 % Female Opinion Writers in Print Male-Female Byline 7:1 in Online Media

With more than one year monitoring of women's representation in major print media in Nepal, Freedom Forum presents the first report for 2018. The report consists of findings of monitoring media contents from January to March 2018. This time, FF has added six online news portals in its regular monitoring in view of the growing presence of online media with the expansion of internet in Nepal.

In this context, this report presents a representative picture on presence of men and women in the media contents along with their portrayal in the stories. The media outlets monitored are- Nagarik, Kantipur, Annapurna Post, Gorkhapatra, Nayapatrika, The Kathmandu Post, The Himalayan Times, The Rising Nepal, and Republica dailies. Similarly, online portals monitored are- www.setopati.com, www.ratopati.com, www.onlinekhabar.com, www.lokaantar.com, www.pahilopost.com and www.baahrakhari.com.

The report is prepared after scanning main news and op-ed's from each media once in a week for their bylines, news sources, and analysis through gender perspective. The activity is carried out with the financial support of the Free Press Unlimited (FPU), a foundation based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, working on freedom of expression issues across the world. This evidence-based report, prepared by following the tools and methodologies provided by FPU, is published every three months.

sheet provided by FPU. Figures derived in the coding sheet were then entered into Microsoft Excel and processed for presentation and tabulation. Data were processed for comparing male versus female presence in news byline and sources, topic-wise distribution and their analysis.

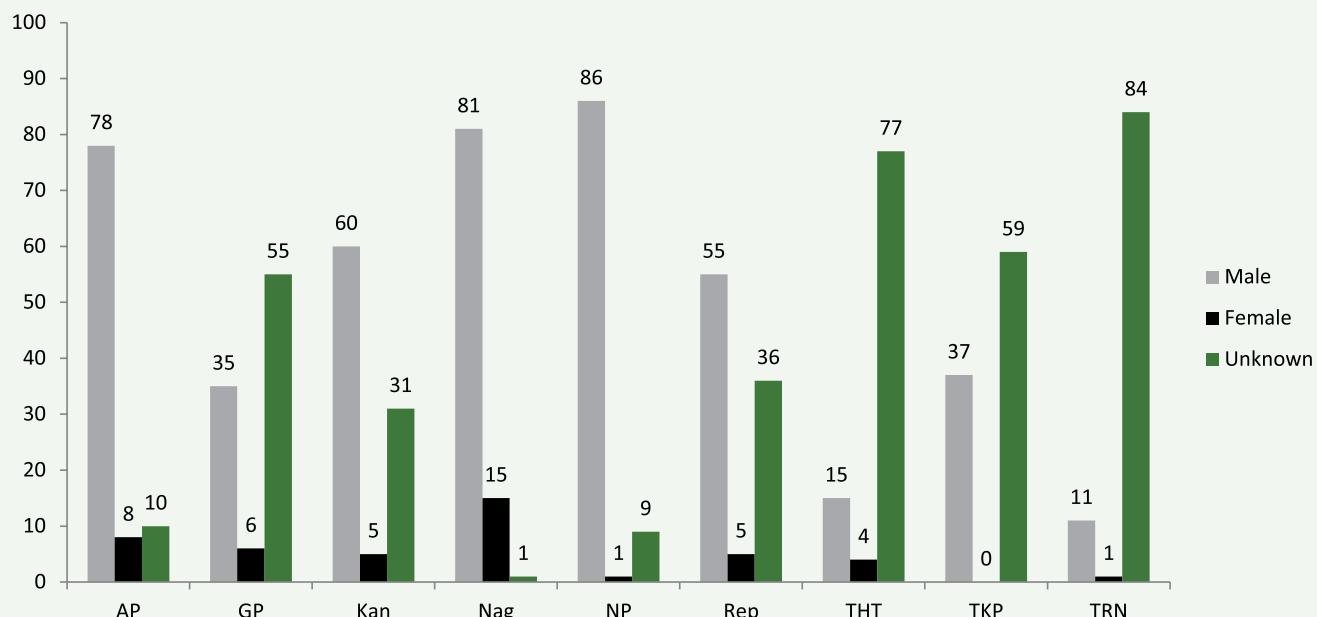
Names of the selected print media have been abbreviated as Kantipur (Kan), Nagarik (Nag), Annapurna Post (AP), Naya Patrika (NP), Gorkhapatra (GP), The Himalayan Times (THT), The Kathmandu Post (TKP), The Rising Nepal (TRN) and Republica (Rep).

Furthermore, five main news published on the home page of each selected online news portal were scanned once in a week (4 times a month) for their byline, news sources, topics category and analysis through gender perspectives (if any). While selecting such news from the portal, diversity of the story was taken into account. Data generated through monitoring were coded into coding sheets and then, analyzed using MS-Excel.

Methodology

As done in the previous study and analyses, the contents are picked from the nine national dailies and six online news portals. Eight news stories from main pages (1, 2, 3, 4 or 6) of each newspaper and two each from Op-Ed section were randomly selected and scanned once in a week (different days in different weeks); however, stories with named bylines were given first priority. The variables were recorded into a coding

FIGURE I: NUMBER OF MAIN NEWS BYLINES FROM NINE NATIONAL DAILIES



Key findings (Jan-Mar 2018)

- For Op-ed pages of national dailies, women writers comprise 23.98% while, their presence in online and print are 4.14% and 5.2% respectively.
- From print media, Nagarik (15) and Kantipur (11) contained maximum number of female bylines, while www.lokaantar.com and www.setopati.com among online portals contained highest (5) female bylines.
- There is however, a significant increase (3%) on women's presence as news source compared to 2017 in the print media. It is 11.61% on online media in the recent three months.
- Report says majority of female bylines and sources come from news related to social and legal issues.
- Notably, news with female bylines accommodate more women as news sources.
- Number of stories about women (14) is provided more space on the first page of the dailies than before however, majority of the stories about women still perpetuate stereotypes.
- 38.25% and 28.41% of the total news titles fall under Politics and Government category in the print and online media respectively.

Findings from Oct-Dec 2017

- Male bylines (53.94 %) outnumbered female (5.84%), while unknown (40.22%).
- Nagarik daily scored the highest (101) male bylines among others, while Annapurna Post daily contained 17 female bylines (highest of all).
- Among total 1,076 news monitored, 79.75% contained men, 10.38% women and 9.88% secondary sources.
- Among total females, Annapurna Post and Kantipur contributed to the maximum reporters (26.98%) and quoted sources (20.08%) respectively.
- 53.06% news titles fall under Politics and Government followed by 27.32% social and legal news.
- Nine news stories with female bylines and stories about women (9) were published on the first pages of monitored broadsheets.

