

2019-20

ANNUAL REPORT



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

July 2020

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Message from the Chairperson

This is my great pleasure to introduce Freedom Forum's annual report despite the pandemic of Covid-19. The global pandemic Covid 19 is yet to fizzle out in Nepal.

Even during the lockdown, FF continued its activities but in limited manner. In the face of crisis, FF managed insurance to many journalists and right activists too.

FF believes in democracy and democratic norms in every step of state activities. The rule of law is main character of democratic state and we always advocate for rule of law and other democratic norms.

FF has continued its efforts to build better democracy with the advocacy, research, training on FoE and information, transparency and good governance, press freedom, journalists' rights. The State agencies are prodded for FoE friendly policy and laws. It is worth mentioning that with our activities, landmark achievements in the area of Right to Information (RTI) and legal reforms have been made.

This is an annual report containing major activities and achievements accomplished by FF during a yearlong period spanning from July 17, 2019 to July 16, 2020. The primary objective of the report is to share overall activities, learning, and outcomes of the organizational initiatives and demonstrate its track record and competence to execute ideas aligning the key themes of the organization. The report is expected to serve as a well documentation of the key efforts of the organization to attain its objectives and a consolidated contribution FF made to the country's national development objective. Information contained in this report have been widely extracted from the newsletters, project documents, project reports, press releases, website updates, meetings and discussion notes, media coverage and sharing on social media.

FF has completed more than a decade-long journey since its inception in the year 2006 and now established its name in national and international arena among the organizations working for the promotion and advancement of RTI and FoE. During this period, it took lead in reforming media policy and practice through monitoring of policy, review and advocacy. Transparency, accountability and good governance are other area given priority. Within the core themes of the organization, our working areas have expanded to public financial management, open data, and internet freedom.

We were able to achieve what we had aimed for the fiscal year BS 2076/77(2019-2020 AD). FF is committed towards ensuring open government and responsive democracy. We are open for creative and constructive collaboration with various national CSOs and agencies. FF has firm conviction that promotion of freedom of expression, easy access to information, and professional development of journalism will only foster robust and deepening democratic system.

I take this as an opportunity to thank all the board members, staffs, partners and well-wishers for their continuous cooperation and good will and hope for the same in the upcoming years too. I specially thank to Executive Chief Mr Tara Nath Dahal, our researchers, friends and hard -working staffs who always dedicate their efforts to ensure our fulfillment of goals.

Hari Binod Adhikari
Chairperson
Freedom Forum

1. Introduction

Brief Introduction to Organization:

Freedom Forum is an independent, non-governmental and not-for-profit civil society organization working for democracy and human rights focused on press freedom, freedom of expression, right to information and governance in Nepal. Incepted in 2005, FF has emerged as a prominent national organization in promoting access to information, freedom of expression and open development. The organization is also working on the issues of open governance/open data, public finance management, budget/aid transparency and political and parliamentary accountability and electoral reform. Adding new dimension to its regular activities, FF initiated Gender monitoring of Nepali media contents since last year.

This is a purely social organization registered with the District Administration Office of Kathmandu (Regd.127/062/063) and the Social Welfare Council (Affiliation No.18518) of Nepal. Its head office is in Kathmandu, Nepal. FF has different contact offices and representatives in provinces and district sites. It has 11 member Board of Directors, 52 general members, and 17 staffs. Annual General Meeting is the apex body of the organization and it takes place every year.

Major Objectives:

The key objectives of the organization are

- a) Protection and promotion of freedom expression and information
- b) Promotion and development of professional journalism
- c) Defending journalists, Right to Information activists and freedom of expression practitioners
- d) Promotion, protection and practice of the right to information
- e) Promotion of human rights and democratic norms and values
- f) Research/study, civic monitoring, oversight and education and advocacy for the guarantee of free and fair elections
- g) Promotion of the use of media, Right to Information, Open Data and Public



Financial Management (PFM) tools to support the movement and campaign for social justice and development of disadvantaged people

h) Contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through exchange of ideas, experience and learning at national and international level being focused on attaining the targets of Goal 16

i) Affiliation and participation in regional and global networks related to transparency, right to information, freedom of expression, free and professional press, civic engagement and Open Government Partnership

j) Undertake action research and study to draw evidences for advocacy in its core areas of works.

About the Report:

This is an annual report containing major activities and achievements accomplished



by FF during a year-long period spanning from **July 17, 2019 to July 16, 2020.**

The primary objective of the report is to disclose overall activities, learning, and outcomes of the organizational initiatives and demonstrate its track

record and competence to execute ideas aligning the key themes of the organization. The report is expected to serve as a well-documentation of the key efforts of the organization to attain its objectives and a consolidated contribution FF made to the country's national development objective.

