

Media Advocacy Group

**"Use of RTI for citizens' awareness for effective Public Service Delivery
in selected Village Development Committees of
Kailali and Mahottari districts"**



Project Completion Report



31st December 2013

ABBREVIATIONS

CSN- Civil Society Network

CSO-Civil Society Organization

DAO-District Administration Office

DDC-District Development Committee

DEO-District Education Office

IO-Information Officer

MAG-Media Advocacy Group

NIC- National Information Commission

PSD- Public Service Delivery

RTI- Right to Information

SA- Social Accountability

SPCBN- Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal

UNDP- United Nations Development Programme

VDC-Village Development Committee

WDO- Women Development Office

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would also like to thank all VDCs and municipalities and participating media persons for their support. We are grateful to Chief District Officer of Kailali, Bed Prakash Lekhak and Chief District Officer of Mahottari, Ram Prasad Thapaliya, the Local Development Officers, Information Officer of Kailali DDC Yogendra Ojha, Assistant CDO Udaya Bahadur Singh, VDC secretaries and other government officials. We are also thankful to actor Rajesh Hamal for his willingness to be a part of our television promo. Likewise, Chief of Kailali branch of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) Bharat Shah and chief of its Mahottari branch, Hari Mandal, Local Coordinators- Bhuwan Joshi (Kailali) and Rakesh Chaudhary (Mahottari) also deserve our thanks. We would like to thank our Mentor, Mr. L.B Thapa for his invaluable suggestions and feedback throughout the project period. We would like to record my deepest appreciation for the Principal Social Accountability Practitioners Ms. Krishma Sharma and Ms. Shristi Joshi without whose support it would be impossible to document the prevailing practices of social accountability. We would also like to thank each and every member of the Civil Society Network in Kailali and Mahottari who contributed immensely for making this process a success. We would like to sincerely thank Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) and World Bank's initiative Programme for Accountability in Nepal (PRAN), National Capacity Development Institute (NCDI), Pro Public for supporting this entire program.

Ms. Babita Basnet
President
Media Advocacy Group

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Project Facts

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of the Sub-grantee CSO | Media Advocacy Group |
| Project title | Use of RTI for citizens' awareness for effective Public Service Delivery in selected Village Development Committees of Kailali and Mahottari districts |
| Name of the SA Practitioner | Shristi Joshi |
| Grant Category | Large Grant |
| Name(s) of the SA tool(s) practiced | Right To Information (RTI) |
| District(s) where project was implemented | Kailali and Mahottari district |
| VDCs/Municipalities where project was implemented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 VDCs (Fulahatta, Pigouna, Bathana and Sugabhawani VDCs) and Jaleswor Municipality of Mahottari district • 4 VDCs (Geta, Godawori, Shreepur and Malakheti) and Dhanghadi Municipality of Kailali district. <p><i>(8 VDCs and 2 Municipalities of two districts)</i></p> |
| Service provider organizations worked with | District Development Committees, District Administration Offices, Women Development Offices, Municipalities, VDCs, National Information Commission |
| Total Project budget (NRs) | Rs 38,20,700 |
| Project start date | 1/05/ 2013 |
| Project end date | 31/12/2013 |

1. Project Purpose/Objectives

- Enhance capacity of the rights holders with the use of RTI to claim information on PSD and capacitate and engage CSOs for increasing social accountability in Public Service Delivery through RTI at local levels. .
- Orient and inform duty bearers and rights holders on RTI in common forum and enhance effectiveness of PSD through joint effort.

2. Citizen Beneficiaries of the Project

Target groups of the project were marginalized groups such as women (including single and pregnant women), senior citizens, differently able persons, disadvantaged groups, and Dalits.

2.1 Total Citizen Beneficiaries

| Type | Number |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Direct beneficiaries | 662 |
| Indirect beneficiaries | 74,00,245 ¹ |

2.2 Gender and Social Inclusion among Direct Beneficiaries

| Ethno-caste distribution of Citizen-rights holders | | Male Number | Female Number | Total Number |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. | Dalit | 104 | 63 | 167 |
| 2. | Janajati | 73 | 44 | 117 |
| 3. | Muslims | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| 4. | Chhetri/Brahmin | 126 | 78 | 204 |
| 5. | Sanyasi | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| 6. | Other Backward Castes | 99 | 60 | 159 |
| | Total | 413 | 249 | 662 |

2.3 Madheshi/Pahadi inclusion among Direct Beneficiaries

| Pahadi/Madheshi distribution of Citizen-rights holders | Male Number | Female Number | Total Number |
|--|-------------|---------------|--------------|
|--|-------------|---------------|--------------|

¹ 60 Lakh from the Television PSA from two channels (Himalayan and Avenues TV) and 14 Lakh from Radio Jingles in both districts

| | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. | Pahadi | 234 | 142 | 376 |
| 2. | Madhesi (other than Tharu) | 170 | 104 | 274 |
| 3. | Tharu | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| | Total | 411 | 251 | 662 |

2.4 Inclusion of Disabled People among Direct Beneficiaries

| Male Number | Female Number | Total Number |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 40 | 5 | 45 |