Analysis:

1. News Byline: Monitoring of the 1060 news from print media revealed 503 named bylines from main news and 197 bylines from op-ed pages were recorded. Among these, 52.95% and 5.20% bylines were of male and female in case of main news, whereas 76.02% opinion articles were by male and 23.98% by female.

Among the dailies, NP (86) contained the highest number of male bylines and Nagarik (15) as usual contained the highest number of female bylines. But no any female byline was recorded from TKP's main news. On the other hand, TRN (84) again contained maximum number of unknown bylines (Figure 1).

Similarly in case of opinion articles, Kantipur witnessed maximum number of female writers (11) followed by The Kathmandu Post (9). TRN (21) contained maximum number of male writers followed by NP (20) whereas; GP contained all male-written articles in opinion pages and no females.

News found on the first viewing of each news portal was selected as main news. Monitoring of the 360 news from six online portals revealed 4.14% female and 28.45% male bylines. Online portals Setopati.com and Lokaantar.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF OPINION AUTHORS FROM NINE NATIONAL DAILIES

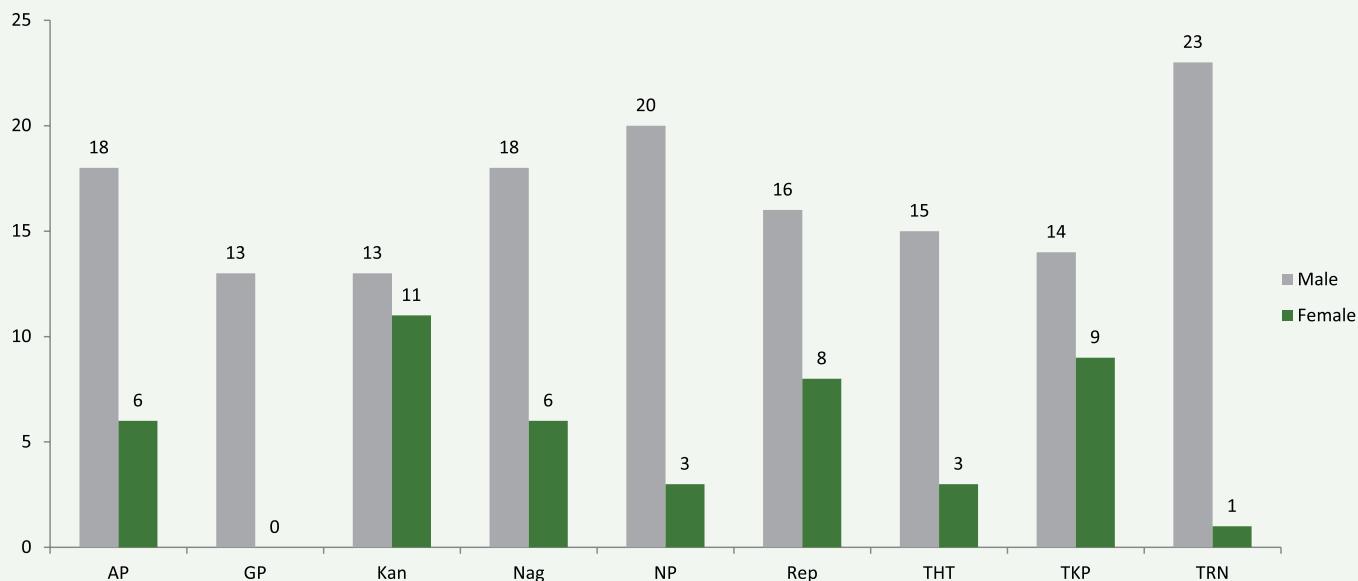
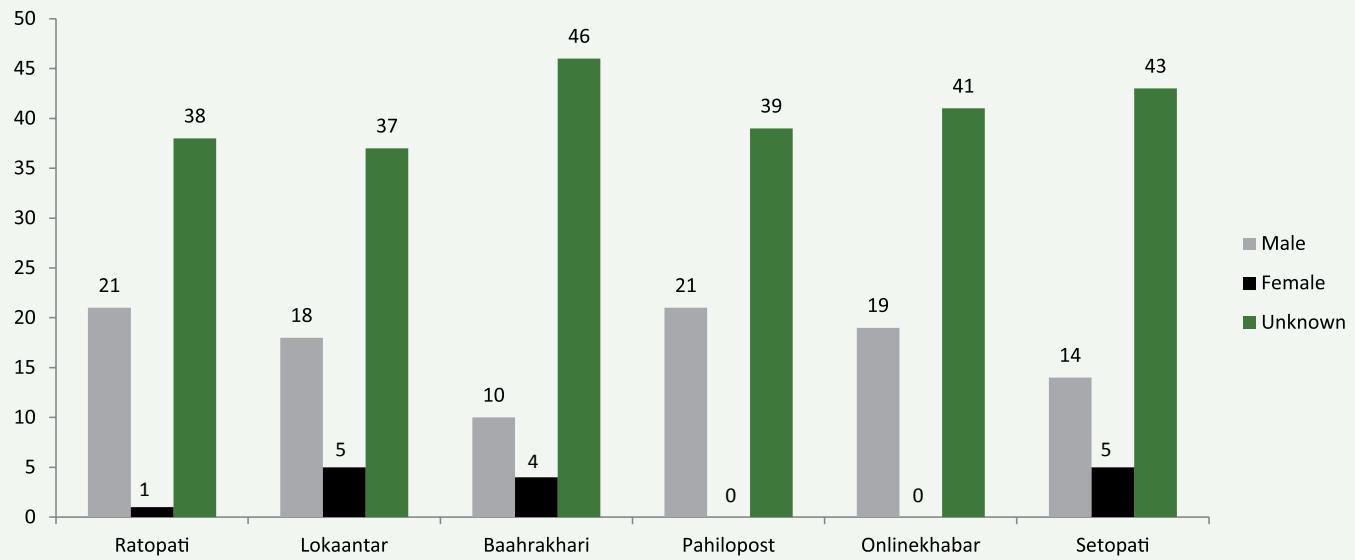


