

---

# Report of a two-day Training Program on Civic Education for Women Journalists

23 -24 August, 2012

---

Organized by:

Media Advocacy Group (MAG), Kathmandu, Nepal and  
FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG (FES), Germany

---

Dhangadi, Kailali

---

## Acronyms

MAG- Media Advocacy Group

FNJ –Federation of Nepali Journalist

## 1. Introduction

Civic education is teachings concerned with self-governance. It also helps create and build public opinion and consensus at grass root resulting into rule of law. The coverage of civic education is wide. It has direct and indirect relation with democracy, nationalism, responsibility of the citizen towards country, governance, social justice, leadership and ease of safe landing of the transition stage of the country. Hence, it has to perceive as important dimension towards ensuring quality of life in the country.

Media plays a crucial role in constructing or deconstructing people's perception and belief system. Similarly, studies have shown that media reporting of civic and political events influence the ways through which people perceive, and participate in political life. In addition media can be an important bridge to fill the gap between state mechanisms and public providing important information on basic civic education as well as better coverage of public policy news. It is an effective means to bridge between state and public. Limited public understanding of civic education not only makes difficult to policymakers and state to implement policy effectively but also for citizens to make them accountable on their responsibilities. At the same time, from point of view of democratic rule of governance, media is perceived as a 'watchdog' as well as the fourth estate pillar enabling state mechanism to function effectively. Therefore, enabling and empowering media itself on various tenets of civic education and democracy is must.

Journalist are voice of voiceless and bring the issues from the grass root for broader dissemination in one hand and bring awareness of public policy to grass root level. Like other profession, participation of the women in journalism their stability is weak. Public opinion should have voice of the marginalized groups such women, dalits and minority. So, women journalists are effective means for bringing the voice and issues of voiceless group including women of a family. By nature, they also can be crucial for making aware the voiceless women about the public policy. On the other hand, most of the times women journalists have been sidelined from covering civil and political issues because of gender discrimination prevailing in media sector. They are mostly given the work of covering soft issues related to entertainment, glamour and the like. Therefore, this hampers their knowledge and competence as informed and aware media professionals as well as limits their understanding on the democratic role of media.

Considering the above facts, Media Advocacy Group (MAG) in support of FES, Germany organized two days workshop programme to orient women journalists of far western region on the topic to generate greater understanding and awareness on civic education. This initiation is crucial step where the women journalists are informed about the concept of civic education, civic education in media and the role of media in civic education. The civic education to women journalists definitely contribute for effective and professional presence of women journalist in the landscape and reduce rapid turnover of the women journalist.

### 1. Objectives

Following are the specific objectives of the programme are;

- Raise greater civic consciousness among women journalists about the democratic role of the media;
- Enhance professional competence of women journalists to enhance their analysis and reporting capacity of civic affairs from remote areas of the country; and
- Enhance coverage of civic news among various media.

## **2. Activities**

### **Day One**

#### **2.1 Opening session**

The programme was inaugurated informally by delivering of the speech by resource person of the training and key stakeholders and donors as below;

**Ms. Babita Basnet, President of Media Advocacy Group (MAG) and resource person of the training** informed the participants that MAG was organizing training program in a different topic with different roles across the country. Introducing MAG, she informed that the organization have been working n advocacy, media and management. MAG particularly works on issues related to women’s as well as issues related to elements of nation building. MAG has made efforts to run a campaign on right to information to align with Right to Information Act to enhance better access of right holders to service and facilities from state’s service providing mechanisms. She also clarified the objective of the training as building conceptual clarity of civic education among the participants (women journalist) to enable them with local cases. She expressed her strong confidence that the training will contribute to women journalist in bringing civic news in reporting in future which in turn strengthen their capacity.