3. Volunteers Mobilized by the Project

| Male Number | Female Number | Total Number |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 2 | 6 | 8 |

4. Other People who Directly Participated in the Programme Activities

| | Type | Number |
|----|--|------------|
| 1. | Service Providing Agency | 46 |
| 2. | Government Officials (other than Service Providing Agency) | 80 |
| 3. | Other stakeholders | 119 |
| | Total | 245 |

5. Project Achievements

5.1 Summary Information

| SN | Outputs | | Achievements | | |
|----|---|--|---|---|--|
| | Narrative | Indicators and target | Quantitative | Qualitative | Your self-rating of qualitative achievement in % |
| 1 | Activity 1.1.1 Project launching and multi-stakeholder interaction workshop in two project districts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 day workshop will be organized in each district (80 participants in total) | 90 participants were informed about RTI and contributed in improving the project activities | The participants suggested to produce radio jingles in Doteli and Tharu as well which was essential in terms of reaching out to the public. The two additional radio jingles helped in reaching to the people of different linguistic background. | 80% |
| 2 | Activity 1.1.2 Develop RTI tool kit adaptive to target groups for enhancing transparent, effective, efficient and inclusive public service delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Production and dissemination of 700 RTI Tool kit | More than 457 people have been made aware from the Toolkit | The RTI ToolKit has been utilized as a training material by the trainers. It has been serving as a guideline while filing applications and seeking information. | 85% |
| 3 | Activity 1.1.3 Radio Jingle produced and aired | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two radio jingle and dissemination through 48 episodes of FM radio Radio jingles in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3720 episodes have been aired on the radio. 14 lakh people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After our campaign on RTI, the media realized the important message of RTI. We were successful in negotiating | 100% |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|-----|
| | | <p>Nepali and Maithali</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 episodes of 1 PSA through television | <p>have been informed about RTI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four languages were Maithali, Nepali, Tharu and Doteli • The PSA was aired 125 times by both TV channels | <p>with the media for promoting RTI as a part of their social corporate responsibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of the wide scale reach of the media, people especially the marginalized communities have been provided information on RTI specifically on the issue of old age allowance since it was the major theme for the radio jingles as well as PSA. People have now begun to question the local authorities about their budget. Hence, it was further led to the practice of seeking information. | |
| 4 | Activity 1.2.1: Conduct two day orientation and sensitization training on RTI at local level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two day training organised in each district (8 VDCs and 2 municipalities) • 250 participants in total | <p>Altogether 273 participants were capacitated on the issue of social accountability</p> | <p>In Mahottari, in less than a month after the trainings, four petitions were made. The offices where the petitions were registered were: Nepal Electricity Authority-Mahottari on 23.08.2013, District Education Office-Mahottari on 19.08.2013,</p> | 90% |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|-----|
| | | | | Sub Health Post- Pigauna on 25.08.2013, and Women Development Office- Mahottari on 19.08.2013. | |
| 5 | Activity 2.1.1: Organize multi-stakeholders consultative meetings at district level to identify existing issues and challenges and role of RTI for promoting downward social accountability of service providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two meetings (one in each district and total 80 participants) | 83 participants benefitted from the program. | Marginalized communities taking their own initiative to make their local bodies more accountable and transparent. | 85% |
| 6 | Activity 2.1.2 Conduct two days training on RTI to media persons, CSOs, local authority and Public Service providers at district level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainings on RTI (one in each project district) for 30 participants | 74 media personnel were capacitated | The capacities of the media personnel's have significantly increased leading to increase media coverage. | 80% |
| 7 | Activity 2.2.1 Capacitate media persons on RTI based journalism for effective media advocacy to increase downward accountability and promote citizens rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One training in each district on RTI based journalism for total 15 media persons from each district One day sensitization workshop on RTI for total 60 participants (30 from each district) from CSO including media | 34 media persons got an in-depth understanding on RTI based journalism | Media personnel were further made aware about their role and how they could contribute in this process thereby, capacitating them and mobilizing them to use RTI to evidence based information dissemination. | 85% |
| 8 | Activity 3.1.1: Create Two district Civil Society Network (CSN) at district | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultative meeting in each | 31 members improved their | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A functional multi-stakeholders platform | 90% |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|--|---|---|-----|
| | level for monitoring the effectiveness of public services in line with RTI Act | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> district 30 persons will participate in each consultative meeting to select member of CSN | understanding on RTI | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> for monitoring the use of RTI at the district level was established CSN Members took the initiative of conducting classes on RTI in two different schools in Dhangadhi. | |
| 9 | Activity 3.1.2:Organise quarterly meetings at district level for assessing progress status on marginalized groups access to public service information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 meeting in each district held | 3 meetings were held till date with 17 participants during each meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Society Network has been playing an active role as the informal information dissemination mechanism and has helped community people receive information about RTI. RTI has received significant attention RTI has generated public interest | 70% |
| 10 | Activity 3.1.3 Media Monitoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compilation of print media reporting (1 from each district) | 34 media articles have been published on RTI in these two districts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to Information has been receiving significant attention and coverage from the media Reflection that culture of asking information has been established | 75% |
| 11 | Activity 3.1.4 Video Documentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appx.7- 10 | 8 minute 42 seconds video | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The video was very effective in terms of | 80% |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|--|-----|
| | | minutes video documentary produced | was produced | <p>showcasing the entire project within a short span of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The video encouraged dignitaries and guests present in the national seminar to think about the needs of marginalized communities, to expand membership to include more women members and to prioritize opportunities for the vulnerable communities. | |
| 12 | Activity 3.1.5: Documentation of project lessons learned and success cases for sharing and replication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 200 copies of report printed and distributed in Nepali language | 1000 copies of the Booklet was printed (500 in Nepali and 500 in English) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Booklet was launched during the National Seminar by Minister of Information and Communication More than 100 participants were made aware about the cases that came from the field as well as recommendations that were derived during the project | 80% |
| 13 | Activity 3.2.1: Organize local dialogues between rights holders and duty bearers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two dialogue programme | Altogether 103 participants benefitted from | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A platform to bring together service providers and service | 95% |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|-----|
| | | organised in each district (40 people attend each dialogue) | the program in both districts | <p>users was created which was very instrumental in promoting accountability for public service delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequently, the service providers were made aware about the issues and challenges that the service users undergo to get access to information. • Capacities of service providers' i.e government, non-government organizations, media and service users' were increased. | |
| 14 | Activity 3.2.2: Conduct National level dissemination workshop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 national level dissemination workshop held (50 people attend the event) | 93 participants attended the national seminar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of government and non-government service providers and media were strengthened to promote the issue of RTI. • Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Local Development and Federal Affairs, | 90% |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | <p>National Information Commission, Ministry of Information and Communication reiterated their commitment to promote RTI in Nepal and ensure proactive disclosure of information</p> | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

