

# A STUDY REPORT

MEDIA CONTENT RESEARCH ON AID TRANSPARENCY IN NEPAL



**FREEDOM FORUM**

Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal



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# Acknowledgements

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This report takes a critical approach to media coverage on the issues pertaining to foreign aid and its transparency and accountability in Nepal. The purpose of the survey is to find overall scenario as to how and to what extent Nepali media have been covering issues associated to aid transparency and effectiveness.

Here, content research and analysis is used as a tool to develop candid evidence in sensitizing broad-based stakeholders on foreign aid related issues by showcasing the role of media in enhancing people's access to aid information and their participation in aid governance. With the undertaking of this initiative, we have scoped out media coverage on the issue and identified the areas where Nepali media have to increase its strategic intervention in bringing the aid discourse to grassroots level and building public opinion accordingly. The report has presented the capacity gaps of media/journalists in raising the issues and recommended the areas where capacity building measures are to be devised.

It is a significant part of knowledge management and transfer, which has been built on the basis of Freedom Forum's on-hand experience of doing media content research and analysis on different areas before. The essence and emergence of transparency and effectiveness of foreign aid (or development assistance) is featured in various international instruments and the Government of Nepal is obliged to comply with these instruments as per its commitment for the cause at international fora. Hence, this is our small initiative to leverage the nation's action towards fulfilling its pledge to spend aid money in an effective and efficient manner.

The survey is particularly focused on research of content covered by 13 Nepali broadsheet dailies. The study has shown quantitative flow of content in mainstream dailies. The content research has been basically centered around opinion articles, editorials, news and interviews on the issues concerning aid transparency and its dynamics. The approach was to produce quantitative data (database) with web links showing contents and trend analysis of media coverage. In course of accomplishing this initiative, we would like to owe our sincere thanks to the Development Initiatives (DI), an organization based in the United Kingdom, and Victoria Room, Policy Advisor, AidInfo Programme of DI for offering this opportunity to execute an innovative idea in the new field. Likewise, we express our gratefulness to Mr Siromani Dhungana for his sincere efforts to analyse the media content and bring this report to this shape. We would also like to record the contributions by Freedom Forum Executive Director Krishna Sapkota for coordinating the initiative and fine-tuning the report.

Thanks also go to other employees of Freedom Forum including Dan Bahadur Karki and Manju Dahal for their support in documenting media content and clippings. Freedom Forum is also thankful to those who have provided direct and indirect support to accomplish the survey and also to our valued readers and users, who are always a source of inspiration in such works.

**TARANATH DAHAL**  
CHAIRPERSON  
FREEDOM FORUM

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Foreign aid, very indeed, has long been an integral part of Nepal's national economy. The public money receiving from different bilateral and multilateral donor agencies is spent to carry out development interventions, meet humanitarian needs, leverage efforts to fight poverty and facilitate trade and economic development, among others. The first-time compilation of Nepal's foreign aid receipts since Day One back in 1951 shows an economy overwhelmingly dependent on external support, first through grants and now through loans (Himal South Asia, 1997). From its modest appearance in the early 1950s, foreign aid has grown to be an indispensable part of the development process in Nepal. However, people's access to aid information is still a far cry in lack of citizen-friendly information mechanism to reach out to general public.

Better access to aid information is critically important to engage citizens in governance and deliver its effectiveness and efficacy. So, the timely, accessible and comprehensive information is a key to enable citizenry to influence aid policies and spending in a matter that can create positive impacts on their economic and social lives.

Foreign aid to Nepal is provided by a diverse group of donors, including OECD-DAC donors, International Financial Institution (IFIs), United Nations agencies, global vertical funds and providers of South-south cooperation (Ministry of Finance, 2012). These donors, according to the ministry,

reported total disbursements amounting to US\$ 1.08 billion in fiscal year 2010-11.

In this backdrop, media's role is spectacular to impart information thereby building public opinion and putting pressure on the donors and recipients for transparency, accountability and effectiveness. It requires free and regular flow of aid information in a non-technical and citizenary format as information disclosure contributes to promote aid transparency and accountability. Likewise, another critical area is that aid debate should be brought to grassroots level to ensure wider spectrum of civic engagement on the issue of public money to be spent for them. Imparting information on public money and its spending areas is crucial to make the issue a part of public debate. Hence, producing complete, coherent and consistent aid data, and presenting and disseminating them in understandable format attaches wider significance to facilitate the process.

In the Nepalese context, producing and publishing bulky books and pdf files and making them public through e-mail and internet will make no sense. Media contents are perennial means of imparting information to public in an easier, cheaper and quicker way. It is significant because information requires to be regularly produced, published and disseminated to public. It is the media which could take up this role effectively and continuously.

With this in background, analysis of media content on aid transparency, accountability and effectiveness in Nepal has been carried out to assess overall situation of media coverage in the respective issue.

This research study has attempted to identify news coverage on aid transparency and accountability in mainstream dailies. The study is focused on reflecting overall situation of media coverage on aid issues, depth in coverage, effectiveness of news, investigative stories and quantity of the issues.

The paper starts with a general overview of the subject matter. Along with a general background, it explains the problem statement, objective, rationale, significance, major activities, expected outputs, proposed methods, study duration and work plan.

## 1.2 Rationale and context of the study

The country is heavily depended on foreign aid to run development projects and other humanitarian needs. Further, four crucial sector for development -- education, local development health and road transportation -- received huge amount of foreign aid. Four sectors have received over US \$ 100 million in disbursement in fiscal year 2010-11. However, the government is yet to establish a separate and reliable accountability mechanism to check foreign aid flow and effectiveness of development assistance.

Even though the state is largely depended on foreign aid to implement its plans, policies and programmes, scientific study to this effect is extremely limited and, as many say, media sector has also failed to give comprehensive, in-depth and critical look into the issue. In this context, this research has attempted to explore media coverage on the issue concerning overall development assistance. Similarly, the research is aimed at revealing media content flow on the

issue of foreign aid effectiveness and transparency.