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

2. Partnership Projects executed:

This year FF worked in partnership with following international organizations.

A. Open Budget Survey 2019

Duration: 1st December, 2018 to 30 September, 2020

Funding Agency: International Budget Partnership (IBP)

Project Site: National Budget System of the country

Project Nature: Research and Advocacy

Financial Grant: \$10,000

B.CACFRIIM (Contributing to Atmosphere Conducive to FoE, Reduced Impunity and Inclusive Media) **in Nepal**

Duration: 1st January, 2019 to 31st December, 2019

Funding Agency: Free Press Unlimited (FPU)



Project Site: Seven Provinces

Financial Grant: EUR 94,500

C. CAFIFIR (Contributing to the Atmosphere Favorable to Improved FOE and Information Regime) **in Nepal**

Duration: 1st January, 2020 to August 31st, 2020

Funding Agency: Free Press

Unlimited (FPU)

Project Site: Seven Provinces

Financial Grant: Euro 67000

D. Enable Environment for Media law Reforms and Improved RTI Practice (EEMIR) (CS:MAP)

Duration: 1st January 2017 to 30

September 2020 **Funding Agency:**

Family Health International 360 **Project**

Site: Kathmandu

Financial Grant: NRs.2,25,84,850

E.Sustainable use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN)

Duration: June 2017 to March 2021



Funding Agency: Global Affairs Canada/ CECI

Project Site: Sindhupalchowk, Lalitpur, Dadeldhura, Achham, Kailali and Bajhang

Financial Grant: NRs. 59,80,426

F. Amendment of Right to Information Act Nepal

Duration: September 2018 to July 2019

Funding Agency: The Asia Foundation

Project Site: Kathmandu

Financial Grant: 11,21,360



G. Open data Training in Kathmandu and Gaundakot

Duration: April 2019 to July 2019

Funding Agency: The Asia Foundation

Project Site: Kathmandu and Gaundakot

Financial Grant: 70,000

H. Promoting Open Parliament Initiative in Provinces

Duration: 1st July to 30th November, 2019



Funding Agency: UNDP

Project Site: Seven Provinces and Kathmandu.

Funding Grant: NRS.45, 01,350

I. Legal Defense Fund

Duration: May 2019 to March 2020

Funding Agency: Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

Project Site: Kathmandu

Funding Grant: \$23,000

J. Driving Audit Accountability: Audit Report for Collective Action to Strengthen Government Responsiveness

Duration: September 30, 2019 to September 30, 2021

Funding Agency: International Budget Partnership (IBP)

Project Site: Kathmandu

Funding Grant: \$55,000

3. Major activities and accomplishments (thematic): FF carried out several activities to promote its core values with support of funding partners during reporting period. In 2020, few activities were organized through virtual platform owing to the COVID 19 pandemic. Details of the activities executed under aforementioned projects are as following:

I. Democracy/ Governance:

Our activities are focused on promoting democratic principles, norms, values and standards and strengthening democratic structures and institutions to foster democratic culture in Nepal. Activities carried out during this year under this theme are as follows: and major activities undertaken by FF



A. Discussion on 'Open Parliament: Concept and Practices' in seven provinces:

In a bid to promote open parliament initiatives at province and federal levels, seven events were held in the capital cities of all seven provinces with support from Parliament Support Programme/ UNDP.

The programs were attended by parliamentary committee presidents, lawmakers, media persons, government officials, university teachers, legal practitioners,

among others.

For details on Bagmati Province program:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/new-policy-needed-for-journalists-easy-access-to-parliamentary-reporting-province-3-speaker-shrestha/>



B. Federal dialogue on 'Open Parliament, Open Government: Concepts and

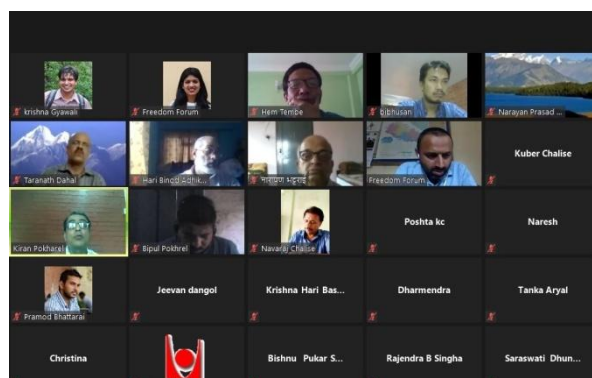
Practices': At the dialogue organized with support from Parliament Support Project/UNDP in Lalitpur, the members of federal and provincial parliament underscored that the more citizens understand the legislative and governance process the more benefits it would reap for the state and its institutions. They have highlighted the need to engage citizens in law-making process and governance systems so as to leverage open parliament and open government practices.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/peoples-participation-and-openness-in-legislative-and-governance-process-key-to-strengthen-democracy/>

C. Open Government dialogue: The governance openness during the time of crisis and pandemic is more important than in normal situation. Hence, the issues of Open Government Partnership are not only the issue of CSOs but also of government. With this in background, the dialogue was organized on May 29, 2020 as an initiative of Freedom Forum. It was attended by 10 participants including two females.