5.2 Factors contributing to the success

5.2.1 Output 1.1: Marginalized groups (MGs) such as single women, senior citizens, differently able people, pregnant women and other disadvantaged groups are aware on their entitlements for public services

a) Achievement: The program was successful in terms of creating a revolution in information seeking from the point of view of the marginalized groups. Their response and the way they proactively exercised RTI surpassed our expectations. They are now empowered and well-informed about their entitlements for public services. Women who were largely confined to the four walls of the house have now moved out and have started questioning the public bodies for issues like their budget that has been allocated for them; why the budget is spent for roads and not for them. They have now been actively submitting applications. Elderly citizens who earlier used to collect their allowance on the basis of what was being handed over to them are now taking the initiative to find out the total budget and how it is being spent. Likewise, HIV positive people (men and women) are questioning the officials on the budget, medical facilities that are supposed to be provided to them. This is one of the visible results especially when we look at Mahottari which is a district wherein women are socially excluded and looked down upon. (Therefore, it is safe to say that marginalized groups have been able to demand a more gender-equal distribution of resources. (Testimonies of the marginalized groups of both district are incorporated in the Booklet).



Target beneficiaries representing different marginalized groups

b) Contributing factor: Through the trainings, consultations and local dialogues the marginalized groups realized that the Right to Information is an instrumental right for empowerment as well as an important social accountability tool. Earlier they did not take much interest in these issues as they were of the belief that these issues did not concern them. Now through these orientation workshops, they have come to realize the significance of the tool. Thus, we can say that the realization of the potential of the tool was a contributing factor that drove them to effectively and extensively utilize RTI.

5.2.2 Output 1.2: Capacity of the marginalized groups enhanced to claim their entitlements through RTI

a) **Achievement:** The marginalized groups through the series of orientation programs, trainings, workshops and local dialogues between service users and service providers have been capacitated. People who had never heard of RTI have now become campaigners of RTI. Not only do they proactively exercise RTI but they also help to spread awareness on the use of RTI and the message that RTI is not just a right to know but that it is a fundamental right enshrined by existing Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007. The program has helped raise awareness on core issues of marginalised groups and Right to Information. Informal information dissemination mechanisms such as Civil Society Network formed and activated by MAG have helped community people receive information about budget, health, education and senior citizen allowance, etc. In Mahottari, 50 applications have been filed and in Kailali 27 applications have been filed during a period of seven months.



Applications submitted to different public service bodies

b) **Contributing factor:** Besides the programmatic interventions conducted by MAG, the role of media are noted to be exemplary. Their proactive role was very important in spreading mass awareness on social issues, generating interest from the marginalized groups. Radio jingles and Public service announcements can be credited for this achievement.

5.2.3 Output 2.1: Service providers are sensitized and capacitated on RTI for effective social protection services delivery

a) **Achievement:** The quality of public service delivery increased to an extent and the service providers and service users were empowered as well as capacitated. Women Development Office in Mahottari, District Education Office, Mahottari have been proactively disseminating information through their Information Officers. In Geta, Malakheta and Shreepur VDC of Dhangadhi municipality, the public bodies and service providing agencies no longer hide information. They have come to the realization that information should not be hidden from the public and have been transparent in their functioning. Capacities of service providers' i.e local authorities, government, non-government organizations and public bodies have significantly increased. They now have a better understanding about the importance of Right to Information and have gained a holistic picture of the issues of RTI. Furthermore, interest, cooperation and

commitment has been generated from service providers as they have realized the significance of disclosing information. National Information Commission, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Local Development and Federal Affairs and Ministry of Information and Commission during our national seminar reiterated their commitment to effectively implement RTI and ensure active disclosure of information.