FIGURE 3: BYLINES OF NEWS MONITORED FROM SIX ONLINE NEWS PORTALS

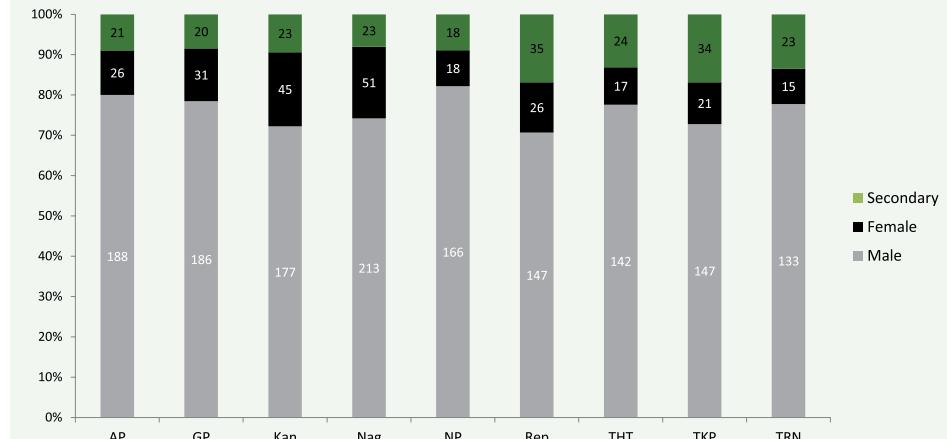
com contained the highest and equal number of female bylines (5), whereas Pahilopost.com (21) and Ratopati.com (21) topped the list for male bylines.

Similarly, Pahilopost.com and Onlinekhabar.com did not have any female byline. Baahrakhari.com (46) contained the highest number of unknown bylines. Unknown bylines in this report are taken as the bylines with unspecified names such as onlinekhabar, setopati, ratopati, etc.

Nine female bylined stories were published on the first page of print dailies.



The news stories quoting persons directly or indirectly were further scanned for male/female sources and for those quoting written documents were coded under secondary sources or both.

**FIGURE 4: SOURCES QUOTED IN THE NEWS CONTENTS OF NINE NATIONAL DAILIES**

2. News sources

All the news contents monitored were thoroughly scanned for their sources to ascertain whether they are persons or the secondary ones. The news stories quoting persons directly or indirectly were further scanned for male/female sources and for those quoting written documents were coded under secondary sources or both.

After scanning through 1,060 news from nine national dailies, 12.69% female, 76.09% male and 11.22% secondary sources were identified.

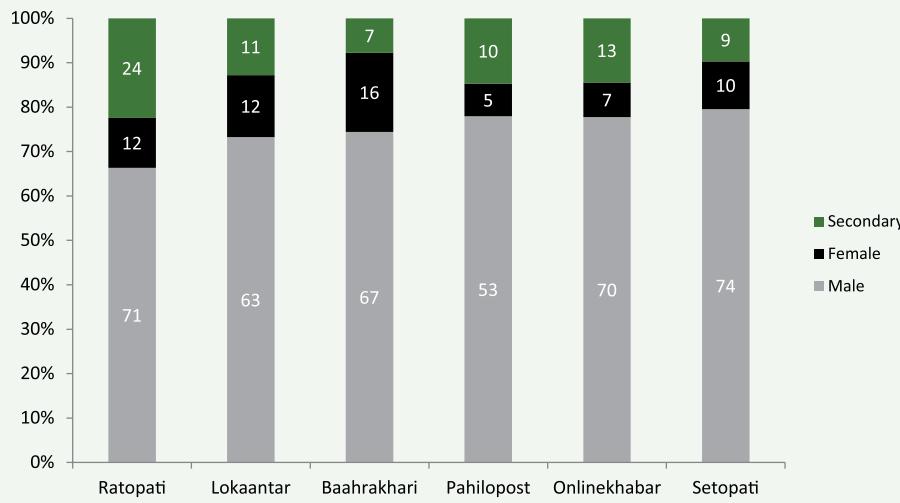
As per figure 4, Nagarik daily this time too contained the highest number of male as well

as female sources and Republica contained the highest number of secondary sources among others.

On the other hand, online news depicted 11.61% female sources against 74.53% male sources. Amongst all six online portals, Baahrakhari.com quoted maximum female sources, whereas Setopati.com quoted maximum male sources (Figure 5).

3. News Topics

During three months, 1,060 news stories from all nine broadsheets were monitored including main news and opinion articles. Monitoring data still showed that political news dominated

FIGURE 5: SOURCES QUOTED IN THE NEWS CONTENTS OF 6 ONLINE

main pages of almost all broadsheets. Comparatively, news related to Politics, Economy and Social Issues occupied significant space on the main news pages.

Government run newspaper Gorkhapatra contained the highest number of political news.

Likewise, Kantipur, Republica and The Himalayan Times dailies covered equivalent number of Political and Social/ Legal news. In almost all the newspapers, news on celebrity,

arts, media and sports were least covered on the main pages. Among private owned, Naya Patrika published more political news in comparison to others.

During this period, news on sports published on the front page of all the dailies monitored also contributed to the visible bar for Other category where sports is incorporated.

But in case of online news portals, Pahilopost and Onlinekhabar (Figure 7) contained more

social/ legal news than political ones, and among the six online portals, www.lokaantar.com contained maximum number of Political News. Comparatively, online news portals showed more diversity in news topics than the print media outlets as main news.

4. Topic wise distribution of Gender

Bylines and news sources derived from the three months long monitoring were again analyzed for their relation to news titles. The analysis resulted majority of male bylines (41.12%) under Politics and Government category whereas, majority of female bylines (39.13%) under Social and Legal category in print media (Figure 8).

Among total 250 women sources quoted in the monitored newspapers, the highest 35.2% came from news under Social and Legal category followed by 23.6% under Politics category.

According to data, the highest number of female byline and sources from print media are recorded from the news related to Social and Legal issues (Figure 8).

Gender content monitoring in the selected online media revealed maximum number of female bylines on the economic news. However, in terms of sources, social and legal news revealed the highest number of female sources (Figure 9).