## 1.3 Conceptual framework

Media is deemed a vehicle of freedom of expression and of opinion. Effective and transparent flow of information helps empower people. Accurate and balanced media coverage is a must to hold the government accountable to the general public. And, without doubt, accountability depends on access to information.

Since the country is heavily dependent on foreign aid for development works and economic prosperity, this content analysis tries to assess whether the media coverage is comprehensive and the issues are raised critically.

News media is a crucial tool to inform citizens in various crucial issues. Media should play the role of 'watch dog' in the society (Kharel, 2012). Transparency is needed for citizens to be able to hold their governments to account and promote public accountability. Media, through its critical content, opinion and editorials and analysis, provides information to the general public whether government is transparent and accountable or not.

In this regard, this study tries to examine the trend of coverage of foreign aid issues in Nepali mainstream dailies. The aid is crucial issue in Nepal since it shares a huge portion of national economy in general and budget in particular. Media - which is considered as 'not just another business' (McQuail, 2007) - has to fulfill its social responsibility through its content. The coverage of news should be balanced and should be a platform for 'public sphere'.

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### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to assess general situation of coverage of aid transparency, effectiveness and accountability in Nepali mainstream dailies and to gauge the skills and knowledge on the part of media professionals who cover the news story on different newspaper.

The specific objectives of the study will include, but are not limited to the following:

- To assess the coverage of aid transparency in mainstream newspapers
- To identify effectiveness of published stories
- To gauge whether journalists have specialized knowledge and skills to write news on foreign aid
- To examine overall scenario of the news coverage related to foreign aid

### 1.5 Limitations of the study

Aid transparency and accountability itself is a critical and sensitive issue. A comprehensive and in-depth research is required to have a complete picture of such an important issue.

The study, to a large extent, is based on content analysis of 13 broadsheet dailies published from the capital city, Kathmandu, of Nepal. Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables (Kerlinger, 2011).

This research has been limited in terms of its scope and representation. It covers only 13 newspapers published from Kathmandu.

# METHODOLOGY

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Content Analysis

This study focuses on mainstream dailies that cover national and international issues and have the ability to shape up the opinion of general public and public policy. Content analysis has been used as a main technique of data collection for this study.

Content-analysis consists of scrutiny of the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and contents of all other verbal materials which can be either spoken or printed.

Content-analysis prior to 1940 was mostly quantitative analysis of documentary materials concerning certain characteristics that can be identified and counted. But, since 1950's content-analysis is mostly qualitative analysis concerning the general import or message of the existing documents. "The difference is somewhat like that between a casual interview and depth interviewing." (Good, Carter V. Scates, Douglas E, 1954).

The analysis of content is a central activity whenever one is concerned with the study of the nature of the verbal materials. A review of research in any area, for instance, involves analysis of the contents of research articles that have been published. The analysis may be at a relatively simple level or may be a subtle one (Kothari, 2004 ).

### 2.2 Observation

According to Pauline V. Young (2001), observation may be defined as systematic viewing, coupled with consideration of the seen phenomena. After starting data collection for the study, researchers attended different programmes related to foreign aid, participated in many informal thematic discussions, listened to experts' views and observed published news from different dimensions. These formal and informal engagements into the issue have helped produce report in this form.

### 2.3 Data collection

The newspapers used in the content analysis include Nepali-language newspapers- Kantipur, Nagarik,

Annapurna Post, Gorkhapatra, Nepal Samacharpatra, Rajdhani, Naya Patrika, Himalaya Times and Karobar dailies. Similarly, this research includes analysis of the coverage of foreign aid in English-language newspaper published from Kathmandu including The Himalayan Times, Kathmandu Post, Republica and The Rising Nepal. These are the newspapers in the forefront of the country and are considered influential media outlet to shape the agendas of the country.

The research questions this study seeks to answer include:

- What are the lengths and dispersions of stories covering foreign aid flow in print media?

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- What are the themes and topics commonly used by print media to cover issues of foreign aid?
- What are the frames used by newspapers to cover the issues of foreign aid?
- What is the level and volume of coverage in some essential aspects of foreign aid, mainly transparency and effectiveness?
- How is the overall scenario of coverage of foreign aid issue in newspapers compared to other general issues?

The research period of this study spans from January 1, 2012 to July 31, 2012.

Each published news was marked and clipped in the beginning and minutely observed the content in the second stage to check consistency and reliability.

A total of six headings were made in categorizing the news and views covered by media outlets. These are: news, article, interview, editorial and letter to editor. However, this research also analyzes overall items of news being published in different thirteen newspapers.

Stories were also analyzed from the perspective or their implications in influencing public opinion and public policy. Each story was categorized based on its content and analysed whether they have affected public policy (e.g., legislators, legislation, etc.), public opinion (i.e., it attempted to provoke the reader's emotions), or was informational (i.e., it made no attempt to influence public policy or public opinion).

# ANALYSIS AND FINDING

## 3. Analysis and Findings

### 3.1 Quantitative content analysis

The research team clipped newspaper articles, news, letters to editor and editorials, critically studied each content to find the coverage of foreign aid and development assistance in mainstream dailies.

The six-month long survey of 13 different national dailies demonstrates that a newspaper publishes 78 news stories in average in a day. Likewise, all 13 newspapers publish a total of 1,013 news/fea-

tures a day. The number of published news items during the survey period totals 182,340.

Out of total coverage, 262 contents including article, news, interview, editorial and letters to editor were published during the survey period.

A total of 24 articles were published during the survey period. Similarly, the number of published editorials, letters to the editor and news was five, two and 231 respectively. While, no newspaper covered a single interview on the issue of foreign aid transparency and effectiveness during the survey period.

