

Media feeble to do investigative and corruption stories, prepare critical mass

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Freedom Forum conducted the media mission from 10 to 13 July 2018 in the Province 1 focusing Jhapa, Ilam and Panchthar districts. The media mission was conducted in the wake of the formation of local levels and their activities and how favorable the atmosphere is for the journalists for free reporting, whether the investigative stories are reported, if there was any threats to them and whether the right to information was implemented well to ensure people's access to information were some pertinent issues the mission.

Because the journalists in the local levels have competition to be press advisor and media facilitators to the government agencies and political leaders, it has resulted in narrowing down of the scope of investigative journalism and critical news. It is one of the alarming trends observed during the mission. As is the case of journalists nationwide, the journalists in this area shared they do not get enough remuneration which has led them to compromise with their professional integrity.

Interface meetings among the local level employees, district offices, civil society organizations and journalists were imperative to create atmosphere conducive for independent, fair and safe media. It will be helpful also to prepare critical mass through media and avoid local levels' manipulation of media and journalists.

Jhapa

There are three hundred journalists working in these districts. Categorically, there are 13 daily and weekly newspapers combined seven radio and online news portals, one national TV. Bhadrapur, Birtamod, Mechinagar, Surunga and Damak are the major centers. Jhapa district has two press clubs among the four in these three districts. During the media mission, meeting was held with 25 working journalists and some editors on 10 and 11 July of Bhadrapur. Mission team held meetings at a

local radio station office and two weekly newspaper's offices. Likewise the mission team held meeting with 30 journalists at Birtamod of Jhapa.

Photographs:





MAJOR OBSERVATION

- There is no direct and visible threat to the journalists in that area due to the political stability.
- However, investigative journalism is weak. No news stories about smuggling in the Nepal-India border area. It may also be the reason for the less number of threats.
- Local levels are recently established. There is no proper system of information management. Information is not managed properly. It is difficult for journalists to fetch news about the government affairs in that area.
- Local governments are not aware and capable about the Right to Information (RTI). Similarly, information seeking was also minimal.
- One of the major threats for the journalists in the area is - they may be misused as propaganda and advertisements. The journalists are focused on being media facilitator, media counselor.

- Media are dependent on the advertisement provided by the local levels. That's way, they are hesitant to write critical news against them.
- Although there is rise in the opportunity for the media development and for journalists, there is no stability and continuity of the profession. Adequate remuneration and facilities are the main reason behind it.
- Civil society members have grudges with the media does not provide true and verified news. It does not bring the people centric news.
- Elected local government is hesitant to give information/data to the journalists. Also the journalists do not have courage to report on the investigative issues.
- Journalists reporting for the central (Kathmandu) based national media attempt to write critical and investigative stories, therefore they are relatively under serious threat.

Ilam, Phikkal (Suryodaya Municipality)

Phikkal is the second important town of Ilam district which borders Darjeeling city of India. There are 15 working journalists, two community radios and two local newspapers in Phikkal. Two meetings were held on 11 and 12 July with six journalists. The mission team also visited one FM radio station.

MAJOR OBSERVATION

- Journalists in this area are focused on the activities of local levels and the community.
- They are in need of training and support to enhance their skills and get other kind of opportunities.
- Local government, private sectors should support them for the sustainability.
- As no investigative stories are carried out by the journalist in this area, they do not face any serious threat.

Ilam City (Ilam Municipality)

Ilam is an old town of eastern Nepal which is also the headquarters of the district Ilam. Although there are over 100 journalists here only 60 are working actively. There are two community radios and two newspapers published in Ilam Municipality. Mission team held meeting with 11 editors and reporters and visited a radio station.

Photograph:



MAJOR OBSERVATION

- Although there is no such threat to the journalist in this area, the journalists are facing hassles from local levels (government), because the management of information- practice of sharing information is poor.
- Online expression and journalism is in threat due to the Electronic Transaction Act 2008. It is being misused to impose threat on the journalist expressing on the online platform.

Panchthar, Phidim

Panchthar is a small mid hill district, sharing boarder with Sikkim, India. Phidim is district headquarters which is also a model town of eastern mid-hill Nepal. The mission team held meeting with the journalists and administrative bodies of the Panchthar, Phidim. A gathering of more than 50 persons from diverse sector was organized on 12 July.

Photographs



Major observation

- There is no threat of physical attack on the journalists because of relatively few activities of the political parties.
- As in other places, the journalists here have competition to be press advisor, and media facilitator to the government agencies and political leaders which has resulted in narrowing down of the scope of investigative journalism and critical news. It is an alarming trend observed during the mission.
- Journalists shared their problem that they do not get enough remuneration which has led them to compromise with their professional integrity.
- Journalists are politically divided on ideological groups.
- Civil society organizations complain that press is not critical.
- It is observed that journalists are in need of training and fellowship.
- The major problem they face is the threat received from online expression.
- There is need of the meetings between local level, district offices, municipality, sub-municipality and journalists.
- As some journalists have successfully disclosed the local corruption with the use of RTI, the journalists are excited to use it as investigation tool to report the news.

The media mission team included FF's Chief Executive Mr Taranath Dahal, Vice Chairman of Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Bipul Pokharel, Vice Chairman of FNJ Province 1 committee and station manager of Nepalbani FM Radio Somnath Suseli and Senior Journalist of The Himalayan Times working in Jhapa Govinda Chandra Chhetri.

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