**Mr. Hemanta Poudel of President Press Chautari Nepal** expressed his gratitude for organizing such training in the far west region. He informed that the journalism situation is not very good in terms of quality of the journalists and information they bring. There are very few programs dedicated to skill development of journalist and it is very difficult to motivate women for the purpose because of conservative nature of Nepalese society and deep rooted gender based discrimination and exiting gender architecture. Most of the journalists have not even undertaken basic journalism training and there is lack of skilled human resource. Both basic and advanced journalism training is required in the region.

**Mr. Chandra Dev Bhatta of FES** introduced his organization as a German Political Foundation established in the name of the first elected President Germany in 1924. FES is working in more than 100 countries around the world and it started in Nepal in 1996 with four main themes; peace, freedom, unity and equality. FES also works on social justice, labor and provides scholarships to student for better education. He said that it provides support to the state without imposing based on demand and need. He added that democracy can only be strong if both the stronger and the weaker and the rich and the poor classes can be taken forward in coordinated effort. This is the point where civic education can play a very important role. Issues can only be solved if the state is strong. However it will take some time to reach the point and state.

**Mr- Umid Bagchand, Local Journalist** said that the topic for the training is very contextual and it will make differences in the professionalism of the participants. However, there is a need for basic journalism training for women journalists which also enable them to pick up civic issues for media coverage. Nepal Press Institute (NPI) and Antenna Foundation have provided training in this line but

there is still a need for skill development training to journalist. Most of the women journalists are working in radio and print media but the number is very low. Such type of the training not only increase the number civic reporting but also help to reduce fast turnover of the women journalist from the profession.

**Mr. Mahendra Bista, Former General Secretary of Federation of Nepalese Journalist (FNJ)** stated that the two-day discussion in such training on civic education will focus on different ways of entering journalism. He added that Journalists have a huge responsibility in building the society and the nation. In this background, they need training and skill development to develop their quality. Generally, journalists only focus on running after incidents and collecting reactions. They should focus more on issue based journalism and not only inform but also educate. Journalists must look through an angle and question the contributions made to the society. Civic affairs is such affairs to be brought by journalists as one of the issue to contribute national building.

**Mr. Dil B. Chhatyal** central committee member of FNJ said that civic education is very important and contextual topic and he hoped that the women journalists would greatly benefit from the training. Journalism has just developed in the last decade and journalists still face security challenges. There is a lack of skilled human resource particularly among women journalists. There is a need to increase women's participation in this sector by developing their skills.

**Mr. Karna Shah** former president of FNJ Kailali Branch said that in the last 5 to 6 years, the number of journalists has increased, media houses have developed, mass communication studies has been established but the training part has decreased drastically. In the past, basic and skilled journalism training had been provided but now it is very less which has created a vacuum. The present media trend is to report only on easy news or event centered reporting. Media plays a very important role to link the state with citizens and civic education plays an important role in this context.

## **2.2 Technical Session**

The technical session consisted of various forms of presentation ranging from speech, two-way discussion on elements and context of the civic education and power point presentation followed by plenary discussion.

Mr Chandra Dev Bhatta of FES is the resource person to deliver speech on the technical session. He questioned the participants on their level of understanding on civic education. He highlighted the importance of women to join print media. He informed and justified that civic education is very important to strengthen the democracy and it is linked to all activities of the society.

He added that Abraham Lincoln has described democracy as 'by the people, for the people, of the people'. Democracy provides citizens the rights and responsibilities for people's rule. Citizens must know their rights, responsibilities, knowledge and skills since they are the source of state power and this power mechanism is used by representatives elected by the people. If the citizens are aware of different perspectives, development of people's poll and politics, they will be more informed and they can take part in discussions and developing policies for the benefit of the society. Furthermore,

Democracy and human rights are deeply interlinked. Both give value to freedom, equality and people's self respect. The United Nations has given validity to 5 kinds of human rights. In 1966, the UN established two types of conventions on human rights for securing the rights. They are: International Convention on Citizen and Political Rights and International Convention on Economical, Social and Cultural Rights. Nepal has already ratified both these conventions. All the five different human rights are dependent on each other. Human rights and rule of law are foundations of democracy. Citizens can only use their freedom if the government is bound by the law and is committed towards the preservation of human rights. The judiciary system must be independent and impartial. Another important factor is the distribution of power in the various bodies of the state.