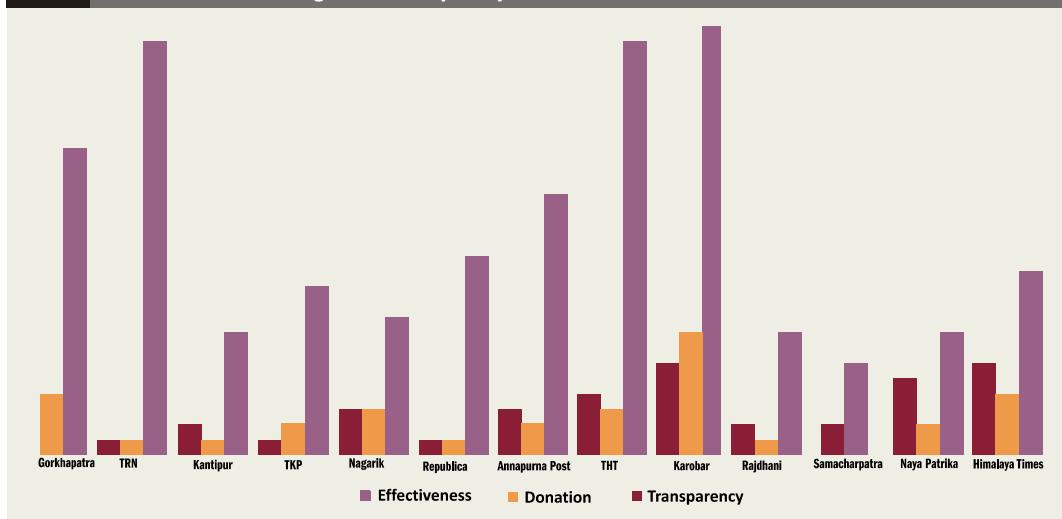
**Table 3.1: Situation of media coverage on aid transparency and effectiveness**

S. N.	NEWSPAPER	TRANSPARENCY	EFFECTIVENESS	DONATION	TOTAL
1	Gorkhapatra	0	4	20	24
2	TRN	1	1	27	29
3	Kantipur	2	1	8	11
4	TKP	1	2	11	14
5	Nagarik	3	3	9	15
6	Republica	1	1	13	15
7	Annapurna Post	3	2	17	22
8	THT	4	3	27	34
9	Karobar	6	8	28	42
10	Rajdhani	2	1	8	11
11	Samacharpatra	2	0	6	8
12	Naya Patrika	5	2	8	15
13	Himalaya Times	6	4	12	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>262</b>

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Chart 3.1 Situation of media coverage on aid transparency and effectiveness



A total of 262 items including news, articles, features, editorials and letters to the editor were published during the research period. Of the total 13 surveyed newspapers, the Karobar Daily published maximum 42 items followed by The Himalayan Times (34), The Rising Nepal (29) and Gorkhapatra (24). Nepal Samacharpatra daily is on the bottom of the table in terms of coverage of foreign aid news. The newspaper covered eight content during six months of the surveyed period.

## Content on Foreign Aid Effectiveness

A total of 36 news contents on foreign aid effectiveness were published during six months of the survey period. The data shows that the flow of news on aid effectiveness is quite limited.

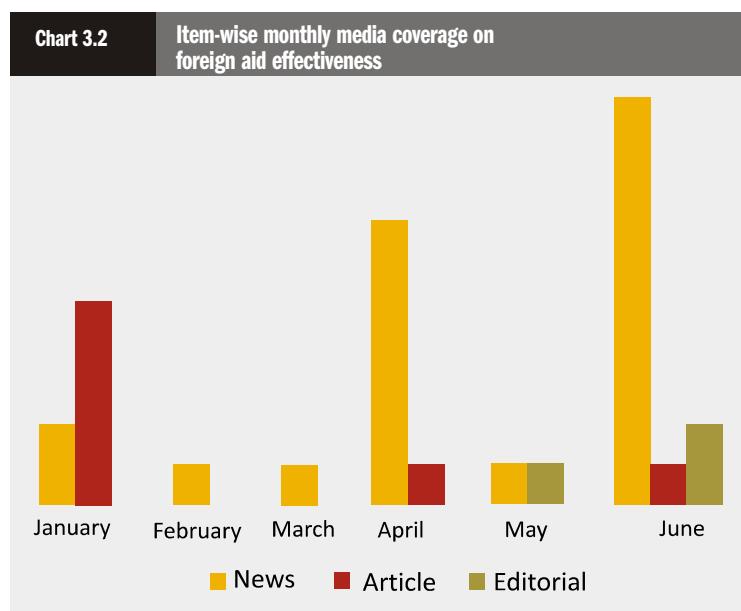
The coverage of foreign aid effectiveness was a record high 13 content items in

June followed by 8 items in April. Controversy of aid given to Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), an umbrella organization of ethnic organizations by DFID was a main reason for more coverage in June. NEFIN had imposed a three-day long violent strike from May 20 to 22 demanding single identity based federalism (The Himalayan Times, June 28). The Kathmandu Post reports: DFID has provided over 2 million pounds to NEFIN for its projects.

Eventhough the NEFIN had called three-day long strike on May, the news coverage on June regarding aid effectiveness rose since UK Minister of State for International Development visited Nepal in the month and he publicly clarified his stand on peaceful activities. All the published news were based on a official statement by the visiting UK minister.

**Table 3.2: Item-wise monthly media coverage on foreign aid effectiveness**

MONTH	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LETTER TO EDITOR	TOTAL
January	2	5	0	0	0	7
February	1	0	0	0	0	1
March	1	0	0	0	0	1
April	7	1	0	0	0	8
May	1	0	0	1	0	2
June	10	1	0	2	0	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>



## Content on Foreign Aid transparency

Foreign aid transparency got a bit more coverage in newspapers during the survey period. A total of 32 items of content were published from January to June 2012. The content on foreign aid transparency stands at 0.01 percent since 183,340 pieces of content were published during the survey period.