For details:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/csos-stress-on-ogp-dialogue-practices/>



D. Open Response and Open

Recovery: Next dialogue on 'Open Response, Open Recovery in the Wake of COVID-19 Crisis', was held on 19 June 2019 at virtual platform (zoom), having government officials, state assembly members, civil society leaders and stakeholders, media fraternities and other actors. Out of 42 participants, there were 10 females in the discussion event. The main objective of the discussion was to prioritize the idea of government openness on response and recovery in regards to the time of pandemic and COVID-19 crisis.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/dialogue-on-open-response-open-recovery/>

E. Collaborative Performance for Open Governance: FF brought together representatives of CSOs and media to put forth the agenda of openness in

different sector of governance such as Open Budget, Open Contracting, Right to Information, Anti-corruption, Accountable Institutions, among others on OGP workshop held on 28 June 2020. The main objective of the workshop is to bring CSO's concern and voice together for open government and set the priorities and strategies for upcoming days. The zoom workshop was moderated by Sanjeeb Ghimire Project Manager which held as part of the "Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)" with the support of FHI360, was attended by 51 participants. Out of 51 participants, there were 11 females in the event.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/mutual-partnership-key-to-open-governance/>

II. Freedom of Expression:



Among the major accomplishments made by FF for the consolidation and strengthening of freedom of expression and of press are constant lobby and advocacy for policy reform on media sector, public awareness,

drawing up Agenda for Change (AFC) as a long-term plan for the enhancement of freedom of expression in line with international standard. Specific activities carried out under this theme are:-

A. Training to advocate on FoE and Media law: In the wake of growing press freedom violations and increase in the cyber crime endangering freedom of expression online, FF organized 3-day training cum workshop. During the program held in Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu from 16 to 18 August, 20 advocates including 7 females—two each from seven provinces and 6 from the Kathmandu Valley— took part to learn the national and international provisions and standards on Freedom of Expression (FoE), privacy, cybercrime, journalist safety and impunity for crime against journalists.



For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/advocates-trained-on-the-issue-of-foe-and-media-law/>

B. Multi-stakeholder dialogue on FoE, media law: FF organized a multi-stakeholder discussion in Kathmandu on July 30. The program was organized in the presence of members of the Federal Parliament, members of Province-3 Assembly, university teachers, researchers, media persons, FoE practitioners and rights defenders. The program, held as part of the program “Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)” with the support of FHI360, was attended by 55 participants. Out of 55 participants, there were 17 female and there were total 18 lawmakers from Federal and Provincial Parliaments.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/multi-stakeholders-dialogue-on-freedom-of-expression-held/>

C. End Impunity Day marked nationwide in Nepal:

The International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists’ was marked



across the nation in November. It is observed in a bid to raise awareness on journalists’ rights, express solidarity to the campaign of journalists’ safety and advocate for justice to the victim journalists and media persons in order to end impunity for the crimes meted out against them. Three awards were also conferred to three candidates under Courageous Journalism, Best RTI Activist and Investigative Journalism categories.

For details on program in capital: <http://freedomforum.org.np/end-impunity-day-marked-nationwide-in-nepal/>

D. Talk program on Universal Periodic Review (UPR): Freedom Forum organized a talk program on 'Freedom of Expression and Journalists' Rights focused on Universal Periodic Review' in Kathmandu on December 27, 2019. The talk program attended by FoE practitioners and advocates ranging from academia to media, free press defenders and law practitioners and government representatives had thorough discussion on Nepal's compliance to UPR 2015 especially on freedom of expression and journalists' rights. It also sought views from the experts relating to FoE and journalists' which could be addressed in the UPR 2020.