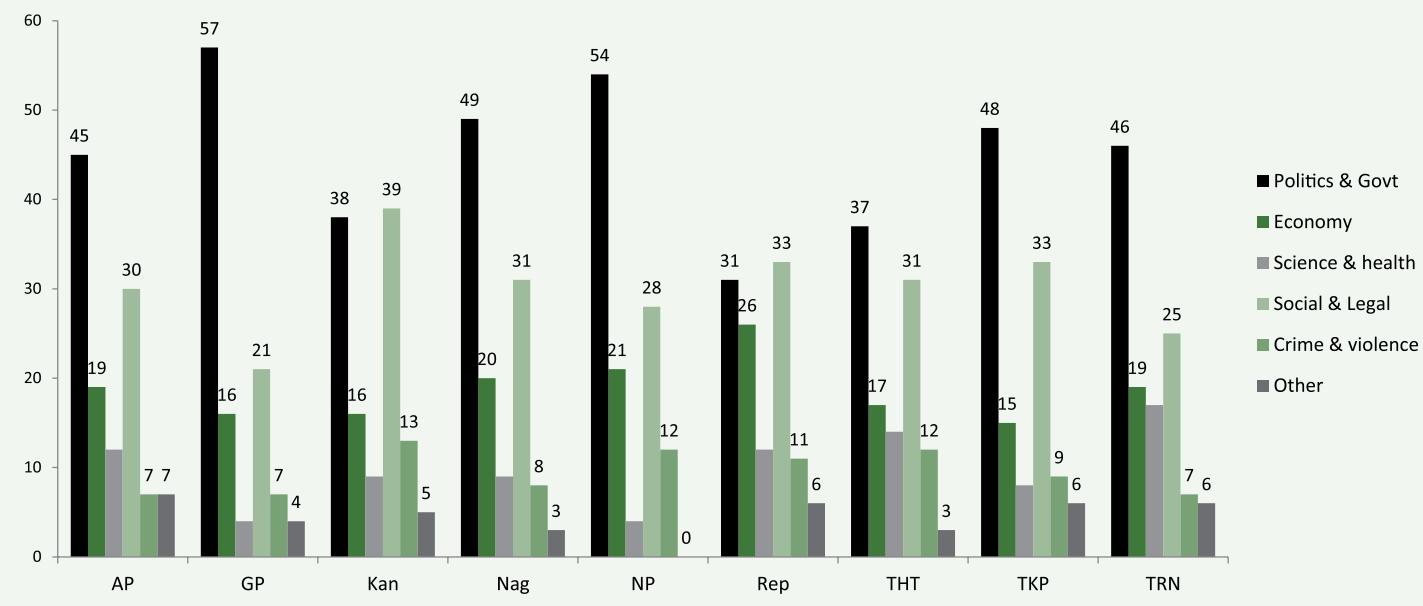
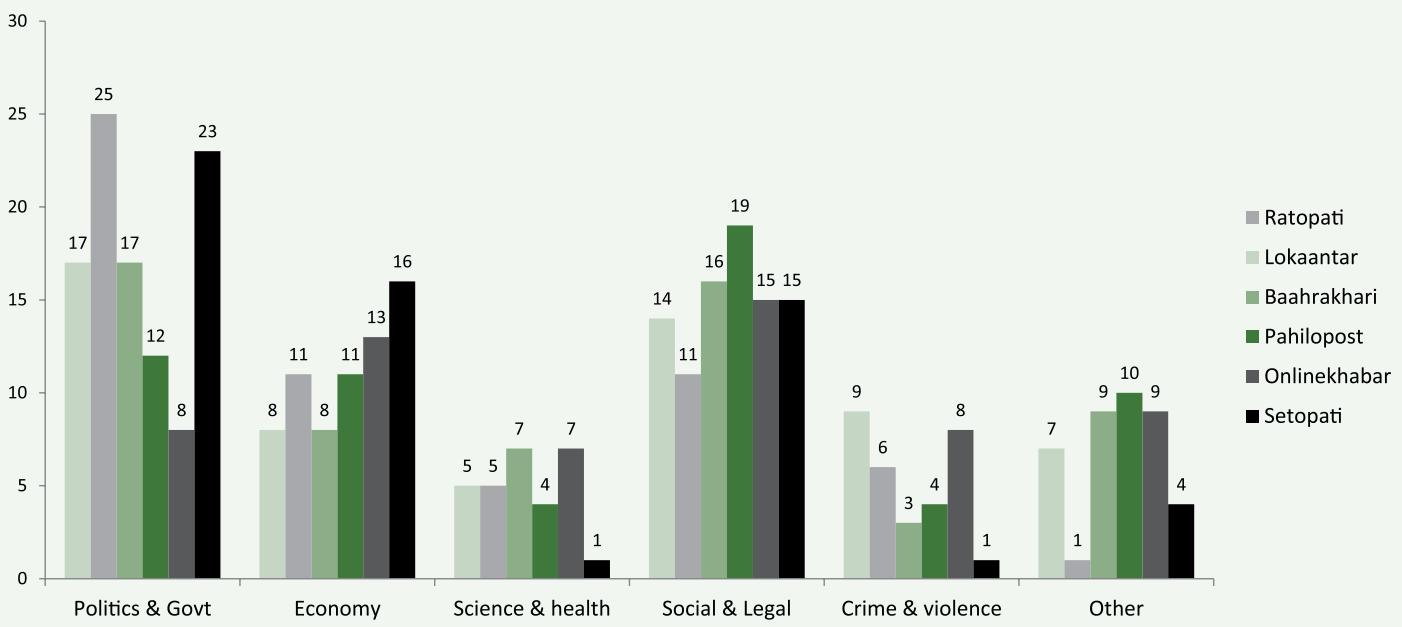
FIGURE 6: TOPIC WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS MONITORED FROM 9 BROADSHEETS

FIGURE 7: TOPIC WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS MONITORED ON ONLINE NEWS PORTALS



5. Analysis of stories through Gender perspectives

Next dimension of the study is to analyze the news stories through different four questions:

- When and how women become newsmakers?
- To what extent does the news increase public understanding of inequalities between men and women?
- Are male and female stereotypes reinforced or challenged in the new stories?

Based on these questions, only 24 among 57 stories about the women recorded in the print media challenged stereotypes. In the news challenging stereotypes, women are presented as President, social activists, political representatives, survivor, volunteer, change makers in society, breadwinner in family, player, etc.

Among the news monitored in print media, 68 stories highlighted inequality in terms of news sources as well as gender lens. Likewise, thirty-five news stories contained equal number of men and women as news sources.

Similarly, from among 23 online media stories about women, 14 challenged stereotypes; 22 stories highlighted inequality and 8 news stories contained equal number of sources.

Some Examples

A news story published on Pahilopost.com (March 8) is about an independent woman earning livelihood on her own. Married at 16 year of age and losing husband at 24, she works as a cobbler and earns money for her family. The way the story is presented clearly challenges stereotypes, as it subverts submissive role of women in Nepal society.