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**Table 3.3: Item-wise monthly media coverage on foreign aid transparency**

MONTH	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LETTER TO EDITOR	TOTAL
January	1	3	0	0	0	4
February	4	1	0	0	0	5
March	5	2	0	0	0	7
April	8	2	0	2	1	13
May	2	1	0	0	0	3
June	2	1	0	0	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>

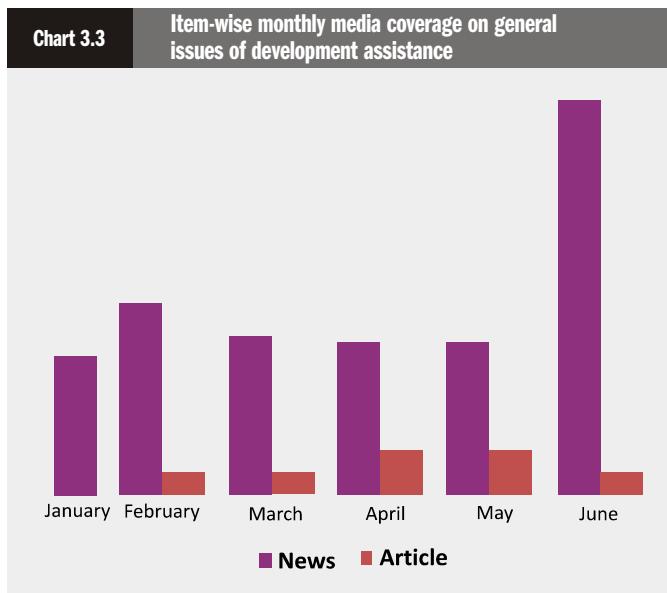
### Content on general issues of development assistance

In six months of the period, a total of 194 contents were published in regard to the general development assistance other than aid effectiveness and transparency. Most of them were based on press releases published by donor agencies and development partners to disseminate

information from their side. For example, most of the news were related to the volume of grant a particular donor is going to give, detail of the projects the donor agency and the government are going to launch, the pattern of investment in particular projects and so on. In fact, not even a single content published during the survey period regarding general development assistance issues were critical and investigative.

**Table 3.4: Item-wise monthly media coverage on general issues of development assistance**

MONTH	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LETTER TO EDITOR	TOTAL
January	22	0	0	0	0	22
February	30	1	0	0	0	31
March	25	1	0	0	0	26
April	24	2	0	0	0	26
May	24	2	0	0	0	26
June	62	1	0	0	0	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>194</b>



## Newspaper-wise coverage

Among 13 newspapers, the Karobar, an economic daily, topped the list for publishing the matters concerning aid transparency. The Karobar daily published 42 items followed by The Himalayan Times which provided space for 34 contents. Similarly, Nepal Samachar Patra remained at the bottom that only picked 8 items followed by the Rajdhani daily with 8 items.

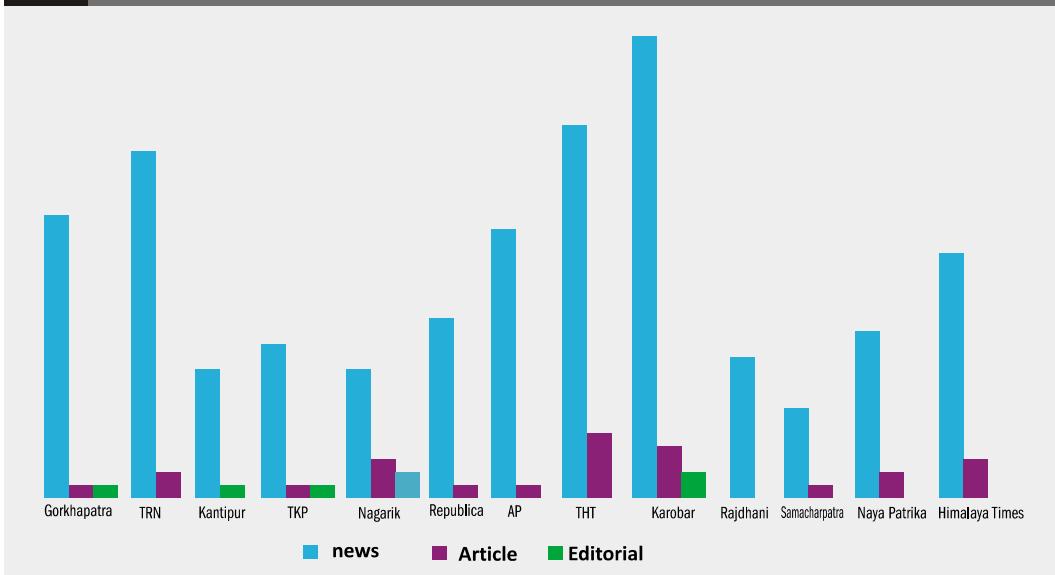
**Table 3.5 Newspaper-wise coverage of items on aid transparency/accountability**

S. N.	NEWSPAPER	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LOE	TOTAL
1	Gorkhapatra	22	1	0	1	0	24
2	TRN	27	2	0	0	0	29
3	Kantipur	10	0	0	1	0	11
4	TKP	12	1	0	1	0	14
5	Nagarik	10	3	0	0	2	15
6	Republica	14	1	0	0	0	15
7	AP	21	1	0	0	0	22
8	THT	29	5	0	0	0	34
9	Karobar	36	4	0	2	0	42
10	Rajdhani	11	0	0	0	0	11
11	Samacharpatra	7	1	0	0	0	8
12	Naya Patrika	13	2	0	0	0	15
13	Himalaya Times	19	3	0	0	0	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>231</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>262</b>