For details:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/talk-programme-on-upr-suggestions-to-include-every-aspects-of-foe/>

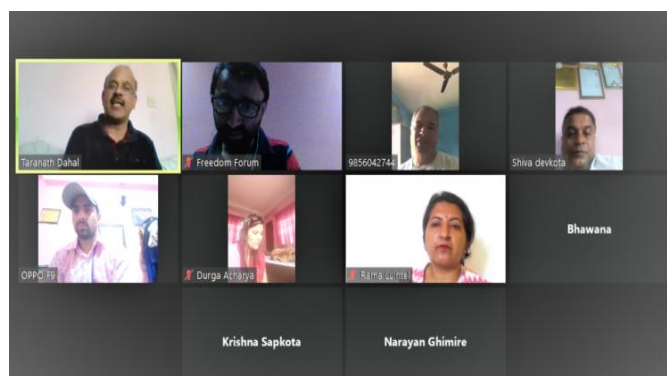
E. Dialogue on 'Art, Creation and FoE': Different literary writers, film producers and directors, representatives from CSOs and journalists underscored the

importance of freedom of expression (FoE) without any hindrance at the program organized by FF in collaboration with Nepal Independent Filmmakers Society on 25th December 2019.

For details:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/media-film-literature-under-control-and-fear-in-nepal/>

F. Meeting with province representatives on status of media during lockdown: Nepal enforced lockdown to contain COVID-19 since March 24. Most of the sectors were badly suffered due to the stay-at-home order. Many media houses were closed down with journalists facing tough time to continue profession. In this connection, FF organized a Zoom meeting with its representatives from seven Provinces including the Kathmandu Valley on May 16, 2020.



For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/journalists-share-bleak-picture-of-nepali-media-in-covid-19-crisis/>



G. COVID Insurance to the journalists: At a time when hundreds of media are closed resulting in thousands of journalists rendered jobless and several unpaid with the financial instability of media, journalists, who are still in profession facing hardship, have sought cooperation for their safety and media sustainability.

Freedom Forum has managed insurance worth Rs. 100 thousand to each journalist affiliated to the Online Journalists' Association. Shikhar Insurance arranged the facility for it.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/ff-manages-insurance-to-journalists-associated-to-online-journalists-association/>

H. Zoom meeting with Public Interest Reporting journalists: Journalists reporting on public interest issues have shared the problems they faced in the wake of COVID-19 lockdown in a Zoom meeting with FF on May 14. This crisis has piled pressure on the local newspaper industry at all levels.

For more:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/chaallenges-for-pir-journalists-during-covid19/>



I. Distribution of Safety materials to journalists: FF distributed necessary safety materials (masks, sanitizer, gloves, and personal protective equipment) to journalists and media staffs for protection from possible infection on the first week of June 2020. In coordination with its province representatives, additional materials were also distributed for other journalists who were reporting in the field. FF

representatives distributed equipment to the journalists.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/safety-materials-to-journalists/>

III. Right to Information and Open data:-

FF organized various campaigns, trainings and discussion programs under this theme during this year.

- A. RTI Nepal App: FF is running RTI Nepal android mobile App which is 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.
- The application can be downloaded in any android mobile from play store.



- B. Celebration of International Right to Know Day: Freedom Forum (FF) has continued its endeavor for the cause of good governance by making public agencies transparent and accountable and sensitizing citizens from across the country on importance of information with the use of Right to Information (RTI) applications. In this connection, FF conducted a week long citizen's campaign for right to information to mark the International Right to Know Day. The campaign begun on September 22 concluded on 28 in collaboration and initiation of various CSOs including FF.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/ff-marks-intl-right-to-know-day-2019-in-a-grand-manner/>

C. National Seminar on 'RTI for good governance in local governments':



At the seminar held on January 28 2020, Chiefs and deputy chiefs of different 12 local governments and representatives of CSOs from Sindhupalchowk, Lalitpur, Dhangadhi, Dadeldhura, Achham and Bajhang shared the best practices of

governance in their areas. As many as 80 participants including state assembly members, mayors/chairs, deputy mayors/vice-chair, government officials, information officers and representatives of CSOs, private sector, universities and media took part in the seminar.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/ff-conducted-national-level-consultative-seminar-on-rti-in-kathmandu/>



D. Orientation on RTI Nepal App: FF
conducted orientations among youth, women and various groups on

Right to Information and RTI Nepal App as a campaign to promote use of RTI for good governance all over Nepal. Starting from June, FF conducted eleven orientations till July 12 in Bagmati, Gandaki, Karnali and Far-west Provinces. At a time when people's movement is limited across the country with the COVID-19 pandemic, FF organized the Zoom meeting, thereby reaching the targeted groups for the promotion of RTI App Nepal.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/orientation-on-rti-app-continues/>

E. Dialogue on Rule of Law and Right to Information: FF organized a dialogue in collaboration with Center for Rule of Law on *Rule of Law and Right to Information* in Kathmandu on 8th November 2019. The program was organized in the presence of lawyers, academicians, researchers, media persons,