A change in the attitude of the service providers was witnessed. They have come to the realization that information should not be disclosed and should be proactively disseminated (*please refer to Jitendra Paswan- Establishing the culture of asking, case study in Annex 1*). Because of this the gap between service providers and service users has reduced. Thus, both the service users and service providers have been taking initiatives to promote good governance in public service delivery.

b) Contributing factor: The service providers acknowledged that they were reluctant to disclose information; some were confused whether information could be disclosed. After the Local dialogue program conducted in each district, they ensured that information would be disseminated on a regular basis.

5.2.4 Output 2.2: Media persons are capacitated on linking social protection issues into RTI leading to increased media coverage

a) Achievement: The trainings and workshops that targeted media personnel have led to the increase in the media coverage especially in Dhangadhi. Fifty newspaper articles were documented during five months of the project implementation. They have been successful in clarifying the misconception that RTI is not meant only for journalists and can be utilized by every citizen. After receiving the feedback from the service users and service providers, MAG was successful in producing radio jingles in four languages namely Nepali, Tharu, Doteli and Maithali so that the message of RTI reaches out to a wider section of the society in both districts. Recognizing the importance of the social accountability tool after attending our programs, the radio stations aired the radio jingles 3740 times in total (1800 times in Dhangadhi and 1920 times in Jaleswor) as compared to 48 times which was committed as per the planned activity. The media outreach through radio jingles reached 14,00,000 audiences in both districts. Media's role in building an inclusive information society has been clarified during the trainings and workshops that were designed exclusively for them. They are now well-informed about RTI. They now ensure that they report from the perspective of RTI.

b) Contributing factor: Media personnel have realized that right to information is a cornerstone of good governance. Furthermore, they have recognized that they can make a real difference to the lives of people especially the marginalized communities. The willingness of the media personnel was one of the contributing factors in their efforts to create mass awareness.

5.2.5 Output 3.1: Established Civil Society' Network (CSN) at district level for monitoring the effectiveness of public services in line with Rights to Information Act, 2007

a) Achievement: Formation and activation of a proactive Civil Society Network has been the major success of the project as it is composed of the vibrant and committed people from

different VDCs and municipalities of both districts who are constantly advocating on the issue of right to information, its process and system. The Civil Society Network has been playing an active role as the informal information dissemination mechanism and has helped community people receiving information about RTI. They also operate on behalf of people who want to file RTIs. Because of their relentless efforts, the issue of RTI has received a lot of attention in these districts. People who had never heard of RTI are not actively filing and seeking information. It has generated interest among the public to a large extent. Fifty applications have been filed in Mahottari whereas in Kailali 27 applications have been filed.

b) Contributing factor: The selection of the Civil Society Network from different VDCs and Municipalities helped to ensure that the issues from different sectors of people receive attention. The proactive attitude and the willingness to make a difference helped the community people to connect with the CSN Network and confide their issues so that the Network would in turn help them to file applications.

5.2.6 Output 3.2: Constructive dialogue initiated between service users and service providers for enhancing quality of public services

a) Achievement: After the local dialogue, the gap between the service users and service providers has reduced to a great extent. They were able to develop a consensus on their common interest and explore ways to work in collaboration. Building an effective consensus among these varied groups was exceedingly useful.

b) Contributing factor: The service users expressed their commitment and cooperation to ensure that information will be provided to those who seek and furthermore, they realized the value of information dissemination to ensure transparency and social accountability.

5.3 Reasons hindering the achievement

Though MAG witnessed few challenges, it was successful in terms of addressing it with alternative plans and strategies.

6. Concrete Outcomes (results)

i. Marginalized sections of the society are empowered: Women who were largely confined to the four walls of the house have now moved out and have started questioning the public bodies for issues like their budget that has been allocated for them; why the budget is spent for roads and not for them. They have now been actively submitting applications. Elderly citizens who earlier used to collect their allowance on the basis of what was being handed over to them are now taking the initiative to find out the total budget and how it is being spent. Likewise, HIV positive people (men and women) are questioning the officials on the budget, medical facilities that are supposed to be provided to them. Earlier they were not interested about issues that did not concern them but now they are interested in every facet of development. This is one of the visible results especially when we look at Mahottari which is a district wherein women are socially excluded and looked down upon. Therefore, it is safe to say that marginalized groups have been able to demand a more gender-equal distribution of resources.



(Detailed information on the cases are provided on the Booklet on Citizen's Awareness for the use of Right to Information)

ii. Culture of asking information has been established: After the completion of the series of trainings at the VDC, municipality and district level offices, within 15 days of the Orientation and sensitization training, four petitions were registered and were submitted to five different public bodies in Mahottari, namely Women Development Office, District Education Office, Jaleshwar Municipality, sub-Health Post, Pigauna and Nepal Electricity Authority. People of Mahottari filed 50 different RTI applications on various issues in different public offices during a period of four months. Similarly, in Kailali, twenty seven applications that have been filed to various services providing agencies the District Administration Office, Dhangadhi Municipality, VDCs and political bodies.