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Chart 3.4 Newspaper-wise coverage of items on aid transparency/accountability



### Month-wise coverage on overall aid issue and development assistance

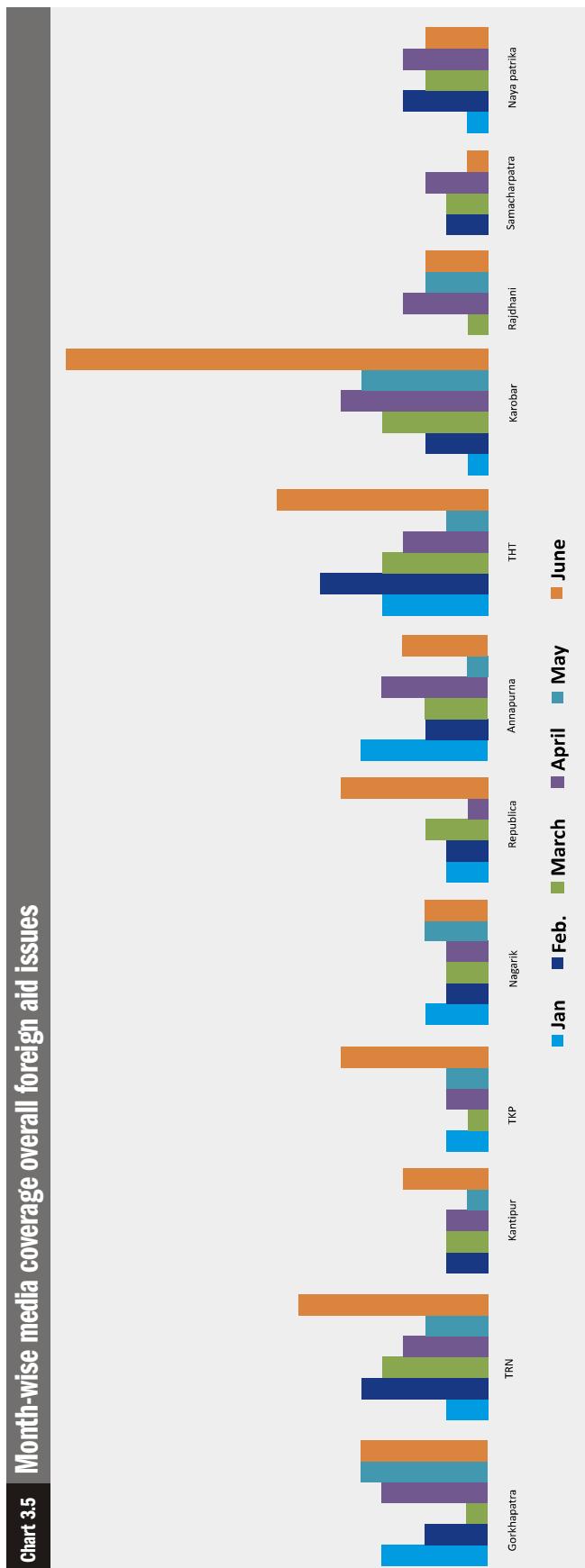
During the study period, researchers gathered clippings of all published news on foreign aid and development assistance and maintained a file. Researchers clipped 33 news contents in

January, 37 in February, 34 in March, 47 in April, 31 in May and 80 in July. As mentioned above, the reason behind the highest number of news published in July is controversy over donation provided to the ethnic organization which called a violent general strike using donation by foreign agencies. The survey showed that a total of 43 contents on foreign aid and development assistance were published in major 13 newspapers.

Table 3.6: Month-wise media coverage overall foreign aid issues

S. N.	NEWSPAPER	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	TOTAL
1	Gorkhapatra	5	3	1	5	6	6	24
2	TRN	2	6	5	4	3	9	29
3	Kantipur	0	2	2	2	1	4	11
4	TKP	2	0	1	2	2	7	14
5	Nagarik	3	2	2	2	3	3	15
6	Republica	2	2	3	1	0	7	15
7	Annapurna	6	3	3	5	1	4	22
8	THT	5	8	5	4	2	10	34
9	Karobar	1	3	5	7	6	20	42
10	Rajdhani	0	0	1	4	3	3	11
11	Samacharpatra	0	2	2	3	0	1	8
12	Naya patrika	1	4	3	4	0	3	15
13	Himalaya Times	6	2	1	4	4	5	22
		<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>262</b>

**Chart 3.5 Month-wise media coverage overall foreign aid issues**



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### Month-wise coverage on Foreign aid transparency

News coverage on foreign aid transparency is found extremely low compared to the gravity of foreign aid assistance in national budget. Only four

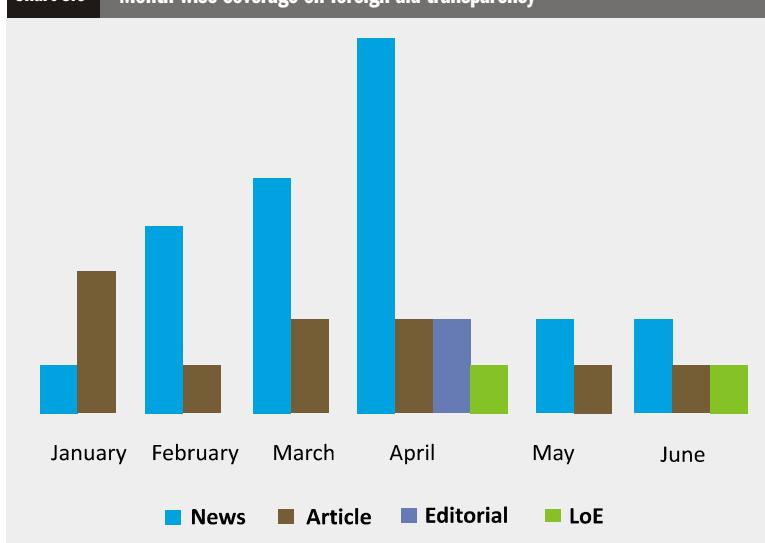
items were been published in January while five in February, seven in March, 13 in April, three in May and four in June.

