
A Report on

**Civic Education Training For Women Journalists
29-30 August 2013
Bardibas, Mahottari**

Organized by – Media Advocacy Group (MAG)

Supported by – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Nepal

(FES)

Prepared by: Media Advocacy Group (MAG)

Introduction:

Civic Education is considered as one indispensable part for a democratic practice in any country. It is the education process of making citizens accountable towards their duties and responsibilities as citizens. Civic education enables citizens as how to pursue civic values and norms in their normal day-to-day life. It can also be termed as the educating process where the citizens learn about their rights, duties and responsibilities which informs them as to what areas of the political and governance processes they can participate in and what they can do to influence political outcomes and thereby improve the quality of governance at the local and national level. If the civic journalism is done with these points in mind it can have positive impact in our society. The core learning of civic education is values and principles of transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability, empowerment and equity. Communication and access to information is one of the integral aspects of learning.

Media and Journalism plays an important role in determining the proper functioning of laws, rules regulations, practices and norms of a state. Both strengthen individual and community to participate in policy development processes and its implementation. Any form of media can act as a bridge between the government and a citizen.

Considering the importance of civic education and its direct relation with media, MAG with the support of FES Nepal, organized the 2 days training on civic education for women journalists in Bardibas, Mahottari on 29-30 August 2013. There were 25 participants from 7 districts (Udaypur, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Saptari, Dhanusha, Sindhuli, Siraha). The training focused on raising the interest of women journalists for civic journalism and its importance. This is especially important as currently women are only given the responsibility of covering soft and entertainment issues. The purpose of the training is to increase the participation of women journalists in the sector of civic journalism.

Objectives of the training:

- Increase the women participation in civic journalism.
- Creating the wider scope and usage of civic education.
- Making every forms of media accountable and responsible towards civic education.

Day 1

Opening and welcome notes:

Ms. Babita Basnet, President of MAG welcomed all the participants of the



Pic 1: Ms. Babita Basnet welcoming the participants

training. She introduced the experts /presenter of the training– **Mr. Kashiraj Dahal** (Constitution Expert and President of Administrative Court) and **Mr. Mahendra Bista** (News Chief of Image Channel and Media Expert). Ms. Basnet gave a brief introduction of MAG as a nonprofit organization working in the sector of Right To Information (RTI), Media, Gender, Women, Peace & Security and Safe Migration. She informed the participants about the recent project of MAG on RTI, implementing in Kailali and Mahottari. Further she highlighted the objectives of the training as below:

- Information on Civic Journalism.
- Aim to empower female journalists and motivate others to become journalists working and potential women journalists.
- Creating expertise in the field.
- Raising the issue of responsibility.
- After the training the participants will be clear on the selection of the topics they are interested in and gain expertise in it.

Ms. Sameera Poudel, representative of FES Nepal extended her thanks to the participants and the resource persons. She gave a short introduction of FES as a Germany based non-profit political organization named after the first democratically elected President of Germany Friedrich Ebert. It has more than 100 branches in the world. She informed the participants that FES works for freedom, unity, social justice, and peace and media development. Ms. Poudel mentioned that education and awareness is important for people to participate in policy making. Media, which has been seen as the major pillar of state –I can also contribute in policy making area of the state.

After the welcome notes, the program proceeded further with the introduction of the participants with focus on their current field of work. A majority of the participants informed that even though they prepare news on almost every general issues, their area of interest is women. Ms. Babita Basnet then requested Mr. Kashi Raj Dahal to start the training program and urged the participants to actively participate during the training, which will enhance their capability and learning process.

All the 25 participants were given 2 books each on Civic education & Democracy provided by FES Nepal.

Mr. Kashiraj Dahal started his session by asking the participants about their knowledge on civic education. He first highlighted the meaning of Democracy and Republic form of government and informed that none of these forms is complete without active participation of the citizens in the policy making process. He emphasized on the following elements.

- 1) **Citizen as the source of rights** – In any democratic form of government citizen are sovereign,
- 2) **Human Rights** – Human rights are the important facet of any form of

government. Every citizen has its economic, social, cultural and citizen rights. Mr. Dahal also stated that now-a-days there are new rights being claimed and the democratic form of government should ensure and protect them.

- 3) **Rule of Law**: Every state practices the democratic form of government by the rule of law. He further explained this by giving examples of contexts where law was misused and said that no state practicing the rule of law allows its misuse in any circumstances.
- 4) **Timely Election**: Election provides the citizens right to choose their own leader and form government. Without election no country can have a properly working democracy.
- 5) **Accountability**: Every citizen depends on media as the source of information. Media should be very responsible towards this duty and ensure that only fact information is provided to the citizen. Creating false news not only ruins its reputation but also creates confusion and mistrust of citizen towards media.
- 6) **Transparency**: There should be transparency between citizen and government and media can play a vital role in ensuring this process.
- 7) **Democracy and Multiparty System**: Multiparty system is important for democracy. It helps citizens to choose the government by themselves and builds a strong civil society and media, which, in turn, balance the power and ensures justice.

Further Mr. Dahal explained the term civic education and argued that civic education is the knowledge that comes from insight and requires the citizen to be accountable towards their duties and the country. In this context media can play a powerful role in promoting civic education.

Most of the participants had the opinion that as the right is not hampered fully he/she should not be punished. Mr. Dahal then explained them that if the action is done against the ethics then the citizen will be punished because the rights, responsibilities and the ethics are all values of civic education. Civic education strengthens the relation between the state and the people. Citizens are patriotic towards their country. They can be unhappy with the system but they can never be unfaithful towards their country. So, journalism and media should increase the responsibility and duty of a citizen. Civic education motivates the citizens to be free from seeking personal benefits and increase their responsibility towards the society. Every citizen has their responsibility towards their culture, and tradition and resources. They should preserve and promote them. The country cannot be strong unless the citizens are aware of their duty and responsibility. The important factors for a strong foundation of a country are:

- 1) Quality, patriotic, social and skillful education
- 2) Economic Development
- 3) Development of Science and Technology

- 4) Strong Union
- 5) Leadership

The participants were as then given the task to make a short news on the things learnt above. They participated highly motivated and later the experts gave comments and suggestions on their drafts. Mr. Dahal then concluded his session by stating that civic education is mandatory for every country as it teaches the citizen to be controlled and disciplined and media can play a vital role in providing civic education for every. Without knowing the subject matter correct information cannot be generated. Therefore every media person and journalist should be well aware of about the content they are writing/reporting.

Ms. Babita Basnet gave a short history update regarding civic education by saying that it started in Nepal 100 years back and that it was introduced by King Jay Prithvi Bahadur Singh. He drafted a document on civic education. Later on the renowned poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota wrote a book on civic education, which was published lately by Ratna Pustak Bhandar. Ms. Basnet further said that the Nepalese citizens do feel attached towards their country and also to some extent their government but they are unhappy towards the political instability. Civic education can help them to get involved in the policy making and government as it also makes the citizen asks themselves 'what has the country given me and what have I done for my country'.

Mr. Mahendra Bista then continued session by stating that the role of media and journalist in news making and deliverance is vital. The scope of media is wide as any reporter can get a news/issue in a day. However, they should be able to identify the news. Every news has to have elements of five WH in its content (What, Where, When, Who, Why and How). This is important for everyone who seeks information. Languages, format, description can be different but every news must have the five WH. Media and journalism is all about identifying, writing, understanding, delivering news and getting the feedback or else it is not called journalism. He also explained the ABC of news being Accuracy, Balance and Credibility. Mr. Bista explained that the participants had the knowledge of journalism and national issues -but they lack the ability of present them in a correct way. . Wrong news can create misunderstanding and confusion and it can lead to destructive responses. Journalists should first be convinced and confirmed by the news before delivering it.

Civic Journalism: Mr. Bista informed the participants that civic journalism is done keeping the citizen in concern in the centre. The important aspect of civic journalism is to bring positive perspective in negative news. It is said that world changes by opinion/thoughts and journalists are considered as opinion makers. So education is important for journalism, as it requires vast knowledge and wisdom. Journalists have freedom to write but they have certain limitations, which they are bound to remain within. Every journalist should respect the individual privacy, national unity, security, and sovereignty of a country. So, Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and Press Council drafted the Code of Journalistic Ethics (Amended and revised in 2008) – www.presscouncilnepal.org

Every news should be factual. It should have proof, evidence and the journalists should be able to ensure this. They should also know the impact of the news that can come forth disregard of its nature. In this context, some of the participants shared their experiences, which were evaluated jointly by other participants and the resource persons. Mr. Bista further stated that journalism is a difficult field and we should not take it lightly. Likewise, appreciation and trust of the citizens can be considered as the long-term achievement for every journalist. There is a huge opportunity in this sector but the fact is that we need to developed skills and knowledge to reap these opportunities. He shared with the participants a very useful saying in journalism while making news “Where there is doubt check it and again if there is doubt then simply cut it out.”

He said democracy is the most important and hardest form of government as this form allows the complete usage of civic rights by the citizens themselves. Strong practice of democracy is ensured by civic education. The effective functioning and stability of democracy is even more important then its establishment. If a country and its citizen practice democracy then it can be said that civic education is an intrinsic practice in the state. Every learning process has steps of 1) Reading 2) Observing and understanding 3) Increase in critical thinking on process of learning.



Pic 23: Mr. Mahendra Bista informing about the essential elements for news making

Participants were given the task of preparing a short news/report about the day 1 training of civic journalism for the second day of training session.

Day 2

A short recap of the day 1 was done in the second day training. The participants thanked the organizers and the resource persons for conducting the training on wider perspective of civic journalism. The participants' enthusiasm in the second day was amazing?.

Mr. Kashi Raj Dahal started the training session by explaining about federalism meaning the system of power being decentralized.

The participants were asked individually to present their previous day report. The resource persons evaluated them and gave feedback and suggestions on the news/report they had . Mr. Mahendra Bista then continued the session by giving information on essential factors of balancing a news/report, which are:

- Mentioning the source of the news
- Confirmation of data by the expert or concerned official
- Recommendation of solution/alternative after explaining the problem.
- Introduction should be specific.
- Short sound bytes
- Should be short as the international standard of report/news is 3 minutes.
- Avoid hypothetically and unclear data.
- Reasons and results of an issue are mandatory.
- If local issue is raised then local person's opinion should be included.
- Story should be balanced by keeping the opinion of both parties of the story/news.

He also shared the format of civic journalism with the participants and stated that if a news/report is created in its format then the effect of the news on the targeted group can be achieved. A civic journalist should consider the following things at the time of making news:

- Proper handling of an issue.
- Including citizen in the news making process.
- Consider the nature and complications of community and society.
- Truth and fact of news is a must.
- Change process and development issues are important.
- Civic journalism should carry a social message with the news.
- The news/report can be critical but not negative.
- Abusive language and unnecessary respective words should be avoided.
- Education, health, service, social and justice related issues should be prioritized.
- Social issues should be subject centered and not event centered.
- Citizens have to be in centre of civic journalism.
- Social dialogues should be given priority.
- Local and marginalized group should be prioritized.
- Civic journalism should make the citizens capable enough to raise questions to the system, government, and society and most importantly to themselves

Mr. Kashiraj Dahal conducted the final phase of the training where the participants were given information on the Right to Information Act 2007. He informed that under this act a citizen has the right to get the information to his/her concern that does not cause harm to the state and its agencies. Following information cannot be disclosed:

- which seriously jeopardize the sovereignty, integrity, national security, public peace, stability and international relations of Nepal.
- which directly affect the investigation, inquiry and prosecution of crimes.
- have serious impact on the protection of economic, trade or monetary interest

or intellectual property or banking or trade privacy.

- that jeopardize the harmonious relationship subsisted among various casts or communities.
- that interfere on individual privacy and security of body, life, property or health of a person.

Mr. Dahal concluded his session stating that every citizen has their rights despite of their identity and differences and it should be respected, maintained and protected. In process of making news, no journalist is allowed to ignore the rights of a person. Rights are a sensitive and important issue so they should always be taken into account at the time of news/report making and civic journalism.

In the last session, the participants were asked to present a group work (5 groups) in which they should write down issues/topics that fall under civic journalism. The issues presented by the 5 groups are listed as below:

Issues relating to civic education for making news:

- Minimum participation of women in policy making.
- Child labor
- Polygamy
- Peace and security in the local level
- Preserving culture and traditional values, resources.
- Lack of quality in education
- Improper functioning of government administration.
- Citizen being deprived of the facilities provided by the government.
- Women rights in determining the number of children.
- Citizen responsibilities towards community.
- Development Issues
- Accountability and transparency in politics.
- Gender based violence.
- Human rights and its violation.
- Economic, peace, security and employment.
- Foreign employment etc.

Mr. Mahendra Bista stated that civic journalism focuses on the development process of the



Pic 34: Group work of participants



Pic 43: Organizers, resource persons and participants group photo during the closing of the training program.

society. It urges the citizens to participate in policy making, ensures good governance, state bind by the law, regime of law, transparency, right to information, civil rights and duties and responsibilities of a citizen. He requested all the participants being involved with the different forms of media, to work in civic journalism by remaining within the code of conduct. He mentioned that journalism is a challenging field but if one is determined to move ahead then one can play a vital role in establishing a responsible and accountable state and its citizen.

Participant's evaluation on the training: All the participants expressed their gratitude towards the organizer and the resource persons. They said that the knowledge and learning they have gained during the training are very much valuable for their profession and future.

Finally, **Ms. Babita Basnet** announced the closing, expressing gratitude to the participants, resource persons and the logistic management on the successful completion of the training. She requested the participants to broaden their knowledge and skills in journalism and mentioned that MAG, FES Nepal will always be ready to give their assistance to the participants in future.