FIGURE 8: NEWS TOPICS VERSUS FEMALE BYLINES AND SOURCES IN PRINT MEDIA

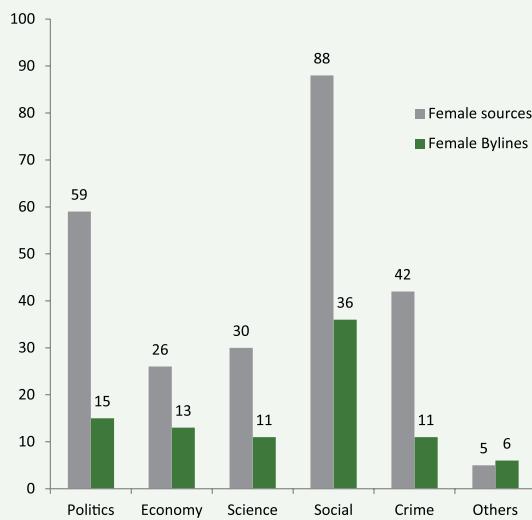


FIGURE 9: NEWS TOPICS VERSUS FEMALE BYLINES AND SOURCES IN ONLINE MEDIA

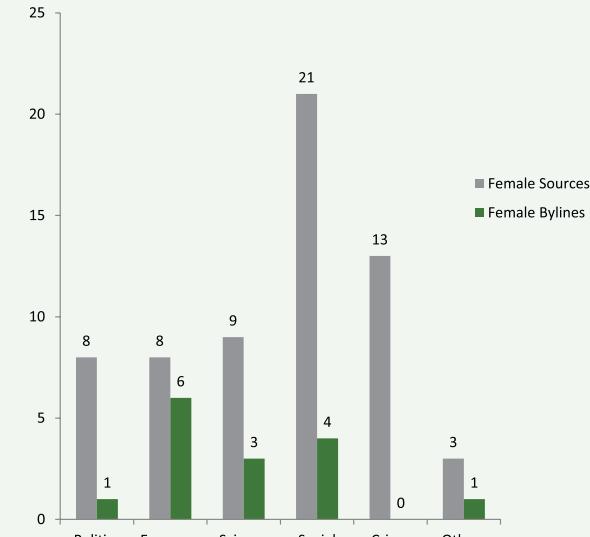


FIGURE IO: TREND OF FEMALE IN NEWS BYLINE

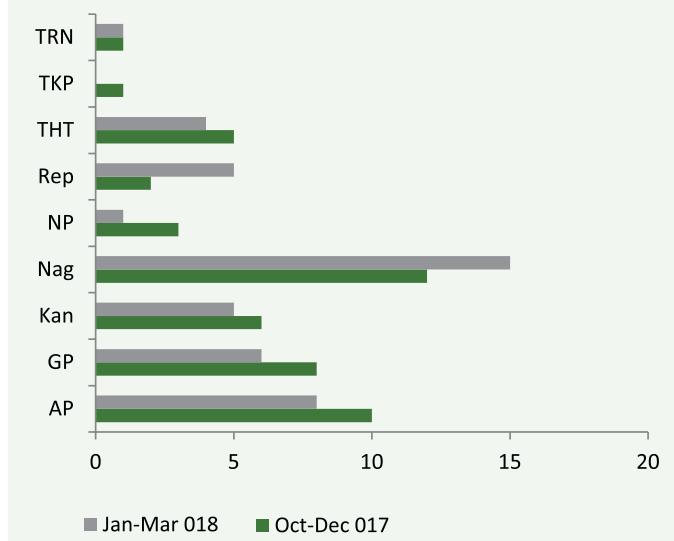
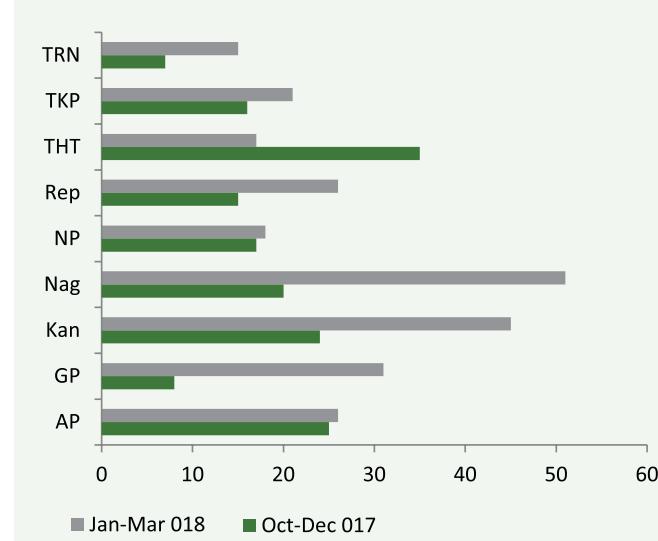


FIGURE II: TREND OF FEMALE AS NEWS SOURCES



Coming to the headlines, both online and print media showed diverse news contents. However, political news still dominated the space. It is worth noting that news category containing more female byline accommodates more women as news sources.

A news story about a group of women published on The Kathmandu Post (January 1) says they are spearheading a cultural revolution against the patriarchal tradition known as 'Ghumto Pratha' where married women are customarily required to veil their faces before men. They have also become proponents of women's rights and empowerment after gaining financial independence. The story also challenges the stereotypes.

Comparative Analysis

Looking back into content monitoring from October to December 2017, Nagarik and Republica showed significant increase in the

number of female bylines on Jan-Mar 2018 (Figure 10). Remaining media contents failed to show any increments on number of bylines on the main news.

Similarly, in terms of sources all the monitored print media outlets except for THT showed visible increase in number of women as news sources on Jan-Mar 2018 (Figure 11).

Percentage of female byline is somehow similar to the previous 3-month but women quoted as news sources have increased by 2.93% this 3-month.

Conclusion

Women's participation in Op-ed is found significantly higher than in main news of the national dailies monitored in three months.

Three months data showed 1 among approximately 4 males is female writer on the Op-Ed pages of the national dailies while 1 among every 10 male bylines is female on the main news of the dailies. On the other hand, 1 among every 7 male bylines is of female in case of the online media. In case of the print media, maximum number of female bylines was observed under Social and Legal news, whereas their maximum presence in online media was found under financial news.

Likewise, online media contained most of the unknown bylines compared to the print media. Number of female bylines was also found less than those of print media.

Furthermore, this 3-month monitoring resulted in 5.2% female bylines against 5.5% in the previous three months (Oct-Dec 2017). However, over all percentage for female byline is similar in comparison to the last one: Nagarik and Republica show significant increase in their number of female bylines. Nevertheless, percentage of women quoted as news sources on the monitored national dailies shows increase by approximately 3% from the last 3-month (Oct-Dec 2017). Sources quoted in the news from online portals are also observed to be positive in comparison to print media.

Amongst all, Gorkhapatra, Kantipur and Nagarik show substantial (almost double) increase in the number of female sources followed by Republica in this monitoring period (Jan-Mar 2017). According to the data, maximum female inclusion as news sources was found in the social/legal news for both online and print media. Coming to the headlines, both online and print media showed diverse news contents. However, political news still dominated the space. It is worth noting that news category containing more female byline accommodates more women as news sources. Conclusively, increasing participation of female as news sources in the contents of the monitored dailies is a significant change recorded in this monitoring period.