The flow of content on aid transparency cannot prove its presence compared to news flow in mainstream dailies.

**Table 3.7: Month-wise coverage on foreign aid transparency**

MONTH	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LOE	TOTAL
January	1	3	0	0	0	4
February	4	1	0	0	0	5
March	5	2	0	0	0	7
April	8	2	0	2	1	13
May	2	1	0	0	0	3
June	2	1	0	0	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>36</b>

**Chart 3.6 Month-wise coverage on foreign aid transparency**

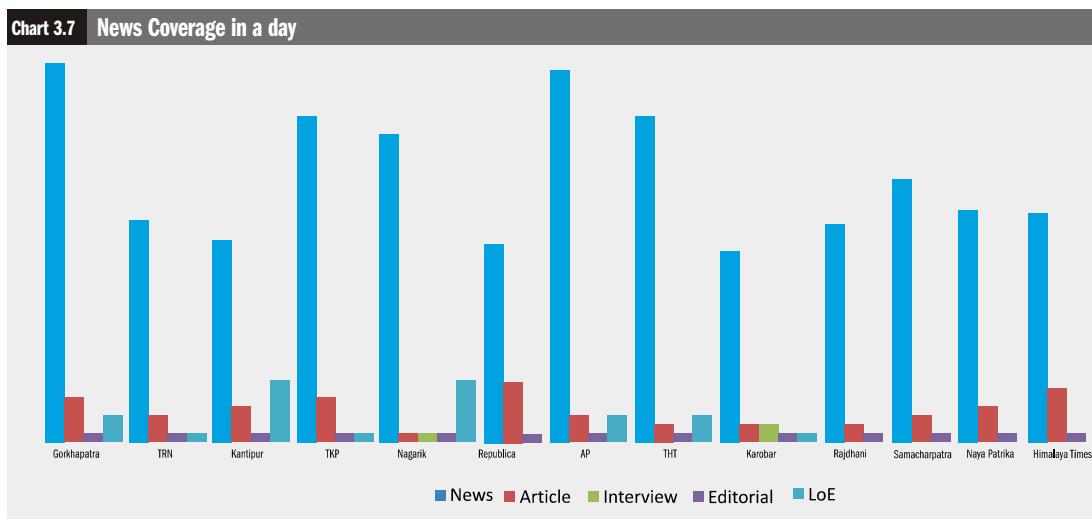


## News Coverage in a day

The research team had studied all news published in selected 13 newspapers on July 20 to find the volume of content is related to foreign aid or not. The aim of the sampling was to give a comprehensive look to the follow-up of content in a day and compare it with contents related to the foreign aid and development assistance.

**Table 3.8: News Coverage in a day**

SN	NEWSPAPER	NEWS	ARTICLE	INTERVIEW	EDITORIAL	LOE	TOTAL
1	Gorkhapatra	101	5	0	1	3	110
2	TRN	59	3	0	1	1	64
3	Kantipur	54	4	0	1	7	66
4	TKP	87	5	0	1	1	94
5	Nagarik	82	1	1	1	7	92
6	Republica	53	7	0	1	0	60
7	AP	99	3	0	1	3	106
8	THT	87	2	0	1	3	94
9	Karobar	51	2	2	1	1	57
10	Rajdhani	58	2	0	1	0	61
11	Samacharpatra	70	3	0	1	0	74
12	Naya Patrika	62	4	0	1	0	67
13	Himalaya Times	61	6	0	1	0	68
<b>Total</b>		<b>924</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1013</b>



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The study revealed that a total of 1,013 news were published in average in a newspaper everyday. A comparative chart reflecting news published on July 21 has been presented in Chart 3.8.

## 3.2 Overall findings of news coverage

The period of this study spans half year from January 1, 2012 to July 31, 2012 and news content covered 13 national dailies were the subject of analysis in the study.

- **Almost non-existent (0.143 percent) coverage of foreign aid:** A total of 262 news were published in 13 mainstream dailies during the survey period. However, the average news flow during the survey period was 142,340. The research shows that Nepali mainstream dailies have been providing very limited space to the news related to foreign aid which stands at 0.143 per cent whereas the contribution of foreign aid in fiscal budget stands at 40 per cent. The data clearly shows that the space provided by the newspapers for the foreign aid content is almost non-existent.
- **Lack of follow-up in reporting:** News on some crucial issues were published but the issues raised by the news were not followed by the media. For example, in mid-April, most of the newspaper published the news regarding public remarks on Nepal government by Australian Ambassador to Nepal Susan Grace. She blamed the government for 'wide-spread social and economic irregularities' (The Himalayan Times, April 18, 2012). Ambassador Grace had also said that the foreign aid was 'fruit-less due to rampant

corruption'. The news was published by some of the major newspapers including Kantipur, Annapurna Post and The Himalayan Times. But, none of the papers followed-up and none of these revealed why she mentioned 'rampant corruption'.

- **No consistency:** Journalists have failed to provide comprehensive account of the news story. None of the media has consistently raised the issues having gravity and pressing public concerns. For example, the economic daily Karobar in April 25, 2012, had covered news that the cabinet had decided to scrap all agreements of foreign aid which was signed without prior consent from the Finance Ministry. But, the news regarding how many projects agreement were scrapped or how many agreements were signed without consent from the Finance Ministry were never published.
- **No investigation and in-depth coverage:** There was a similarity among 13 newspapers that most of the dailies covered the same news in the same day and datelines. The trend clearly shows that newspapers are carrying news provided by particular donor agencies or the government. Of the total published 262 items, none of them were in-depth and investigative. Even some critical contents were based on the report published by the Finance Ministry. The editorial of the Kantipur daily on April 30, 2012 claimed that the effectiveness of foreign aid was out of government's control and also had not been the subject of government's audit. But, no in-depth story regarding lack of effectiveness of foreign aid has been published in a single newspaper.