RTI activists including other stakeholders. The experts responded to the queries in the event. The program, held as part of the program "Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)" with the support of FHI360, was attended by 55

participants. Out of 55 participants, there were 5 females in the event.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/discussion-on-rti-and-rule-of-law/>

F. Open Data Training in Gaindakot and Kathmandu: The training was provided to total 28 youths (12 in Kathmandu and 16 in Gaindakot). The training was conducted



in the framework of prior assessment, do, learn, review and apply. Assessment of prior knowledge of the participants was done by placing questions around social security allowance such

as – *do anyone in their family members receive social security allowance? If yes what type? How much government allocation on social security? How do they know this?* Main aim of the session was to enable local CSOs to define the benefits of open data and use open data and RTI in monitoring social security allowance.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/open-data-training-in-gaindakot-and-kathmandu/>

IV. Gender Justice in Media:

FF continues monitoring Nepali media contents through gender perspectives. This year monitoring was conducted at central and provincial level, monitoring nine national dailies and six online news portals in central and 21 major provincial dailies from seven provinces.



Specific activities carried out are as follows:

A. Reports on Gender Content Monitoring Published: The report of monitoring throughout a year is published on quarterly basis. The first report of the year was published from July to September, 2nd, 3rd and 4th from October to December, January to March and April to June respectively.

The report is prepared after analyzing the data recorded from main news contents and op- eds of all selected media outlets.

For detail report: <http://freedomforum.org.np/publications/reports/media-monitoring-reports/>

B. March 8: Advocacy for more Women in Media for Inclusive Media: FF marked the International Women's Day showing solidarity through social media platforms and doing photo session holding placards which read: *change the stereotype, change the image, stand up for the women in the media, protect women's right*. Campaign was



organized for sensitization of women rights and advocacy of equal rights of women in media.

C. Interface 'Women's Presence in Nepali Media': Two interfaces were organized where participants were from media fraternity. The interfaces were organized as part of the project named CACFRIIM; one was held at the capital city and another in Bardibas, a city in southern plains. At the programs, journalists from different media houses talked about women not getting unequal opportunity and pay gap among women and men and also media houses' trust upon women journalists on reporting important issues.

For detail: <http://freedomforum.org.np/interface-meeting-on-womens-presence-in-nepali-media-2/>

<http://freedomforum.org.np/mandatory-policy-for-womens-appointment-in-media-demanded/>

V. Media Policy Reviews/ Program:

FF also reviews national policies through FoE perspectives with its background on advocacy on issues of freedom of expression and information. This year FF reviewed and disseminated the papers on various policies brought forth in Nepal under the project EEMIR- CS: MAP.

A. Multi stakeholder discussion on “Media Council Bill”: National Assembly members agreed to reform regressive provisions on media council bill after taking suggestions from stakeholders and reiterating the preparation and process of reform



as per the demand of the concerned. The commitment of policy makers came during the organized on 25th August 2019 by Freedom Forum in Kathmandu. Various

National Assembly members, Editors, former representatives of Press Council, lawyers and other concerned media stakeholders participated in the policy dialogue event on the proposed bill, which has been already registered in parliament (NA) now.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/urge-for-reform-on-media-council-bill/>

B. Discussion on Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) bill: Freedom Forum organized a strategic discussion program on Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) and its proposed bill on October 25, 2019. The main objective of the meeting was to share the brief highlights of proposed PSB bill and facilitate for common understanding among stakeholders, mainly the trade union representatives of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television including others.



For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/strategic-discussion-held-on-public-service-broadcasting/>

C. Interaction with Research Sub-Committee on Media Council Bill: A group of four members of the research sub-committee under the Legislative Management Committee (National Assembly), gathered at Freedom Forum seeking suggestions

on Media Council bill on 20th Nov 2019. The committee sent an email regarding their visit to FF and a set of questionnaires to be answered in the meeting the day after.



FF's experts not only discussed the given questionnaires but also handed reviewed documents of Media Council Bill, policy brief and a comparative study of Media Council Bill among

other countries as well.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/interaction-with-research-sub-committee-on-media-council-bill/>

D. Review of Public Service Broadcast Bill: The government registered long- awaited bill in the parliament on July 29 to amend and consolidate the laws on public broadcasting to change the existing regulation system of Radio Nepal and Nepal Television. Following this, FF made various comments and recommendations to be



amended on the provisions included in the bill to make it globally recognized as per the characteristics and global experience of a public service broadcaster. The review report is soon to be published.