Documentary on Impunity

First of its kind, Freedom Forum has produced a documentary about the journalists who were killed and made disappeared in the two decades from the beginning of armed conflict in February 1996 to 2016. FF study recorded that 24 journalists were killed in Nepal during this period. The documentary prepared with meticulous observation and field visits showcases the story of some journalists who were killed and made disappeared since 1996. It not only reminds the horrible days of the attack on media, but also brings to light the plight of those waiting for true information about their relative said to be killed and disappeared and want to see the culprits behind the bar. FF, as an organization working for the freedom of expression, press freedom and journalists' safety, aims at prodding the concerned agencies to address the impunity for crimes against journalists and respect press freedom.

The family of those killed by the both sides- State and rebel forces- are still waiting for justice. The impunity relating to the crimes against journalists is yet to be addressed, it underscores. The documentary is produced with the support of a Netherlands-based organization, Free Press Unlimited. While making documentary, Rewata Kumari, mother of the slain media person Devi Prasad Dhital, with her eyes full of tears, said, "No matter how, you have to find the murderer. Now my son will not come back. After the murderer is known, we would know who the enemy was and then remain alert of him. That is what we want, no other favours. My son will not come back, so I will beg, please do it at any cost. Please find the murderers."

The documentary can be viewed visiting the link:-https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=152&v=g6koJ5A5Ax8

Election Observation Report

General Election Observation Committee (GEOC), an organization working in the field of rule of law, human rights, women empowerment, local governance and decentralization has published and released its election observation report. GEOC launched the report being based on the activities of Election Commission and the reports submitted by election observer that it had appointed prior to the election. For the observation, GEOC had appointed 720 observers, among which 80 were National and district level observer and 640 were local observer. National and district observer had observed the election activity for three months while local observer observed for a month long election activity. The report has suggested government to ensure more credible security to make voters feel safe and foil the attempts of booth capture; while political parties are told to limit the election transparent. Similarly, the judiciary is suggested to settle the disputes relating to election. The Election Commission is suggested to play important role to implement election code of conduct and pay heed to raise voting literacy so as to reduce the invalid votes. Freedom Forum is also a member of GEOC.

Press Freedom Violation Factsheet

S.No.	Date of Incident	Place/ Province	Incident	No. of Journalists/ media workers affected	Journalists/ Media house directly Affected	Remarks
1	1/15/2018	Gorkha (4)	Correspondent attacked while covering smuggling story, Damaged the belongings of the reporter	1	Sudeep Kaini, Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post	Attackers asked for written apologies, agreed to compensate the belongings of the journalist
2	1/16/2018	Kailali (4)	Journalists barred from entering into the Kailali District Treasury Office	2	Dil Bahadur Chhatyal, Pushpa Raj Joshi, District Correspondent of Nagarik National Daily	
3	1/18/2018	Dang (5)	Vehicle carrying Nayapatraka daily obstructed in Tulsipur			The vehicle resumed after 1.5 hours of police escorting
4	1/19/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Media barred from President Office for covering swearing ceremony	24		
5	1/20/2018	Dang (5)	Media persons obstructed for reporting	4	Editor Dilli Malla (Jana Ubhar weekly) Narendra KC (Naya Yougbodh daily, Aazad Khadka) www.khabartokari.com, Kuldeep Neupane(Photo Journalist)	Reporters returned without reporting
6	2/1/2018	Dang (5)	Television correspondent manhandled	1	Ganesh Acharya, Janata Television	
7	2/1/2018	Dhanusha (2)	Reporter receives death threat	2	Raj Kamal Singh, Sumeet Mishra, Arthik Abhiyan Daily	
8	2/6/2018	Kaski (4)	Journalist Dhakal injured in police intimidation	1	Prakash Dhakal, Aadarsha Samaj National Daily	
9	2/12/2018	Dhanusha (2)	RTI Activist receives death threat for requesting RTI	1	Arwongzeb Ansari	
10	2/15/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Contempt of case filed against Kantipur National Daily	4	Chairman and Managing Director of Kantipur Publications, Kailash Sirohiya, Director Swastika Sirohiya, Kantipur Daily Editor-in-Chief Sudheer Sharma and reporter Krishna Gyawali	
11	2/16/2018	Rautahat (2)	Local representative threatens a group of journalists	3	Rabindar Saha, Rajendra Chhetri and Sanjay Sahani (www.ajitakmadhesh.com)	
12	2/20/2018	Kaski (4)	Journalist injured in bomb blast	1	Ghanshyam Pandey, Station manager at Radio Gandaki and association with Gandaki television	
13	2/25/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Journalist attacked at Pashupati for covering religious news	2	Journalist Raju Pokharel, Camera Person Megh Raj Pahadi, www. pariwartankhabar.com	Case filed at Local Police station
14	3/4/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Journalist barred from reporting court hearing			
15	3/7/2018	Ilam (1)	Media persons attacked	2	Krishna Pathak, Prakash Neupane, Chiyabari FM Technicians	The group robbed 45,000 and a mobile set, case filed against the accused
16	3/15/2018	Parbat (4)	Reporter receives death threat from construction contractor	1	Chhabilal Tiwari, Corresponding NagarikNews	Case registered in District Administration Office
17	3/21/2018	Sarlahi (2)	Media Person manhandled	1	Bakhtiyaar Ali, Managing Director of Lokatantra daily.	
18	3/25/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Death threats to reporters	2	Rajesh Bhandari of ratopati.com and Madan Babu Bhandari of Kathmandu based Sushasan weekly and www.suvadin.com online media	
19	3/27/2018	Chitwan (3)	Journalists barred from reporting	7	Prabin Kumar Dutta, Ramesh Kumar Poudel and Nawaraj Mishra of Kantipur Media, Sabita Shrestha of Nagarik daily, Tulman Gurung of Annapurna Post daily, Gita Gurung of Kalika FM and Shiva Acharya of Sauraha online	Mayor of Bharatpur Metropolitan Office Renu Dahal apologized for the incident.
20	3/31/2018	Kathmandu (3)	Local representatives and sand smuggler threatened reporters	2	Shivahari Ghimire (Nagarik Daily) and Ramhari Karki (dainiknews.com)	Reported under police escorting

