

Project completion Report on Information Dissemination 2007 (SIRF)

Background:

Freedom Forum is an organization which is regularly undertaking activities for strengthening democracy, human rights, media and Right to Information. In this context Freedom Forum entered into a Commission Contract Project No: 620/07/16/LCC with SNV Nepal on 20 April 2007 to carry out components of 'Information Dissemination 2007 SIRF'. Though the contract was signed on April 2007 the forum was continuously working on the activities of the project as it was continuation of the activities carried out by the Freedom Forum since 2006. Freedom forum has completed the tasks as per contract within the end of year 2007. We assure for continuation of such programs in future and looking forward for a mutual relation with SNV.

The proposed activities and performance have been summarized below.

Proposed Activities

For the year 2007 following activities were proposed, finalized and awarded to Freedom Forum for the dissemination of information of SIRF. It was a part of mobilization of media and non-media means of communication for the plan implementation.

a. Seminar in Capital

Four seminars in Kathmandu shall have to be organized to promote discussion on inclusive democracy

b. Seminar out of Capital

Two seminars have to be organized outside Kathmandu to raise awareness of people on issues of social inclusion or other contemporary issues

c. Fellowship to Journalists

Three fellowships are to be granted to journalists writing on the issues of social inclusion. Fellowships are intended to motivate journalists to look into the issues of social inequality, discrimination, exploitation and promote social inclusion.

Activities Completed

Freedom Forum has completed overall activities within the end of December 2007.

a. Seminar in Kathmandu

The forum organized three discussion programs on different issues in the capital according to the approved plan of action. The first program was on the issues of 'State Restructuring with respect to full sovereignty of people'. Mr. Bhim Rawal, central committee member of CPN UML presented a paper highlighting the different aspects and concerns of various groups over the issue of state restructuring. The main focus of program was the concept of class as a base of state restructuring. As different aspects' such as ethnicity, population and territory are being discussed as bases for state restructuring, we decided to conduct that program focusing on class perspective. In the program professor Dr. Yagya Adhikari, Dr. Om Gurung, ethnic leader and Mr. Pasang Sherpa, chairman of association of ethnics and indigenous were key commentators in the program. About forty five participants were present in the program. Views, inputs and ideas on the mentioned topic delivered in the program by the participants will be covered in the monograph of the program.

As Nepal also represent itself as a linguistic mosaic and language is one of the important issues in contemporary discussions, the Forum organized second seminar focusing on the issue of language. In a seminar 'Language as the basis for state structuring' Dr. Novel Kishor Rai presented a resourceful paper. Professor Dr. Madhav Pokhrel and language expert Mr. Sarad Chandra wosti were key commentators of the paper. About fifty participants were present in the program and a number of valuable comments were received by the learned intellectuals, journalists and academicians. A separate monograph has been prepared covering the program.

Freedom Forum decided to organize a workshop in the changed context after the 23-points consensus of seven political parties with commitment to hold constituent assembly within 2064 BS. In this context a workshop, combination of two proposed programs, was organized on the Issue of Challenges of Constituent Assembly Election and Peace Process on 31 December 2007. Two concept papers by two different political analysts, Mr. Nilambar Acharya and Mr. Shyam Shrestha were presented in the program. Large number of participants, including lawyers, political leaders, civil society leaders, activists, journalists and others were present in the program.

Among the two concepts explored in the program, Mr. Nilamber Acharya presented his views on the issue of challenges of peace process while Mr. Shyam Shrestha presented his concept paper on the issue of challenges of constituent assembly election. Dr. Yagya Adhikari and Mr. Kapil Shrestha were key commentators of concept paper. Former Speaker Mr. Daman Nath Dhungana, Professor Krishna Pokhrel, rtd. General of Nepal army, Mr. CB Gurung, Mr. Bishwokanta Mainali, Chairperson of Nepal Bar association,

conflict expert Dr. Bishnuraj Upreti, Pro. Dr. Khagendranath Sharma were key participants who tried to shed light on different facets of contemporary situation and prevailing problems. The workshop saw a meaningful and lively interaction, and effective media coverage providing through-provoking views to participants and general people. More than eighty participants were present in the program.

b. Seminar outside Kathmandu

The forum organized two seminar programs outside Kathmandu. As the issue of Madhesh and exclusion/inclusion has become a highly-debated issue in recent period, the forum thought programs in this region for promoting inclusion is very important. In this context it organized a seminar on the issue of social inclusion in Madhesh at Rajbiraj on 20 Aug 2007. Mr. Ram Rijhan Yadav and Mr. Bramhadev Ram had presented separate papers in the program. More than 75 participants from diverse group participated in the program.