E. Review of Gandaki Province's Mass Communication Policy: FF submitted

27 points recommendations by reviewing the Mass Communication Policy of Gandaki province to the parliamentarians of Gandaki Province assembly. FF has dragged attention towards provisions which are detrimental to the functioning of journalism effectively and efficiently. FF also found that excessive authority is given to levy hefty punishments to some authorities which can easily be misused and are against the notion of the principle of natural justice, which discourages the journalism in the modern digital era.

Review report is available here: <http://freedomforum.org.np/download/mass-communication-policy-of-gandaki-province-review/?wpdmdl=4142&refresh=5fd5d9c4792211607850436>

F. Review and submission of Nepal Special Service Bill: FF made the review of the Nepal Special Service Bill introduced in the parliament-secretariat by Prime Minister and Cabinet's Office on 30th Dec 2019. The study and review of the bill revealed that the provision of 'interception' was damaging to free reporting. It would foment self-censorship among journalists; pose a serious risk to source protection and kills investigative reporting. Therefore, FF strongly recommended the federal parliament to amend the concerned provisions. FF submitted the proposed amendments and policy briefs on the Act to influential lawmakers in both the upper and lower houses of the federal parliament.

Review report is available here:



<http://freedomforum.org.np/download/nepal-special-service-bill-2076-review/?wpdmdl=4137&refresh=5fd5d9c47a8641607850436>

G. Discussion on Media Bills of Province-2 and Stakeholder Concerns: A virtual discussion was organized on July 14 where representatives of FNJ Chapter of Province-2, media persons including others showed their concern, saying it was passed by the Province Assembly without hearing the demand and protest against the provisions in the bills. The major objective of the event was to seek common understanding regarding conflicting provisions of the bills and press the government and the Province Assembly to amend those regressive provisions sooner.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/serious-concern-over-media-bills-of-province-2/>

VI. Audit Accountability Initiative:

The initiative has been recently launched as part of the project funded by International Budget Partnership to monitor the performance audit on users' committee of Nepal

undertaken by Office of Auditor General (OAG) through the intervention of communication, engagement and research activities. Activities undertaken under this project are:



A.

Workshop on 'Advancing Audit Accountability': How can we strengthen responsiveness and actions': FF co-hosted the 'Advancing Audit Accountability: How can we strengthen responsiveness and actions' workshop in Kathmandu on 11-12 December amidst the distinguished participation from six different countries of the globe. The Office of the Auditor General of Nepal, the International Budget Partnership and Freedom Forum had hosted the international event.

For details:

<http://freedomforum.org.np/advancing-audit-accountability-workshop-kicks-off-in-kathmandu/>



B. Inception workshop: FF organized inception workshop

as an initiation of the project. With a view to promoting audit accountability, Freedom Forum (FF) on November 22 organized an inception workshop of Audit Accountability Initiative project in collaboration with the Office of the Auditor General of Nepal and International Budget Partnership (IBP).

A total of 43 persons were present in the meet including 3 from Office of Auditor General Nepal, representatives from PPMO, Nepal, members of Legislative assembly, other government persons, CSOs and Media persons.

C. Meeting with CSO representatives: FF with support from IBP organized a CSOs meeting at Kathmandu on December 9, 2019 in Kathmandu. The meetings was held with an aim to introduce IBP to other CSOs in Nepal, to share the participants and their work, to share the goals and framework of IBP's new initiative, to reflect on the political context for fiscal accountability and participation in Nepal, to answer participants questions and to get CSOs feedbacks and suggestions for the initiative going forward. A total of 15 participants were present in the meet including 2 representatives from IBP.



D. Meeting with representatives from Office of Auditor General:

FF organized a meet with representatives from Office of Auditor General for discussion in relation to the audit recommendations follow-ups and updates on the same. The

event was held on February 18, 2020 in Kathmandu. The meet focused on the present status of audit follow up norms of the Office of Auditor General, international standards, and progress last report recommendations on current climate of works. Both FF and representatives of OAG agreed on need for just not only the act of follow on recommendations execution but there is essential need on policy and regulation changes for effective follow up within the policy of Office of Auditor General and Government. A total of 10 participants were present on the meet including 5 form office of Auditor General and 5 from Freedom Forum.



VII. Open Budget Survey in Nepal:

The Open Budget Survey (OBS) is the world's only independent, comparative and fact-

based research instrument that uses internationally accepted criteria to assess public access to central government budget information; formal opportunities for the public to participate in the national budget process; and the role of budget oversight institutions such as the legislature and auditor in the budget process.

A. Circulation of Open Budget Nepal Survey report: With the view of drawing government attention to this report and its recommendations which would be useful for the government to initiate reforms in budget processes and policies; at a time when the executive is presenting the federal budget in the parliament on May 28 (14 Jestha), we circulated the Open Budget Nepal Survey 2019 (both Nepali & English Edition) to following Government Personals, Appointees and Elected Officials.

For details: <http://freedomforum.org.np/open-budget-survey-nepal-2019-advocacy-letter/>

B. Open Budget Survey report dissemination: A dissemination program was organized on May 20, 2020 among 15 economic journalists through Zoom online platform in presence of Society of Economic Journalists' Nepal (SEJON)'s president Bhim Gautam.

VIII. Legal Aid to journalists:

Our regular FoE monitoring has revealed that many journalists have been attacked, threatened and misbehaved for doing their job. Few are also arrested and have faced legal prosecution for practicing their rights. With this backdrop, FF initiated legal aid program for journalists in support with Free Press Unlimited under Legal defense fund



project. A legal help desk established at FF has a legal officer who identified, studied the cases and decided to provide legal assistance to the journalist.

Journalists receiving aid are:

1. *Journalists Tanka Bahadur Sunar and Bimal Bhattarai* associated with www.darpanpost.com were falsely accused of committing defamation by publishing

news through their online news portal. The chairperson of Haldi Bari Rural Municipality of Jhapa district Rabindra Prasad Lingdel filed a case against the defendant on 21 April, 2019. FF helped Sunar with transportation and accommodation expenses. FF had appointed a senior advocate for legal representation in the court. All the legal fees and costs were also covered.



After several rounds of proceeding, the Jhapa District Court announced his innocence by dismissing the case altogether.

2. *Journalist Gaurav Khanal* from Butwal was charged with the Cyber Crime case under Electronic Transaction Act, 2006. FF helped journo Khanal- paid the initial deposit of



Rs. 20,000 for his release and hired an advocate who represented him in the court. As journo Khanal had to be present in front of court in every hearing date, FF helped him with the travel expenses as well.

Finally Kathmandu District Court gave its decision in favor of journalist Gaurav Khanal on September 24. Journalist Khanal, who was accused of cyber crime, was acquitted in the case.

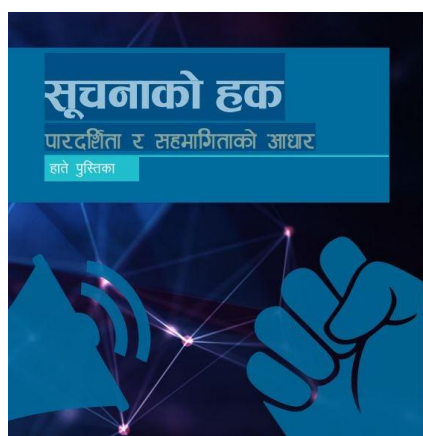
3. *Journalist Om Hamal* was arrested by the security officials for himself being allegedly associated with Biplab-led Maoist group and later case of state offense was filed against him for supporting the faith of a party, banned by the government. During the legal battle FF helped journalist and his wife in terms of legal and financial support. Even FF's appointed a senior advocate who represented journalist Hamal at Supreme Court hearing.

Later, on September 10, SC once again ordered government to release journalist Hamal ensuring justice to him and his profession.

4. *Journalist and Youtuber Santosh Deuja* associated with an online news portal www.kapurbot.com has been sued under cyber crime following a defamation complaint lodged by Local Neelam Shah. He is charged under Section 47(1) of Electronic Transaction Act 2063. Since the beginning of the case, FF has been continuously providing legal as well as financial support until this period. FF will provide him financial aid in transportation and accommodation related expenses for him to be able to commute from Simara to Kathmandu. Accordingly, FF will support in final case hearings by legal representation, preparing pleading notes, giving legal advises as deemed required.

5. *Three journalists (Sunita Rawal, Prakash Bam and Chakra Kunwar)* associated with Radio Nepal Far Western Broadcasting Office were discontinued from service without formal notice. The journalists were denied of their service contract without providing any kind of explanation and opportunity to defend. FF has helped to successfully register the case in the Labour Court and is providing necessary legal advices to the journalists to help them avail rightful legal remedy. FF has also appointed lawyers to help them in the legal proceedings. Since, the Labour Court is based in Kathmandu, FF has been providing them transportation and accommodation assistance to make their travel possible from Doti District.

6. *Freelance journalist Ek Raj Silwal* based in Kathmandu was denied public information about a bidding procedure of the construction of the school. After the school denied giving the information, Silwal filed the case regarding breach of right to information in the National Information Commission (NIC). The NIC then, announced the judgement on Silwal's favour and levied monetary penalty and asked the school to levy disciplinary punishment to the information officer.