Self Disclosure Update

Type and Nature of Organization	NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data, Media Policy and Law, Internet Freedom		
Legal Status	Registered at District Administration Office Kathmandu. DAO Registration Number: 127/062/63, SWC Affiliation Number: 18518		
Location	Adarsa Marga, Prasuti Griha Road, Thapathali, Kathmandu		
Staffs and Roles	<p>Taranath Dahal: Executive Chief, coordinates overall organizational and administrative affairs</p> <p>Aruna Adhikari: Finance and Administration Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer.</p> <p>Nanu Maiya Khadka: Gender Monitoring Officer, responsible for monitoring media content on gender perspectives</p> <p>Manju Ojha: Front Desk Assistant</p> <p>Kamal Poudel: Driver</p> <p>Ganga Kumari Gurung: Office Assistant</p>		
Projects	<p>Krishna Sapkota- SUSASAN</p> <p>Narayan Ghimire- ECAFSIM</p> <p>Sanjeeb Ghimire- EEMIR</p> <p>Bishal Dahal- SUSASAN</p> <p>Bhawana Poddar- EEMIR</p> <p>Bobbish Dhakal- EEMIR</p> <p>Ashmita Pokharel- ECAFSIM</p> <p>Pramod Bhattarai- ECAFSIM</p> <p>Kumar Chaulagain- EEMIR</p>		
Ongoing Project Information	Project Name	Supporting Agency	Date of Signing the Contract
	Open Budget Survey 2017	IBP	7 June 2015
	Enable Environment for Media Law Reforms and Improved RTI Practice (EEMIR) (CS-MAP)	FHI 360	30 Dec 2016
	Enabling Conducive Atmosphere for Free, Safe and Inclusive Media (ECAFSIM) in Nepal	Free Press Unlimited (FPU)	29th March 2018
	Sustainable use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN)	CECI	17th April 2017
	National Workshop on Promoting the Right to Information and Open Government Data in Federal Nepal.	The Asia Foundation (TAF)	13th March 2018
Services Offered/ Activities Carried Out	Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, fiscal transparency, human rights, local governance. It also provides legal aid to journalists, media and information seekers.		
Responsible Authority	Chairperson: Hari Binod Adhikari, Executive Chief: Tara Nath Dahal		
Decision Making Process	<p>General Assembly: Making policies, rules and regulations of organization</p> <p>Executive committee: Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation</p> <p>Management team: Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee.</p>		
Past and Current Activities	Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/		
Information Officer	Aruna Adhikari		
Financial Information	Freedom Forum received grants announcing Rs. 6,934,683 (January to March 2018)		
Official Website	www.freedomforum.org.np		
Publications of Freedom Forum	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/		
Annual Report	http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/		
Mechanism for Information Dissemination	Websites- http://www.freedomforum.org.np/ ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , and Newsletter-Free Expression		

Carter Center's Atlanta Declaration “Women’s Right of Access to Information”

FEBRUARY 2018

We, the 100 participants from almost 30 countries, representing governments, multi-stakeholder initiatives, information commissions and independent oversight bodies, gender, transparency, accountability and access to information civil society organizations, international institutions, donor agencies and foundations, private sector companies, media, scholars and practitioners, gathered in Atlanta, Georgia from February 14-15, 2018, under the auspices of the former United States President Jimmy Carter and The Carter Center. The conference met in plenary, where we heard leading voices from the gender, human rights, transparency, and access to information communities, and we had in-depth discussions as we engaged in five working groups.¹

Based on these proceedings, we hereby adopt the following Declaration and Recommendations to advance women’s right of access to information.

Preamble

Recognizing that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights, and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights provide for a right for all persons to “seek, receive and impart information,” and Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights establishes a similar right to “receive and impart information;”

Emphasizing that the right of access to information is foundational for citizen participation, good governance, public administration efficiency, accountability and efforts to combat corruption, media and investigative journalism,

human development, social inclusion, and the realization of other socio-economic and civil-political rights;

Acknowledging that although there have been great advances in the right of access to information over the past two decades, significant challenges remain to realize that a meaningful right to information is exercised by all people, particularly women and marginalized populations;

Noting that women are often excluded from the flow of information, both essential and strategic information, and are unable to exercise the fundamental right of access to information with the same frequency, ease, and rate of success as men, thus limiting their ability to enjoy the benefits that the right of access to information may provide;

Observing that while the right of access to information is instrumental in ensuring physical, economic, and political autonomy for women, its realization is dependent on the reduction or elimination of structural obstacles, negative attitudes and perceptions of women, and violence that women face;

Stressing that the ability of governments to provide meaningful information and women’s ability to access meaningful information is critical for the implementation and achievement of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals as well as the development and fulfillment of open government principles of transparency, accountability and participation;

Appreciating that this conference created a unique space for persons dedicated to the promotion of human rights, women’s economic empowerment and equality, good governance,

transparency, accountability, and the right of access to information to share ideas and to commit to working together to advance women’s equitable right of access to information.

Conclude That:

- The right of women to access information is essential to their economic empowerment, participation in public life, and the promotion and protection of their human rights. Yet, women from all walks of life and regions of the world continue to be denied access to critical public information they need to transform their own lives.
- Women need a wide scope of transformative information that can further women’s equality.
- Women’s right to a full scope of public information should be made explicit in existing human rights instruments, such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and in the strategic planning and work of intergovernmental agencies and platforms.
- The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity to demonstrate the value of access to information for women, and correspondingly, without information reaching women, the goals will not be achieved.
- The Open Government Partnership (OGP), a voluntary compact among 75 countries, offers an opening to advance women’s engagement and the right of access to information. The OGP should strive for increased women’s participation in the co-creation, implementation, and validation of national commitments. National Action Plans should include commitments that are gender-transformative.

¹ Working groups included 1) International conventions and instruments: opportunities for integrating access to information for women; 2) Intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations: promoting transparency and access to information for women; 3) National laws and institutional framework: possibilities for inclusion, revision, and reform; 4) National enabling environment: considering cultural influences and leveraging partnerships; and 5) Opportunities for demonstrative values and engaging new frontiers: research, data and ICTs.

- Although CEDAW calls for all public policy to be reviewed through a gendered-lens, the existing access to information laws have not been developed with gender-sensitivity nor reviewed to ensure that the statutory provisions and its implementation do not adversely impact women. In some cases, rather than amend freedom of information laws, implementation solutions to address barriers would be more effective in supporting women's right of access to information.
- Public bodies must develop and disseminate information that is relevant to women and to ensure that official data is disaggregated by sex.
- Structural and cultural obstacles - such as women's double-burden of paid and non-paid work and family care, fear, and violence against women - undermine women's ability to exercise fully the right of access to information.
- Women's ability to exercise their right of access to information is a critical but insufficient step to transforming their lives. An enabling environment that supports women's use of that information leading to action also is necessary.
- The Internet and communication technologies have become indispensable tools for realizing human rights, combating inequality, and accelerating development and human progress, but access and connectivity for women remain limited. Women can be excluded from the potential benefits of digital and online spaces by lack of digital literacy and different forms of systematic discrimination and gender based violence. Focus should be placed on making the internet more amenable and safe for women, increasing women's connectivity, and including the telecoms and internet service providers in efforts to reach women. The internet should be considered a complement to other efforts to ensure women's meaningful right of access to information.
- Schools offer an opportunity to increase awareness of women's right to information and to build capacity to exercise their right. Urgent attention is needed to develop and adopt age appropriate curriculum with an emphasis on enhancing girl's and women's confidence, leadership, and engagement of the right to information.
- Resources will be critical to support efforts to advance women's right of access to information, including training at the national level for government/public servants and for civil society; research; and pilot projects.