Ms Babita Basnet, Resource Person delivered a power point presentation on Civic Education for Women Journalists for conceptual clarity. The presentation is followed by an interaction with the participants. The presentation mainly covered following points;

### **Civic Education**

- It is a part of education where citizens are made aware of how to effectively participate in the public life in the democratic context.
- It provides the required knowledge, skills and makes the citizens responsible towards their duties.
- Civic education is an essential part of strengthening of democracy.
- It is a long process which makes us realize our responsibility towards the nation and our social and family responsibilities. Along with this, it helps to promote feelings of respect amongst each other.

- It provides information on the roles and responsibilities and the rights of a citizen.
- Civic education promotes and protects freedom therefore it is linked with democracy.
- Civic education is an ongoing process.
- The main aim of civic education is to unite the nation and promote nationalism. It makes the citizens loyal towards the nation by flowing messages that nationalism can only be one whereas personal and group wise interests of people may be different.
- Civic education increases courage among citizens and provides education on sacrifice and contributions for the country.
- It makes the citizens think what they gave for the country and not what the country gave for them.
- It makes the citizens answerable towards the state.
- It teaches the kind of values that we need to integrate while fulfilling the responsibilities of public life.
- It provides education on participating in elections to select representatives to run the state, upholding the laws, provide support in the activities of the state, provide support in collecting required resources, respect others rights, provide information on contextual incidents, respect human rights, maintain cordiality with all, answerable to family, etc.
- Civic education does not require any formal schools or colleges; it can be done through various organizations or the informal sector.
- There is no age bar for civic education; it can be taken by people of any age.
- The topics and perspective of civic education can be different as per the country. Citizenship, nationalism perspectives, Security Council, foreign policy may be different.
- The topics can be different as per the time and the situation. For example, in the present context of Nepal Constitution Assembly, right to self decision, federalism, national consensus, etc., are important topics.
- Social, economical, political, cultural, gender, regional as well as all other topics are topics on civic education.
- Civic education was massively conducted during Constituent Assembly elections in South Africa, Fiji, Ethiopia, Uganda.
- Civic education has to be linked with citizen's activities.
- It is particularly linked with group benefit.
- There is a great relation between democracy and civic education. Both respect their need for each other and provide responsibilities to the rights users.
- In the context of Nepal, 100 years back Bajhangi King Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh had started a campaign that education should be useful for life and it should help run the life. He had taken three kinds of *Dalits* (leather, cloth and iron) to Kathmandu for training.



- The first editor of Gorkhapatra, Jaya Prithvi Bahadur Singh is also the writer of a book entitled “Civic Education” and he is probably the first person to write such a book.
- In the year BS 2008, Laxmi Prasad Devkota wrote a book entitled “Citizen Philosophy” with the objective of providing civic education but it was published a long time after by Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

### **Challenges:**

Ms Basnet pointed following challenges to be overcome to make civil journalism effective and bring the civic affairs in media coverage resulting into realization of rights and responsibility of right holders;

- The trend to give higher priority to individual’s benefit rather than a group
- Frustration among youths of the present situation of the country and the politics
- Even those who are in the parties give priority to the parties rather than the nation (the feeling of revenge among the youth in the parties which has built tension rather than solidarity)
- Lack of feeling of reconciliation among political parties and its impact

**Mr. Mahendra Bista** conducted a discussion and interaction with the participants. The interaction focused mainly on the following topics:

### **Civic Education and Role of Media**

In general, civic journalism is citizen focused journalism. In this process, citizens are directly pulled into the reporting process. News, articles or reports based on information on how the citizens present their problems and solutions that they perceive are automatically civic journalism.

This is important part of journalism practiced in many countries of the world. This practice is in an increasing trend in developing countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. Gradually, it is also being practiced in Nepal. It is participatory journalism and many people perceive it as community journalism or public journalism.