- **Formal release and provided news:** Most of the news are provided by government agencies or concerned donors. The survey clearly showed that even some critical news on foreign aid were provided by the government itself. The media, as a watchdog of the society, should dare to dig out and investigate into the issue. But, the survey has proved that the concept of 'watchdog' is yet to be materialized in the media industry since media outlets are covering news either provided by concerned donor agencies or by the government agencies themselves.
- **Limited local content:** Most of the contents related to foreign aid are produced with Kathmandu dateline that has elucidated that foreign aid is controlled by urban population though huge chunk of this public money has been channeled for poverty reduction.
- **Ambiguity in news flow:** Most of the news items stated that the donation could not benefit hardcore poor but none of the published news clearly defined how all these were happening. Poor, marginalized and underprivileged, corruption and lack of transparency are some common words and phrases used by journalists during their writing. But, they have failed to present detailed accounts of the sentences which have created ambiguity in news flow.
- **Coverage of effectiveness and transparency:** The Nagarik, one of the main Nepali language newspapers, in its editorial dated on June 29, said that the donors have failed to maintain 'neutrality' while providing donation. However, it had not cov-

ered the news which can prove the editorial claims. It is not only the case of the Nagarik daily but also of other newspapers surveyed in course of research. All newspapers have attempted to dig out the issue but failed to present the case in a comprehensive manner. Corruption in projects, inefficiency of the government and delay in project completion are common headlines but no detail account of such headlines are found in the news.

- **No editorial priority:** Out of total 262 published items, newspapers-surveyed were found to have covered only five items of editorials on foreign aid and development assistance in six months. The number of editorial is quite nominal which reveals ignorance to the pressing issues of foreign aid. Similarly, the space provided to the articles related to foreign aid effectiveness and transparency is very limited. A total of 24 articles were published in 13 mainstream dailies during the period.

It is noteworthy to mention here that the number of articles went up to 24 due to fellowship granted by Freedom Forum to dig out pertinent issues of aid transparency and governance. Freedom Forum had provided fellowship to six journalists and contributors to produce research-based articles and features for broadsheet dailies of Nepal in April 2012.

In fact, the number of published news items itself is a clear indicative that the foreign aid transparency and effectiveness is yet to turn to the issue of editorial priority in spite of some genuine attempts to expose wrongdoings.

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- **Lack of proper citation to the international instruments:** In an article of a newspaper (name not disclosed), which was under the survey, has mentioned Bhutan Declaration to the Bushan Action Plan. Even in a case, article writer has failed to mention Paris Declaration in a correct way. These cases are glaring evidences that in spite of good attempt of writers and journalists, they lack technical knowledge in some cases. It seems that journalists and in some cases columnists and article writers also need technical knowledge on foreign aid transparency, international instruments on aid transparency and even the obligations of the government under Right to Information (RTI) Act.
- **No in-depth coverage:** There are some news, editorial and articles which had covered the issue in comprehensive manner. However, the number of such comprehensive news are hardly half dozens.
- **Media yet to serve a greater 'public sphere':** Journalism, in essence,

should serve public because 'it is not just another business' (McQuail, 2005). The overall news coverage pattern of foreign aid and development assistance, however, does not show that media are playing the role of 'public sphere'. On one hand, the report published in all newspapers suggests that there is corruption, irregularities, inefficiency in the governance of foreign aid and development assistance. On the other, no newspaper has succeeded to present the issue in comprehensive manner. Not even a single newspaper has presented the issue of foreign aid and development assistance in a manner that aid agencies have been investing in the country for the benefit of hardcore poor section of the society. Kathmandu-dateline news items and the news matters provided by donor or government cannot prove that the newspaper are serving the public sphere.

# CONSLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusion

- The coverage of foreign aid issue leaves much to be desired. Nepal's mainstream media provides extremely limited space to the content related to foreign aid. Furthermore, the coverage on foreign aid transparency, effectiveness and accountability is almost non-existent.
- Almost all published content, other than articles, are based on the information provided by either donor agencies working in the country or by the government agencies responsible to oversee foreign aid issue
- Journalists have failed to follow-up and reveal the facts of even sensitive and serious issues regarding foreign aid and development assistance
- Investigative and in-depth reporting is not carried out by a single mainstream newspaper giving much space to carry out such issue in the future
- Journalists also lack technical knowledge

### 4.2 Recommendations

#### To the government

- Government should adopt the policy of proactive disclosure to ensure

transparency and accountability of foreign aid and development assistance

- Government should bring media-friendly policy and create separate platform targeting journalists
- Government has to organize periodic conference to provide comprehensive information on foreign aid and development assistance to the public through media
- Government should encourage / promote media outlets to cover content related to development assistance and foreign aid

#### To the media house

- Media houses should increase investment to capacity enhancing programme for journalists
- Newspapers should provide wider space for discussion on aid transparency
- Editorial policy should encourage journalists to carry out in-depth and investigative news

#### To the journalist

- Journalists should whet their skills and knowledge on the related content/issue
- Journalists should focus on in-depth reporting and cover comprehensive picture of aid transparency and accountability

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- They should show courage to avoid 'publicity stunt' and be true information hound
- They should promote positive and success stories to enable environment pushing for the spending of development assistance in more effective manner

## To the CSOs working on foreign aid transparency

- CSOs should sensitize the issue
- They should promote journalists in bringing the reality to limelight
- CSOs should apply RTI Act to substantiate the movement of transparency and anti-corruption

