Highlights

- Role of Media to Promote Social Accountability

- Civil Society, Accountability and Local Government

- Report on Knowledge Exchange to Promote Citizen Engagement in Auditing

Role of Media to Promote Social Accountability

The media in Nepal has the potential to help create an informed and active citizenry who are able to hold their government and other public actors to account. In Nepal, local media is the main source of information to ensure a vital communication link between the citizens and the government. It is, therefore, an indispensable precondition for ensuring transparency and social accountability in public expenditure. Thus, Program for Accountability in Nepal (PRAN) has always put special efforts in strengthening this important function of the media in the country.

As a component of the PRAN 2 outreach on PFM issues at the district level, a media workshop was organized recently for 26 media practitioners from Kailali, Bardia, Banke, Dang, Rolpa, Bajhang and Bajura.

The objective of the two day workshop held on 28 and 29 December in Dhangadhi was to inform and educate local reporters on major budgetary issues, including social security entitlements in an effort to raise awareness and inform the villagers about their specific GoN entitlements.

Mr. Hem Tembe, Team Leader of CECI, PRAN's grant management partner; Mr. Gokarna Awasthi, President of Society of Economic Journalists Nepal (SEJON) and Mr. Soham Subedi, Manager of Community Information Network of Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) moderated and facilitated the event.

Participants listening to Mr. Awasthi at the workshop

Speaking to the participants at the workshop, Mr, Gokarna Awasthi explained why it is important for district level journalists to raise issues on PFM: "As local media starts to raise PFM issues focusing social accountability, it encourages mainstream journalism/media to do so as well. As an economic bureau chief of a national media house, I am committed to give priority to those investigative pieces in national broadsheets. Covering such solution-oriented issues in print media can play a vital role in society as it promotes good governance, discourages corruption and makes government employees more accountable."

The participants had the opportunity to learn about issues concerning accountability and PFM. The main issues raised during the discussions directly related with the program activities of PRAN 2 included:

- Budgetary procedures not properly followed by the local authorities, as well as the citizens;

- Lack of gender and social inclusion in consumers groups;

- Lack of transparency on tender processes and reporting of development projects;

- Too much political party influence on budgetary decisions;

- Limited VDC secretary's capacity and excessive workload;

- Need for clarity on the social mobilizer's role and responsibilities;

- More public awareness of social security allowance distribution and corruption control;

- Improved Grievance Redress Mechanism in VDCs and municipalities.

The workshop also advised the participants that there will be the provision of fellowships in the local newspapers. The fellowship grantees will be selected amongst the participants based on their performance at the workshop.

Speaking to the participants, Mr. Soham Subedi said: "Community radio plays a vital role in empowering the citizens on the demand side by providing factual information, organizing debates and by making the GoN supply side act responsibly. The radio can be a catalyst to bring the demand and supply side together to discuss and promote good governance."

He further stressed on the importance of close coordination between the media practitioners and the PRAN CSOs for better detailed project reporting to promote Public Finance Management at the local level.

Mr. Hem Tembe of CECI explained the importance of the PRAN 2 advocacy issues focusing on Budget Literacy; Gender & Pro Poor Budgeting; Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS); Right to Information (RTI), Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), Public Hearing, Public Audit & Treasury Single Account (TSA).

All participants and facilitators agreed to focus their media reporting on the four dimensions of public financial management systems:

- Budget preparation stage;

- Budget endorsement process;

- Budget implementation activities and

- Financial programmatic auditing process.

As part of PRAN's media component, CIN/ACORAB is responsible for producing and broadcasting Public Service Announcements, providing professional training for district level journalists, as well as the production of PFM radio programs. This media workshop is one of the two trainings planned at the district level.

At a recent PRAN 2 Review Meeting in Dhangadhi, in Far Western Nepal, the PRAN CSOs shared how vital it is to work closely together with the local government to improve local outcomes in their respective districts.

The lessons learned during the first five months of the MDTF/ PRAN 2 program were shared by 30 Social Accountability Practitioners at the two-day review meeting held on January 18th and 19th 2016.