*Mr. Jitendra Paswan
reading out his
applications
submitted to District
Education Officer*

iii. Information Officers have been appointed and have been proactively disclosing information: After the campaign started by MAG, many public bodies realized the need to appoint Information Officers (IO) and that IO have a very important role. Many IO's did not even feel the need to disseminate information. District Education Officer, Jaleshwar, Women's Development Office have appointed Information Officers in Mahottari. Likewise, in public bodies that already had an Information Officer but were inactive, the project helped to ensure that the Information Officer has an active role and proactively discloses information. Two factors played important roles in the active dissemination of information i.e after attending several programs conducted by MAG, they realized that information should not be hidden and secondly, the people themselves realized the need to seek information. Because of these factors, District Administration Office, District Police Office, District Development Committee, Kailali and Dhangadhi Municipality have now ensured that the IO has an active role and information is provided to those who seek.

iv. An ordinary person enabled to become a trainer: As a result, of the series of training programs, local dialogue between service users and service providers, the Local Coordinator of Civil Society Network, Mahottari Mr. Rakesh Choudhary took a lead in providing assistance as a

mediator to those who were interested in filing RTIs in the district level. Altogether 50 cases of RTI have been brought to his notice wherein he has helped them file cases. He has been recognised by UNESCO as a trainer. Hereafter, he will be training people at the local level, who will in turn empower the members of the communities to use and enjoy their right to information. (For detailed information, please refer to the Case story-changing the world, one person at a time in Annex 1).

v. RTI Advocates: MAG is able to produce local level RTI advocates through implementing this project. Non-technical persons enabled themselves to become RTI advocates. They enhanced their capacity through attending capacity building training and awareness workshop on RTI at local level. It helped them to know the rights and entitles. Following the program conducted by MAG at Godavari VDC of Kailali, a group of local people along with their political party representatives approached the DDC and DAO inquiring about the budget allocated to their VDC. The delegation was led by Mr. Bhan Singh,



Mr. Bhan Singh, Former VDC Chairperson stating his testimony with the participants at the training

Former VDC Chairperson of Mahottari who didn't know about RTI neither about the issues on budget. But after attending the programs, he understood their right and ensured that he utilized it. He pressured the District Administration Office (DAO) to ensure that the budgets are not mis-used and that information is disseminated on a timely basis.

(Article published on Shrawan 9, Paschim Today Daily under the headline 'Why is Godavari VDC discriminated?')



Representatives of Godavari VDC submitting referendum to Deputy District Development Officer, Kailali- Media coverage

vi. Proactive role played by CSN in Mahottari: The Civil Society Network has been playing an active role as the informal information dissemination mechanism and has helped community people receiving information about RTI. They also operate on behalf of people who want to file RTIs. CSN Members met on a quarterly basis and shed light on the new cases on RTI, the culture of sharing information as well as the culture of withholding information. With the

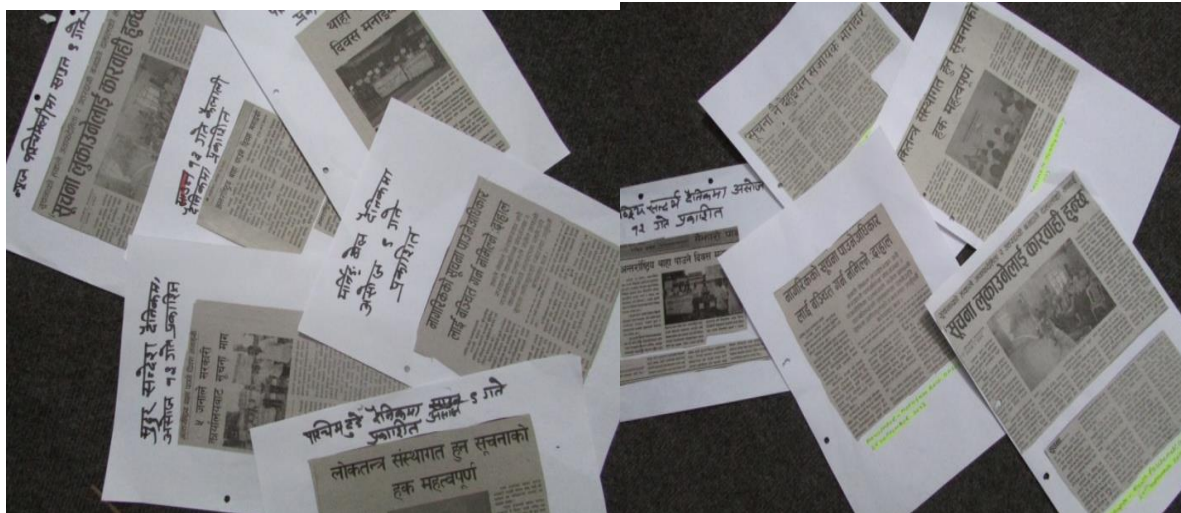
relentless efforts of the CSN Network especially in Mahottari who have been playing an exemplary role, the issue of RTI has received a lot of attention in these districts. People who had never heard of RTI are not actively filing and seeking information.