- Civil society organizations should generate and use alternative media products to bring the aid discourse to grassroots level
- They should conduct trainings to provide skills to journalists while covering news on foreign aid and development assistance
- They should support journalists morally and provide fellowship and other opportunities to encourage them for in-depth writing
- They should play the role of watch-dog mechanism and dare to reveal wrongdoings
- They should propel in formation of expert opinion and analysis

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### Annex-I

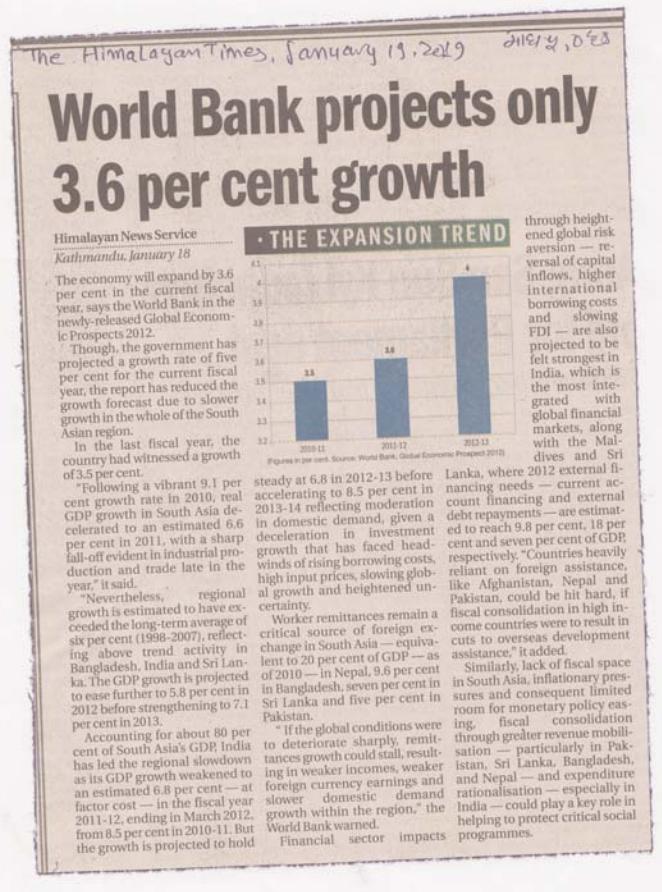
# NEWS PAPERS





## A STUDY REPORT

## Media Content Research on Aid Transparency in Nepal



## A STUDY REPORT

Media Content Research on  
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Recently a long-term Multi Stakeholder Forestry Program (MSFP), funded by three bilateral donors, has become highly controversial after decisions were awarded to a new local organization, and, at the same time one of these donors formed a non-profitable company called "Bhutanistan". Most civil society practitioners are questioning the entire selection process including eligibility of such an unproven and inexperienced organization, the Local Labour and Economic Relation Committee (LLRC) of the Legislative Parliament is also examining the matter. It is reported that the Finance Secretary told the LLRC that the direct involvement of donors in the projects and programs by-passing the government is unjustified and added that it is against the commitments and spirit of Paris Declaration 2005 on Aid Effectiveness.

As is well known, ownership, mutual accountability, alignment, harmonization and managing for results are the five pillars of aid effectiveness agenda. Understandably, such an agenda was not due to the overnight changes in the

donors' aid behavior. This is rather an outcome of many years of pressure from the people of the developing and developed countries alike. The poor outcome or misuse of aid primarily due to donor's political and economic interests is aggravating frustration and anger among the people in developing countries. People of the developing countries are aware that the aid paid by them is used more effectively for enhancing socio-economic development and improving the living conditions of the people and aid goes to other countries. After 2005, two high level meetings, one in Accra in 2008 and another in Busan in 2011, organized in the name of only progresses and gaps were discussed but also future course of actions were agreed upon by development practitioners. The most important feature of 2008 meeting was that it identified the gaps especially on ownership and accountability issues and stressed on the need of engaging all the stakeholders, including parliamentarians, local representatives, and local representative groups for strengthened harmonization for improved

ownership, mutual accountability, alignment, harmonization and managing for results are the five constituents set under aid effectiveness agenda. It was rather an outcome of many years' pressure of the people at large from both developing and developed countries alike

Such a new focus was due to the growing need to to the name of internal ownership, alignment, harmonization and in some cases, for improved

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for further committed the partnership for development. As a result, offshoots of stress on developing, extending and operationalizing the democratic ownership of development policies and programs and efforts to strengthen ownership, mutual accountability, alignment, harmonization and managing for results are the five constituents set under aid effectiveness agenda. It was rather an outcome of many years' pressure of the people at large from both developing and developed countries alike

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## About Freedom Forum

**F**reedom 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. This is a purely social organization registered with the District Administration Office of Kathmandu and the Social Welfare Council of Nepal. Its head office is in Kathmandu, Nepal.

A group of like-minded and democratically conscious professionals from media, law, research and diverse academic background initiated the organization to protect the hard-earned media and democratic rights in the country.

Incepted in February, 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, aid governance, political and parliamentary accountability and electoral reform based on its on-hand experience and learning.

## Aidinfo in Brief

**A**idinfo works to enable people to gain access to and use information about aid and other poverty reduction resources in order to increase the impact on poverty reduction. Aidinfo works with donors and partner countries to secure international agreement from donors to publish information in a consistent format that meets the needs of aid information users. The programme is led by the not-for-profit wing of Development Initiatives, an independent UK-based organisation with an established track record of research and analysis on aid flows and poverty reduction. [www.aidinfo.org](http://www.aidinfo.org) and [www.devinit.org.uk](http://www.devinit.org.uk)



**FREEDOM FORUM**  
Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal

**aidinfo**  
better information, better aid

A DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE