



Kathmandu Office

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Empowering People to Enjoy Their Right to Information for Greater Accountability of Nepal's Power Holders

February 2013 - July 2016

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Overview

The UNESCO Office in Kathmandu started the implementation of the 3-year project “Empowering people to enjoy their Right to Information (RTI) for greater accountability of Nepal’s power holders” on 1 February 2013 and successfully concluded it on 31 July 2016 (42 months). The project was funded by the European Union under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

The aim of the project was to make the Act on RTI adopted in 2007 in Nepal more accessible and easy to understand to citizens. It has been the first project in the country that aimed at encouraging and empowering citizens to claim their RTI as well as to increase the accountability of power holders.

The project targeted three major groups: journalists, local mediators and government officials, to empower them to use and comply with the legal provision related to RTI and facilitate public information access for citizens of the Central Tarai and Eastern Hills regions.

The main project’s activities include the recruitment of project staff, the preparation and publication of 2 handbooks for mediators and journalists, the design and organisation of 2 Training of Trainers (ToT) for 20 mediators and 20 journalists respectively, and the training of 297 journalists and 239 local mediators belonging to various project targeted districts to actively use RTI as effective tools in their daily as well as their professional life. The project also published 3 advocacy materials, such as stickers, posters and leaflets to promote the RTI in the project area.

This project has been instrumental in creating awareness among the local citizens on fundamental features of RTI, its importance to their daily life and information seeking process etc. The trained mediators have been seeking information, facilitating and empowering people in the project area.

The project has provided trainings to the local journalists on RTI and its utilization for investigative reporting.

A more effective use of RTI act

The implementation of the RTI in Nepal has never been a priority for the government. However, there have been advocacies by those who were trained so that state agencies are made accountable to implement RTI laws effectively. The voices are becoming stronger recently compared to the previous years.

National Information Commission (NIC) has received 470 appeals from different information seekers, and has issued the order to public agencies to provide information to 409 of these appeals. However, in some cases the government has not paid attention to the recommendation given by the NIC.

The project has been implemented by UNESCO in collaboration with the Federation of Nepali Journalist (FNJ) and Citizen’s Campaign for RTI (CCRI) as main project partners.

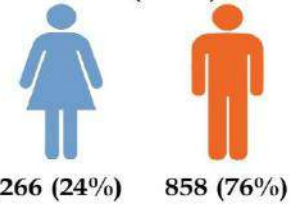
Empowering People to Enjoy their Right to Information for Greater Accountability of Nepal's Power-holders

2013
1 February

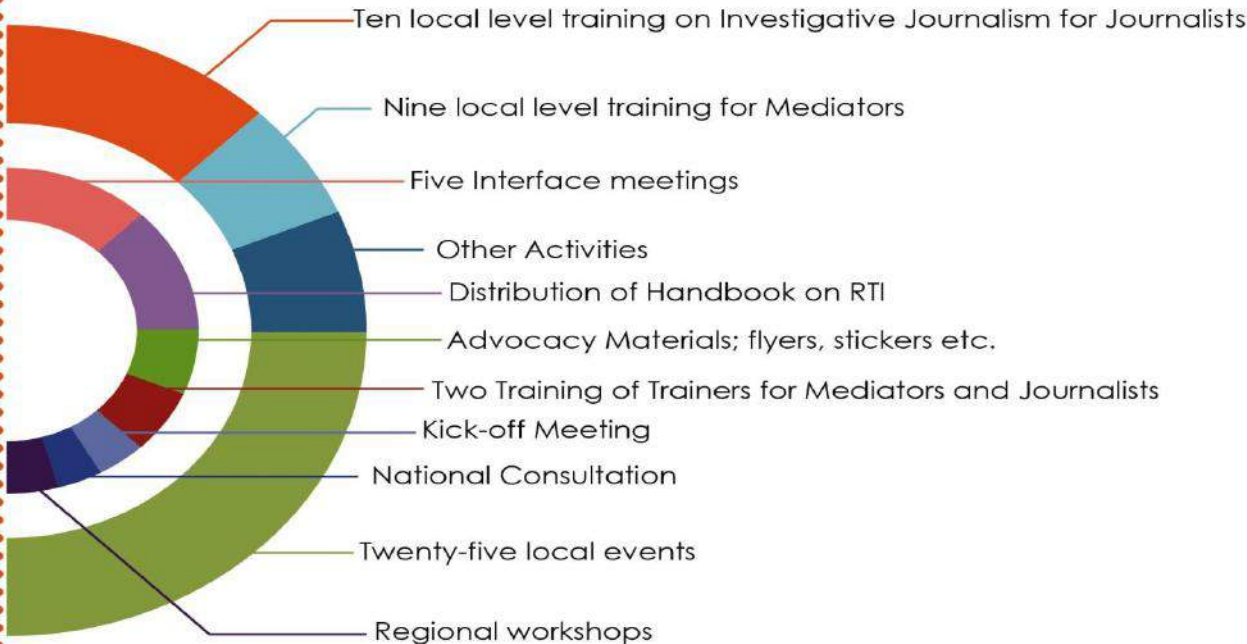
2016
31 July



Total participants
1124 (100%)



Budget



- Aware and motivated citizens to exercise their democratic rights realizing that RTI is open to all
- Increased public interest about accountability and transparency of the activities of Government and public institutions
- National Information Commission received 470 complaints from different information seekers



Kathmandu Office



Supported by



CCRI



Federation of Nepali Journalists



Case stories

The experience of participants in trainings

“UNESCO’s training has showed me that RTI is a powerful tool to empower common citizens and make public agencies responsible”



Mangal Begha, accompanied by the trainers

Mangal Begha lives in Phidim, one village situated in the serenely beautiful Panchthar district, far from the chaos of Kathmandu in the eastern region of Nepal. Most of people there do not know what rights are in general and specifically what Right to Information (RTI) is. Even he, although educated, was not fully aware about the importance of RTI as human rights activist. “I had read about right to information in our constitution but I didn’t know what was inside it or what it can do for us”, says Mangal.

Nepal adopted a RTI Act in 2007 with great expectations for improved transparency and accountability of the government. However many people as Mangal did not have information about the existence of the law, or how it could help them in obtaining public information. This is why UNESCO, with EU’s support, created in 2013 the first project in the country to make RTI act more visible and understandable to people.

Thanks to this project Mangal Begha increased his knowledge about RTI. After participating in one training for mediators, Mangal was not only sensitized about his right to information but is equally applying this right to seek information he deserves from different public agencies. “As a human rights activist, the training and teaching is proving very helpful to me”, points out Mangal.

“It’s easier to get information from every government body”

It was his first RTI focused training and Mangal seems to be very happy with the results: “I got opportunity to know the power of RTI and its importance in my personal and social life”.

In his opinion, the content of training was very useful, comprehensive and practical. “I used to give up the process if information was denied by any public agencies before the training. From now on I know that every public office is obliged to disseminate information. I have learned that RTI is the tool to empower common citizen and make public agencies responsible”, adds the activist.

Mangal affirms that after the training “it’s easier to get information from every government body such as police station, organization working for child and women rights, etc. which is helping to our work in the field of human rights”.

Mangal Begha is only one of the 25 people who participated in RTI training for mediators last June 2015 in Panchthar district. Participants like him can now spread their knowledge about RTI between uneducated people from the district. “I’m getting offers to train other people”, concludes Mangal.

RTI Training for Mediators was the first RTI training in Panchthar district (11-15 June, 2015). Thus, many human rights activists, social workers, NGO people got opportunity to know about process to use RTI and its importance in detail.

“Before UNESCO’s training I used to think RTI was what we get from the media”



Participants working actively during one of the trainings

Gita Chimoriya is a young journalist from Janakpur, a historical city which is located about 123 kilometres south-east of Kathmandu, in Dhanusha district. She was one of the participants of the 5-days training on “Right to Information (RTI) and Investigative Journalism”, organized by UNESCO in Mahottari district last year in June.

In Nepal, RTI Act from 2007 was often seen as a tool only for journalists. This is what Gita also believed: “before UNESCO’s training I used to think that RTI was what we get from media”. Being aware of this situation, UNESCO, with EU’s support, created the first project in the country to increase the knowledge about how people can use their RTI.

“After the training I was able to understand that RTI is more than a tool for journalists. RTI is not for the media or just from the media but RTI is for everyone to demand the rightful information anyone requires from a public office”, says Gita.

Thanks to the instruction, Gita is now capable enough to assist people in understanding RTI. She encouraged people who hesitate to ask information going in different women group discussion and been a part of 15 youth training in various Village Development Communities (VDC). “These locals now know that they can ask about the allocated budget for development projects to the VDC office and are doing so”, highlights Gita.

People can question their VDC

Gita, who is working in Radio Darpan and local correspondent of Karobar Daily, believes that “since RTI is for everyone, this sort of training must be organized from village level so that everyone can know and utilize RTI more effectively. It is important to explain people that they can question their VDC”.

Another important learning for Gita was to seek relevant information from public offices working as a journalist: “after the training, it became easier for me to gather information”.

These were some of the UNESCO’s project objectives: to challenge and encourage journalists at the individual level to take their role as crucial actors in the chain of delivering information to local communities and to challenge the government to practice transparent and good governance.

“There was no request for information in public offices of Udayapur before mine”



A group of people participating in activities during one training

Ajay Kumar Shah is a journalist from Gaighat, a town in the Udayapur district south-eastern Nepal. He participated in the 5-day training on “Right to Information (RTI) and its uses” for mediators organized by UNESCO, with EU’s support, last January 2016. This instruction was part of the first project in Nepal to make RTI act from 2007 more accessible to people. UNESCO’s training about RTI was very important for Ajay. “I had heard the term RTI many times but didn’t know about it in details before the instruction”, admits the journalist.

Taking part in the training increased Ajay’s interest about people’s right in his district. He investigated and he was very surprised to see that “there was no request for information in public offices, not even a single one” in his home district Udayapur.

Hence, Ajay submitted a request seeking information about the budget of security allowance in Village Development Committees (VDC) of Udayapur district in few public offices.

“Mini quake” in public offices

Ajay became the first person to submit an application seeking information in the municipality office in the whole district. And even more important, he was able to give a mini quake in public offices as this was very first time that anyone in the office had come with such request.

“After the request I didn’t get the full information I asked for but it was very useful to sensitize many offices and officers”, says Ajay. According to him, “it’s needed to follow up constantly to receive the complete information”. He believes that the follow up with authorities make them accountable towards public.

A much more active journalist and mediator

UNESCO’s training transformed Ajay into a much more active journalist and mediator. “Thereafter I organized an interaction program between local journalists and government officers to discuss and to help them to understand their roles and responsibility in RTI”, points out Ajay.

He held meetings with the communication officers of the district’s administrative office, the municipality and Village Development Committee (VDC). He also distributed leaflets and books related to RTI between people from the district.

“As a result of the interaction program and information board public can easily get information”, concludes Ajay.

“If any public organization refuses to give information, liable punishment is possible”



A group of participants during one of the conducted trainings

Suraksha Regmi, a journalist based in Chitwan district never thought of using Right to Information (RTI) despite the plenty of hassle she faced during reporting.

“I had a misconception that one has to pay tax to get information from the public office bearers,” Suraksha explained her reason behind declining the use of RTI. Only in April 2015 she learned from UNESCO’s training on “RTI and its uses for mediators” at district level that seeking information is the right of every citizen which demands no tax in return.

Activism to spread the facts

The training built capacity to create the RTI moderators like Suraksha who now confidently help others to access information from authorities. Her activism to spread the facts related to RTI has also made people aware that not providing the information or any manipulation and extortion of the public information by the concerned officials is liable to punishment as per the RTI Act 2007.

One year after receiving the training, Shuraksha has experiences to share. She visited more than 10 public offices looking for relevant information. “There was a mixed response as some were positive but others were defiant.” Those who refused were cautioned that the ignorance to provide information without valid justification could land them into trouble facing legal charges.

“I filed more than a dozen complaints in public offices after UNESCO’s training”



Two participants working during one training on RTI and investigative journalism

When **Raj Karan Mahato** received UNESCO’s training on “RTI and its uses” and “RTI and Investigative Journalism”, he was determined to make its use for his community. Resident of Mahottari district in central Nepal, Raj has turned an RTI activist after his learning on RTI in the two separate trainings conducted earlier in January and July 2016.

Thanks to the instruction, he has more tools to develop his work as journalist and activist. Along with other RTI activists like him, Raj submitted requests for information in more than 32 local offices in his district.

“I filed more than a dozen complaints in public offices with the information and knowledge I learned during the training”, highlights Raj.

The massive amount of request in a short period of time created a sensitizing wave in the district awakening passive government officers.

RTI in the schools

But requesting information was not the only action of Raj after the training. He had a really good idea: he took RTI concept to schools. “I held one-day training with students from Grades 8, 9 and 10 to teach and instruct them on RTI and I felt the need of establishing clubs in schools”, points out the activist.

Raj was not only thinking on kids. He also established a committee- the Citizen Campaign for Right to Information Bardibas (CCRIB)- to further sensitize people on RTI act: how and where to file applications and what is the procedure and what happens later.

However, awareness drive is not a limit for Raj. He has dedicated himself to institutionalize transparency and accountability at his place.

In his words, “through the participation of locals to make the public authority issue the information of public interest, the good governance is not a far-fetched dream.”



Photobook