The defendant filed an appeal in the High Court which did not obligate the defendants to give the information to Silwal and also lowered the amount of monetary penalty. Now, the case is filed for review in Supreme Court to reaffirm the judgment of NIC. After the preliminary hearing, the court has given affirmative response to go ahead with the future proceeding.

FF has been assisting Silwal with the legal support at the Supreme Court till date.

4. Publications:

Besides several programs implemented in partnership with funding agencies, FF's published several policy reviews, reports, books and drafts this year.

A. Newsletters- Free Expression: FF published total four issues of newsletters during this year. All the issues highlighted the activities carried out by the organization. It mainly covers media monitoring reports, policy/impunity watch, RTI campaigns and other collaborative approaches. Those issues are also uploaded on its website and made public. Each issue of newsletter contains three monthly proactive disclosure section of FF's deliverables.



For detail: <http://freedomforum.org.np/publications/newsletters/>

B. Freedom Chautary Podcasts : Podcast has become globally popular to reach the larger audience. It is convenient for use. Utilizing the platform, FF has also been producing podcast on various

freedom of expression, free information, citizen's created by COVID-19 in the 89 episodes of podcasts



Listen to the podcasts

contemporary issues surrounding press, journalists' rights, and right to participation, and lately the problems name of Freedom Chautary. Till date have been produced so far.

here:

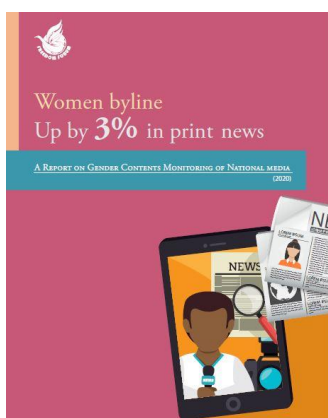
<http://freedomforum.org.np/podcast/>

C. Periodic reports: Annual Media report 2019 and Annual Press Freedom report 2020 are prepared based on regular media monitoring through freedom of expression lens. Press Freedom report was published on May 3, 2020 and disseminated through official website and social media. Similarly, Annual media report was prepared and disseminated on December 31, 2019.

May 3 report: <http://freedomforum.org.np/download/press-freedom-day-may-3-report-2020/?wpdmdl=4222&refresh=5fb4f6859e4d01605695109>

Annual Media report: <http://freedomforum.org.np/download/annual-media-report-2019/?wpdmdl=4085&refresh=5fb4f685a26d21605695109>

FF also conducted a media mission to know the media situation focusing journalists'



rights, their safety and impunity, and obstructions on profession in light of the changed context- the federalism and new constitution- and prepares [Media Mission reports](#).

D. Media content monitoring through gender perspective: The reports published quarterly is prepared on the basis of regular monitoring of main news contents. The news contents are monitored for inclusion of gender as news reporters and

sources. The reports are then shared with the journalists, media editors and through social media.

E. Books/ Booklets: Several books, booklets and training manuals were published during the reporting period. Few publications can be read and downloaded from the links below.

[Open Government and Open Parliament](#)

[Training Manual for Citizen Participation in Promoting Good Governance](#)

[Informative pocketbook of local level planning process](#)

[Right to Information Booklet](#)



5. Participations in National/ International platforms:

- Executive Chief Mr. Taranath Dahal, Policy Advisor Mr. Krishna Sapkota and Budget Researcher Mr. Subash Dahal participated in 'Advancing Audit Accountability Workshop' held in Kathmandu on December 11-13, 2019. The event was jointly organized by International Budget Partnership, Office of Auditor General of Nepal and Freedom Forum.
- Policy Advisor Mr. Sapkota attended South Asia Right to Information Learning Program in New Delhi, India on November 24-29, 2019. The event was organized by Common Wealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), India.
- Similarly, Narayan Ghimire attended training cum workshop on 'Safer Communications' organized by IFEX in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on November 5-6, 2019.
- Policy Advisor Krishna Sapkota participated in 'Open Budget Survey Advocacy

Training' organized by International Budget Partnership (IBP) in Nairobi, Kenya on February 24-29, 2020.

6. Disclosures/ Visibility:

Activities of FF mostly have been covered by national media (broadcast, print and new media). Also, FF regularly updates its activities, press releases, press freedom violations cases on its website (www.freedomforum.org.np & www.nepalpressfreedom.org) and social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) and also through podcast (<http://freedomforum.org.np/podcast/>).

Proactive disclosure of ongoing projects, publications and information about staffs is also incorporated into the newsletters published every three months.