vii. Change in the attitude: Not only did the media personnel but even the common people had a general understanding that the RTI was exclusively meant for investigative journalism. People have now realised that RTI is a tool that is meant for everyone. It is not only the responsibility of the service providers to provide information but it is also the duty of the service users to ask for information. They are now highly sensitized about RTI as a concept, its repercussions and the process to file an RTI and measures to taken when information is not disclosed. *(Please find the details of the testimonials in the Booklet)*

viii. People's awareness on Right to Information as a fundamental right has significantly increased: In Geta, Malakheti and Shreepur VDC of Dhangadhi municipality, the public bodies and service providing agencies no longer hide information. They have come to the realization that information should not be hidden from the public and have been transparent in their functioning. In general, people's awareness on RTI has increased. They are now aware that RTI is not limited to investigative journalism and can be exercised by every citizen. Media has played a significant role in raising awareness on the issue of social accountability through print newspapers, radio jingles (four languages) and television public service announcements that are aired on a regular basis.

ix. The gap between service providers and service users have decreased: After the local dialogue between service users and service providers, both have realized the need to disclose information and the right to seek information respectively. This has significantly led to the reduction in the gap between service users and providers. Information Officers have been providing information for those who seek information. Women Development Office in Mahottari has started proactively disclosing information.

x. Increase in Media Coverage: The trainings and workshops that targeted media personnel have led to the increase in the media coverage especially in Dhangadhi. Fifty newspaper articles were documented during five months of the project implementation (please find the newspaper articles in Annex 4). They have been successful in clarifying the misconception that RTI is not meant only for journalists and can be utilized by every citizen. After receiving the feedback from the service users and service providers, MAG was successful in producing radio jingles in four languages namely Nepali, Tharu, Doteli and Maithali so that the message of RTI reaches out to a wider section of the society in both districts. Recognizing the importance of the social accountability tool after attending our programs, the radio stations aired the radio jingles 3740 times in total (1800 times in Dhangadhi and 1920 times in Jaleshor) as compared to 48 times which was committed as per the planned activity. Likewise instead of 20 times, the television channels broadcasted the PSA 125 times. Media's role in building an inclusive information society has been clarified during the trainings and workshops that were designed exclusively for them. They are now well-informed about RTI. They now ensure that they report from the perspective of RTI.



Considerable Increase in the media coverage

7. Sustainability of Project Achievements

Civil Society Network (CSN) formed and activated in both districts

In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, a Civil Society Network (CSN) was formed on August 18, 2013 in Dhangadhi, Kailali and August 29 in Jaleshwore, Mahottari. The CSN comprised of 15 members in each district wherein participants were selected on the basis of their gender, ethno-caste distribution and geographical distribution. Representatives of all four VDCs and municipalities of the districts are members of the network. The network was created to provide basic ground for practicing RTI to all stakeholders including citizens, CSOs, local authorities, service providers, media and political bodies for promoting social accountability and local governance at the local level. In order to sustain the momentum of the CSN, quarterly meetings are organized at the district level to share information regarding issues pertaining to easy access of public services to marginalized communities.

Even after the project completion, the CSN will continue to monitor and follow up with the local bodies to proactively disseminate information and ensure accountability and transparency towards the citizen holders. They now function like an independent monitoring mechanism wherein citizens' look up to them to file RTI applications to different public bodies. In Mahottari, till date they have been approached 50 times to submit and file applications which can be seen as a positive indicator for its sustainability.

8. Sustainability of Practice of SA Tool

The SA tool i.e Right to Information is a very powerful in itself. On one hand, RTI is a fundamental right of Nepalese citizen provided by the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007. On the other hand, the Legislative Parliament of Nepal enacted and promulgated a separate legislation called Rights to Information Act, 2007 for translation of such fundamental rights into action.

- i. The very fact that the RTI Act has been guaranteed in Nepal in 2007 is a testimony that this SA tool in itself is sustainable. Furthermore, MAG will continue to practice RTI as a social accountability in every facet of its program and activities. RTI will be a core aspect within which other programs will revolve upon.
- ii. Through the relentless efforts of MAG in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, many public service providers have realized the importance and need for public disclosure of information. Many organizations have now officially institutionalized SA tool by ensuring that there is an official system in place. Mr. Jitendra Paswan from Jaleshwor filed an application seeking for information from District Education Office, Jaleshwore regarding the distribution of scholarship fees to schools in Jaleshwor municipality area in 2069/70 fiscal year, with much reluctance they provided information. Consequently, after this incident, they appointed an Information Officer (IO).

Ms. Sunita Bhattarai, Supervisor, Women Development Office, Mahottari informed MAG that they received a request from Ms. Sabita Kumari seeking information about details of budget allocated for victims of gender violence, she said that they were unaware about whether it was appropriate to comply with such request and hence, they did not respond. Acknowledging the effort of MAG, the Women Development Office in Mahottari has started disseminating information on a regular basis.