Recommendations

The following actions can and must be taken now to correct the inequities facing women in the exercise of the right to information and the advancement of women worldwide:

- 1 Create a coalition to articulate strategies and coordinate efforts to elevate access to information as a transformational right to advance gender equality, economic empowerment, and the promotion and protection of women's rights. The coalition, led by a high level advisory council, should include government leaders and public officials, groups from the women's movement, the right to information and open government advocates, human rights activists, regional networks, National Human Rights Commissions, Information Commissioners, youth-led movements, media, telecommunication companies, the private sector, and others.
- 2 Make the right of access to information for women explicit within international and regional human rights instruments and mechanisms, including:
 - Drafting a specific General Recommendation on Right to Information by the CEDAW Committee pertaining to women's right of access to information
 - Developing or amending and promoting regional declarations and protocols for women's right of access to information
 - Compiling country and shadow reports on women's right of access to information as part of periodic reporting to human rights bodies
 - Preparing annual and special reports on women's right of access to information by UN and Regional Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups, and Independent Experts
- 3 Engage United Nation agencies, including UN Women, regional bodies, and existing platforms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Open Government Partnership, to ensure that women can access critical information to allow for meaningful participation in their processes and to focus on outcomes and commitments that empower women.
- 4 Ensure that access to information legal frameworks are gender-sensitive and implemented in ways that support women's ability to fully exercise the right, including:
 - Drafting or reviewing legal frameworks through a gender-sensitive lens
 - Developing, identifying, and proactively disclosing information and data sets meaningful for women
 - Placing information in spaces accessible to all women and through modes and means (language, formats, presentation, simplified language) that allow women to access and use the information, particularly marginalized women
 - Employing solutions to overcome structural obstacles that hinder women's exercise of the right
 - Disaggregating information related to requesters by sex
 - Engaging oversight bodies to promote women's right of access to information and report on progress
- 5 Change the dominant culture within institutions to make them gender responsive and within society to promote women's right of access to information, including:
 - Engaging elected, appointed, community, traditional, and religious leaders to be vocal champions of women's right to information
 - Training government officials to be gender sensitive and responsive
 - Decentralizing information, using media, libraries, community members, and other accessible mediums
 - Making people aware of women's right to information
 - Developing curriculum and using centers of education to teach about women's right of access to information and to enhance women and girl's confidence in requesting information
- 6 Commission research and culturally-rooted pilot projects on women's information needs, structural obstacles that hinder access, the role that information plays in women's increased political participation and leadership, best use of information and communication technologies to reach women with meaningful information, and the levers of change.
- 7 Mitigate risks and backlash faced by women who exercise the right of access to information.
- 8 Mobilize resources to support programmatic initiatives to secure women's right of access to information.

Note: Freedom Forum was also part of the conference.

Countries Consider Penalties for Spreading 'Fake News'



Grant Gross
By Grant Gross Technology Reporter

A handful of countries have recently considered passing new laws or regulations to combat so-called fake news, with Malaysia adding penalties of up to six years in jail for distributors.

Malaysia's controversial Anti-Fake News 2018 bill, which passed this week, also includes a fine of US\$123,000. An earlier draft of the legislation included jail time of up to 10 years. Under the new law, fake news is "news, information, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false," as determined by Malaysian courts.

Malaysia's controversial Anti-Fake News 2018 bill, which passed this week, also includes a fine of US\$123,000. An earlier draft of the legislation included jail time of up to 10 years. Under the new law, fake news is "news, information, data and reports which is or are wholly or partly false," as determined by Malaysian courts.

The new Malaysian law covers digital news outlets, including video and audio, and social media, and it applies to anyone who maliciously spreads fake news inside and outside the country, including foreigners, as long as Malaysia or its citizens are affected.

Eric Paulsen, cofounder and executive director of Malaysian civil rights group Lawyers for Liberty, called the new law "shocking." "Freedom of speech, info & press will be as good as dead in Malaysia," he tweeted in late March.

The law will create a chilling effect on free speech, Malaysia lawyer Syahredzan Johan wrote in TheStar.com. "While we may hope that the implementation of the bill will be transparent and fair, the wide definition given to 'fake news' and the imprecise nature of some of the provisions may lead to selective and arbitrary implementation and abuse," he added.

Government officials have defended the law. Social media outlets are unable to monitor fake news, Azalina Othman, minister in charge of law, told the Washington Post. "No one is above the law. We are all accountable for our actions," she said.

Meanwhile, India had proposed new rules that would allow the government to pull the official accreditation from journalist found to have written or broadcast "fake news." But

the Indian government quickly withdrew the proposal this week after strong opposition from journalists.

The proposal came just days after an Indian website editor was arrested for an apparently false report saying that Muslims had attacked a monk from the Jain faith.

The European Union is also looking for ways to combat fake news, primarily by cracking down on social media companies. The EU wants a "clear game plan" that sets the rules on how social media outlets can operate during sensitive election periods, said Julian King, the European commissioner for security.

King wants more transparency for the internal algorithms used by websites to promote stories, new limits on the harvesting of personal information for political purposes, and disclosure about the funding for sponsored content on websites, according to CNBC.

The EU proposals came partially in response to news reports saying Facebook indirectly shared millions of user profiles with Cambridge Analytica, a voter data vendor used by U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign.

Sources: <https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2018/04/countries-consider-penalties-spreading-fake-news/>



Freedom Forum is an independent, non-governmental and not-for-profit civil society organization working for the cause of social accountability, democracy and human rights focused on press freedom, freedom of expression and right to information in Nepal. Incepted in 2005, Freedom Forum has emerged as a prominent national organization in promoting access to information and freedom of expression through dialogue, research, training, public advocacy and campaign and programme implementation. Currently, the organization is working on the issues of public finance management, budget transparency, open data and aid governance, political and parliamentary accountability, freedom of expression online and open government partnership (OGP) based on its on-hand experience and learning.

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