The objective of the meeting was to review the field level activities of each CSO, to provide guidance in the production of qualitative reports as well as case stories, to create a platform for the participants to exchange their learnings and experiences among each other, and to explore new ideas and/or strategies to tackle issues and problems they face in the communities.

Ms. Anjalee Thakali speaking to the participants on the first day

CSOs participated from all 15 PRAN 2 districts: Dhankuta, Bara, Banke, Bardiya, Bajhang, Bajura, Kailali, Rolpa, Palpa, Dang, Kapilvastu, Gorkha, Dhanusha, Siraha and Saptari.

Along with the CSOs, PRAN's grant management partner, CECI, research partner PRAD Nepal, outreach partner ACORAB/ CIN, and Monitoring and Evaluation partner, New ERA, also participated at the meeting.

Difficulty Owing to Political Unrest and the Unofficial Blockade

Hem Tembe, team leader of CECI, grant management agency of PRAN explained: "The meeting was planned earlier and postponed because the travel plans of many participants were affected by the banda (strike), curfew and fuel crisis (blockade). It was difficult to fix the date because the situation of some PRAN districts had not improved. So, on one hand, it was difficult to ensure the safe travel of the participants, while on the other hand, we were already late to start some of the program activities. However, in close consultation with local CSOs, the situation was analyzed and the meeting was finally organized."

The Social Accountability Practitioners from Dhankuta (Eastern Nepal), for example, had to travel for three days to reach Dhangadhi as their vehicle required police security escort during the night. Because of the political unrest, the practitioners from the affected districts, mainly from Bara, Siraha, Saptari and Dhanusha, had difficulty working on activities such as VDC and Ward orientations. Other districts, such as Kapilbastu, Kailali, Bardia and Banke, were partially affected due to the political instability but have improved in the past months.

Official Agreement with the District Development Committee

One of the most positive examples of collaboration came from Dhankuta and Banke districts as the District Development Committee (DDC) signed an MoU with PRAN to strengthen the program in their respective Village Development Committee (VDCs). In this way, the Dhankuta and Banke DDCs included the MDTF PRAN 2 activities in their annual program.

Local citizens discussing about VDC budget in Joshipur VDC, Kalali

"Signing an MoU with the district government has made the practitioners' work not just easier but also official and widely recognized. In this way, the work of PRAN has been welcomed by the VDCs and accepted and implemented through them," said Anjalee Thakali, Deputy Coordinator of PRAN.

SSE Survey Results, TSA and Budget Reporting activities

During the meeting, the Social Accountability Practitioners also received guidelines from the PRAN 2 partners on issues related to budget reporting, the single treasury system (TSA), SSE survey results and the coordination of the CSOs with the radio stations for Public Service Announcements.

"The active participation and honest presentations by the practitioners was the most impressive aspect of the review meeting. The discussions showed that the majority of the practitioners are doing their best to achieve results -- even in such unfavorable situations.

"We are confident that the upcoming months will allow to implement activities smoothly and give us the opportunity to work on the expected results," says Mr. Tembe.

Group discussion

Report on Knowledge Exchange to Promote Citizen Engagement in Auditing

South-South Knowledge Exchange to the Commission of Audit (COA) of the Philippines, Manila

November 23-27, 2015

The Officials from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of Nepal participated in a south-south exchange to the Commission on Audits (COA) of the Philippines on November 23 -27, 2015. The study visit was organized as a part of the support program provided by the Word Bank to the Office of the Auditor General of Nepal under the Multi Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) to improve Public Financial Management in Nepal. The Chairperson of COA, Honorable Michael Aguinaldo was the host for the OAGN delegation in Manila along with COA staff in charge of the Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) program.

The study visit provided the OAGN delegation with a unique opportunity to learn more about the Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) program and to witness how "citizen auditors" participate and support the auditing process in key sectors such as the education as well as on performance and audit of disaster risk management programs.

Full Report here...

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