- iii. Participants who attended the trainings, orientation workshops, local dialogues not only widened their knowledge on RTI but have proactively exercised it. Many people from both districts have now become active campaigners for RTI.
- iv. Realizing the importance of RTI, Mr. Rohan Edrisinha, International Project Manager-Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal (SPCBN)-UNDP Nepal has expressed UNDPs interest to work jointly with MAG on RTI and Constitution making process.
- v. UN Women Nepal after working with MAG on Right to Information has included the issue of RTI in their Strategic plan for the year 2014 and has expressed their interest to engage with MAG.
- vi. CSN Network in both the districts will be working on a long term basis.

Overall, there is an encouraging and supporting environment, and sustainability of the programme contributions is very much possible.

9. Problems and challenges

- i. **Language barrier:** A major constraint encountered during the VDC level training sessions in Mahottari was the language gap. Majority of the participants did not understand Nepali as they conversed in Maithali.

- ii. **Local Calendar:** The project period was scheduled around the monsoon season. Humidity and rain caused a lot of inconvenience to the participants as well as the organizers.
- iii. **Limited financial resources:** Since the first and second tranche budget is disbursed after the completion of the activities, it was difficult for MAG to arrange the required amount to conduct the activities.
- iv. **Limited human resources:** Because of the ambitious project and limited time frame, it is difficult for the Principal Social Accountability Practitioner to manage the entire project on his/her own.
- v. **Election environment:** Because of the second constituent assembly election, the closing program and monitoring program in Mahottari had to be postponed. Furthermore, a representative from the National Information Commission could not visit the field in Kailali because of their prior commitment during elections.
- vi. **Change in the Principal Social Accountability Practitioner:** Ms. Krishma Sharma, the Principal Social Accountability Practitioner resigned from her position during the implementation phase of the program. There was a gap for a while to implement the on-going activities that were pending for the final phase of the project.

10. Lessons Learnt

- i. Information about the right to information has not spread adequately to all corners of the country. Program like these conducted by MAG and CECI should not just be limited to two districts but needs to be widely initiated across all the districts of Nepal at the national as well as local level. Only a large scale campaign on the RTI can lead to the realization of the RTI for common citizens.
- ii. Appointing an Information Officer is not sufficient in the public bodies. Even though an employee is named as the information officer, s/he may not have adequate knowledge about the services and entitlements provided by his/her office. In the absence of training about the Right to Information Law and the process of providing information, the services provided by the government offices may thus not be effective. It is unclear how much training on right to information has been provided to officials. Tailored capacity building trainings will in turn help Information Officers to disclose information.
- iii. With the aim of making the activities of government offices transparent, citizens can also influence public opinion by raising people's awareness at the local level about the legal arrangements. Local FM radios, CSOs, political parties and government offices can make a whole lot of difference.
- iv. Digital Revolution has changed the shape of Communications and democratized it to a large extent. People now expect to be heard as a right. In the Digital age power rests not in the hands of a selected few but at the fingertips of many – and in conversations

where a whole raft of people participate. Many people still fundamentally misunderstand the Digital revolution. To them it is just about technology and the way that you receive or communicate information. But it is a cultural transformation – it's about democracy and empowerment. The Digital Democracy holds all of us to account. Today, we can all be journalists with blogs, videos and texts to the media. And every organization has the potential to be a media outlet in its own right. Hence, every organization can utilize this platform to make information more accessible and ensure transparency.

- v. In order to make RTI more effective, it is important to learn some lessons from India wherein RTI has a separate beat of its own. Likewise, the media should go beyond the beat and find linkages with RTI and integrate this important aspect in all their beats.
- vi. The concept, model and approach of the program were appropriate in increasing the awareness of both men and women at the local level. However, the programme (such as this) that is largely designed to raise awareness at the community level should integrate multiple issues ensuring that the stakeholders have understood the gap and its implications, involve public bodies that have their own service delivery systems.
- vii. It was found that it is not only the service users but the service providers also did not have a comprehensive understanding of RTI. Most of the public bodies in these districts had not put in place formal rules for processing requests, in other cases they completely refused to provide any sort of information. Trainings should be provided not only to the service users but also to the service providers
- viii. The general consensus seemed to be that, overall, record management was poor and that this was a serious challenge not only in districts but in Nepal as a whole. Public bodies should be capacitated on record management.
- ix. Partnership with the government line agencies, public bodies, civil society organizations, community based organization, media personnel, service users seems to be extremely essential. An alliance between CSOs and the media is especially important. The media has a potentially critical role to play in exerting force on government.
- x. Citizens need to understand that seeking information is not only their fundamental right but is also their democratic duty, without which democracy cannot be sustained. For this, RTI should be included in the school and college curricula.
- xi. Trainings conducted in the local language are more effective.
- xii. A proactive Local Coordinator can make an enormous difference to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- xiii. Establishing a multi-stakeholder platform such as the Civil Society Network is beneficial in terms of helping community people receive information.