'Constituent Assembly for Social Inclusion' was another seminar organized by the Forum on 17 September 2007 at Surkhet to promote the concept and practice of social inclusion and constituent assembly as a mechanism necessary for that. Lecturer Arjun Prasad Ayadi presented a concept paper in the program. The program was successful to stir discussion about social inclusion among different strata of people.

c. Fellowship Program

Provision of three fellowships was envisaged under this project to promote the concept of social inclusion through media. The aim of this component is to motivate media and particularly journalists to look into the issues of exclusion and inclusion. The forum expanded the coverage of this activity by increasing the number of fellowships to 4, contributing some part from its limited economic resource as the forum decided that it would be better to provide 4 fellowships with some contribution from Freedom Forum. The forum finalized fellowships to be of Nrs. 36,000 and the number of fellowships to be four.

The forum provided fellowships to following journalists on following topics:

1. Status of Inclusion in the Ownership, Structure and Mechanism of Media: Mr. Jaya Narayan Shah, Banke, Nepalgunj
2. Status of Social Inclusion in Government Media: Mr. Ek Raj Pathak, Senior reporter, National News Agency (RSS)

3. Inclusion and Dalits in Siraha and Saptari Districts: Mr. Murali Pd. Yadav, Editor, Krishna National Daily- Rajbiraj

4. Status of Inclusion in Mass Media in Kaski: Mr. Ramesh Poudel, News Chief, Radio Barahi, Pokhara

The forum has received study reports from all fellows. The reviewing and editing of the study is in progress and after completing fourth study, a compilation shall be prepared. Fellowship program is found to be very effective tool for strengthening research capacity in journalists in one hand and to explore current position of inclusion in media and other field through the pen of fellows on the other. The fellowship report prepared by Mr. Jaya Narayan Shah, Mr. Ek Raj Pathak and Mr. Ramesh Poudel have focused on the concept and practice of inclusion in media and report prepared by Mr. Murali Pd. Yadav have focused on inclusion of *Dalits* in Saptari and Siraha districts. A separate study reports shall be submitted to SNV in due course of time.

Impact

All the discussions in capital and outside were very important and timely and helped to address some of the concerns aroused in contemporary popular and academic discussions. These discussions were found to be very effective to deliver views of people and academicians in contemporary issued to the government and legislatures. These discussion programs are also important because these bring people, politicians and academicians in the same forum. Considering its importance and impact, we are planning to continue similar discussion programs with more academic touch in the future on different issues of Human Right, Democracy, good governance and Right to Information. We are seeking support from donor agencies on this initiative.

Motivation plays a vital role for promoting specific issues and we believe small investments such as fellowship shall influence many journalists to continue their work in this area. Inclusion will start as soon as we report exclusion. The change in mainstream media, as stated above, has proved that.

We believe that study reports prepared by our fellows will be resourceful to have knowledge about position of social inclusion and media in Nepal as we believe these are the representative of overall condition of country and media. Fellowship report prepared by Mr. Mohan Singh Lama previous year and prepared by other three studies carried out this year on the situation of inclusion in media could be developed as a resource document if compiled together.

The project activities are very useful to promote the notion of social inclusion. Particularly, we have been successful to utilize media and media practitioners for disseminating such issues. The number of issues and coverage on social inclusion in mainstream media has significantly increased in recent time and we believe we have been successful to play some role for this change in the situation.

Similarly, our discussion programs are very useful to initiate a culture of debate in general and on thematic issues both.

The impact of our project activities can be summarized as follows.

1. Our discussion programs were helpful to identify issues of social exclusion and way out to change exclusion into inclusion. Strong participation of journalists in the program with intellectuals and experts pursuing them to write news and articles on issues raised in the program, contributed to the very aim of the whole SIRC project and information dissemination component.

2. Our fellowship program has succeeded to motivate journalists to explore areas of social inclusion and exclusion utilizing research techniques and skills. A study based on research shall certainly contribute more than news. On the other hand, coverage and importance of issues has motivated other journalists also to write on those issues. It is also observed that the skill of writing news, articles and reports on the topic of media and social inclusion has also increased compared to last year.

3. Our Overall activities were found to be very effective to identify key causes of social exclusion and way out for changing exclusion to inclusion.