- xiv. The role of a Mentor has been beneficial in terms of consultation with regard to the overall activities and achieving the targeted objectives.

11. Case stories

The following case stories are in the annex no 1. in this report.

- i. Now we know – It is our right to know (Kailali)
- ii. Establishing the culture of asking (Mahottari)
- iii. Changing the world, one person at a time (Mahottari)
- iv. बजेट माग गर्दै राजनैतिक दलले बुझाए ज्ञापन पत्र (Kailali)

12. Tool briefs

- i. Right to Information

The tool brief is in the annex no 2. in this report.

13. Reports/Materials Produced

The following produced materials are in the annex no.3

- i. Right to Information Tool Kit (700 copies) contains
 - RTI Handbook,
 - RTI Act, 2064,
 - RTI Regulations, 2065,
 - Brochure for Journalists, and
 - Book Marker
- ii. Booklet- *Citizen's Awareness for the Use of Right to Information* (500 copies English and 500 copies Nepali)
- iii. Radio Jingle (Nepali, Maithali, Tharu, Doteli)
- iv. Television Public Service Announcement (PSA) (1)
- v. Video Documentary (1)

14. Recommendations

i) for more effective implementation of such projects

- a) **Selection of a Local Coordinator:** this is one of the important components that should be paid attention before implementing the tool. The proactive attitude of the Local Coordinator and the willingness to learn makes a whole lot of difference to achieve the outcome of the project.
- b) **Mobilize local trainers during the process:** in terms of sustainability, local trainers should be mobilized while implementing the tool so as to ensure community level mobilization.
- c) **Long Term Support:** For best results, it would be strategic to support these initiatives and campaigns on a long term basis. Social Accountability Tool such as RTI needs relentless and consistent efforts to achieve its outcomes. Since it involves changing the

mindset of people i.e both service users and service providers, these programs need a longer time frame and support.

- d) **Financial disbursements:** If financial disbursements are made before the activities, it would help the implementing agencies significantly so as to ensure the timely implementation of the activities.
- e) **Conduct trainings in the local language:** It is important to ensure that trainings are conducted in the local/native languages of the target beneficiaries so that they can grasp information and so that the objective of conducting the meeting could be met.
- f) **Local calendar:** While designing a project or a program, it is important to keep in mind the participatory versus the framed calendar to achieve the best outcome. When the local calendar is kept in consideration, the participation of different stakeholders can be rest assured. This will in turn ensure that the activities are implemented in a participatory manner.
- g) **Exchange Visit:** A provision should be made for exchange visits so that practitioners applying the same tool can learn from each other's experiences, best practices, learning's from different districts.
- h) **Mentor:** A provision of a Mentor and /or a Project Advisory Committee comprising of relevant experts help a great deal to achieve the expected results.
- i) **Establishing a multi-stakeholder platform such as the Civil Society Network** was very beneficial in terms of building a network of citizens, civil societies, and public bodies including CBOs, Journalists, and political bodies at the district and village level.

ii) for ensuring sustainability of the achievement of the project.

- a) **CSN should continue their active role in supporting community people and building awareness:** the CSN should inform the public of their right of access to information, including specifically how they can apply. This should be seen as part of promoting a culture of openness and responsiveness for effective public service delivery.
- b) **Making the best use of the Digital World:** In the age of Digital Democracy, every organization has the potential to be a media outlet in its own right. This platform should be utilized to make information more accessible and ensure transparency. The Internet in particular has opened up new possibilities for service providers to interact with citizens. Combined with the right to information it undoubtedly opens up possibilities for greater public participation in decision making at all levels. This may in turn require support for programmes that assist people to use information technologies to look for, find and analyse information.
- c) **Collaborating with service users and service providers:** One initiative that can help ensure steps towards RTI is to bring key stakeholders together in a series of round

tables, or other for a to develop a consensus on their common interest and the best way forward. Key stakeholders may include public officials and politicians, representatives of civil society, journalists, lawyers and academicians. Building an effective consensus among these varied groups is not easy or rapid, but it is a key to success.

- d) **Effectively mobilizing the media:** The media have an important role to play in raising awareness on the right to information. If the media can be persuaded to see the right to information as a means to report on substantive issues in a way they have not been able to before, then they are likely to stimulate public interest.
- e) **Supporting public awareness campaigns:** they can play an important role in ensuring that that communication channels which are used by more vulnerable groups are incorporated into the design public awareness campaigns around right to information.
- f) **Capacity development of public officials:** CECI and WB can support initiatives to develop a tailored capacity building trainings for Information Officers, public officials at local and national levels by supporting training courses. Furthermore, they could bring together public officials, civil society, journalists and lawyers on the same training courses to facilitate better understanding of the others' motivations and interests and to form a consensus.
- g) **Providing ongoing support to Civil Society Network in both districts:** CECI and WB can continue to support CSN in its ongoing efforts to make right to information a reality for people. This might include support for programmes that increase public awareness for creating an informed society.
- h) **Partnerships for improving right to information:** it necessarily involves a diversity of stakeholders from government to civil society, the media, judiciary and others.