It is also known as democratic journalism. Similar to democracy where the main focus is the people or the citizen, the main focus of civic journalism is also people. Governance will be sustainable and effective if people’s participation in policy development and implementation processes is taken as important part. Similarly, civic journalism demands citizen’s participation not only in the topic of the news but even in the news development process. Journalism ties citizens to democracy and brings benefit of the democracy to the citizens. Civic journalism is required in our country as since commercial journalism mainly focus on benefit making and will have less priority to the benefit of the society.

The question arises whether citizen journalism and civic journalism is the same or there are some differences. There is much confusion among people since both are known as citizen journalism in Nepali. On the basis of the topics, there are many similarities in both and again if you study deeply there are

fundamental differences. The main difference is that all the processes of collection, reporting, analysis, writing and editing of news and information is done by commercial journalists in civic journalism whereas citizens themselves conduct this exercise in citizen journalism. Therefore, citizen journalism is also known as unedited version of citizen's voices. Many also call it the practical exercise of the freedom of expression.

The medium of news transmission can also be different. Mostly, civic journalism practice is done through the mainstream media whereas citizen journalism is practiced through alternative media. But, at times both kinds of practices are done through both the media.

### **Journalism Today**

Today we call journalism the voice of the voiceless, support of the helpless, reflect current status and dynamics of the society and carrier of change. We have read and taught that journalism is social engineering. Journalism has important role in bringing democracy in the country, nurturing democracy, institutional development and making realized the fruits to the people. Journalism is taken the fourth pillar of the state and plays role of watchdog.

He raised many questioned on present trend of media coverage. In reality, are we there? 'Have we been able to fulfill our roles? Maybe we are bringing out the voices of the ones who have the voice? May be we are the means of the haves and not have not? and maybe we are barriers to transformation. Let us review and analyze the nature, trend and topics of the reporting, stories and interviews that we do all day during news collection and reporting. We find that same speeches, from same leaders, the same meetings, the same assembly, same incidents and same accidents are repeating. In addition, media and journalist raise same questions, the same accusation, the same threats, the same battering. Negative news and the continuity of the same accusations is helping to bring civic affairs of the citizen. Where are the voice of citizen in landscape of journalism and reporting? What do they want? What are their interests and needs? Have we given any thought to this?

A single Constitution has given us pain for the past four years and it has not yielded any fruit and where is it going now? Do we have the answers to this? Forget the politics, can our journalism provide answers to this? Citizen journalism starts from here. Citizen journalism teaches us to put forward many questions and to identify their answers.

### **Today's Trend**

In reality, there is no difference in the general trend of today's journalism despite of fast growing media technologies. Today, media and technology has taken a great leap from the past. There has been massive expansion of print media, radio, television and digital media. The world can be reached not only through computer keyboards but also through mobile screens. Social media is coming up in such a way that it is near to displacing mainstream journalism. The latest general practices are format, layout, display, colorful calaver, fast speed, etc. The number, reach and impact of media have also increased.

Similarly, the number of journalists has increased. There is respect and means to live life. There are big organizations and attraction of capital in media sector. However, there are no grounds for satisfaction when we look at the news trend with no much diversification of the contents.

A review of today's editorial policy shows that priority is given to crime, entertainment and sexual topics rather than topics of public concern. Our priority has become sensational rather than sensitive, business rather than economy, fashion and lifestyle rather than citizen's grievances, individual rather than society or institutions, market rather than benefits of the general people and simple rather than accurate news.

As a result, our trust is decreasing, power is declining, impact is weakening and our journalism is not touching the people's hearts and internal dynamics between state and citizen.

### **Today's Situation**

Today we are in a democratic setup. People brought big transformation and we are in the process of institutionalizing outcome of change. Republican setup has still to take its roots. There are talks about state restructuring. There is a need to set up a system. The peace process is yet finalized. Although, the Constituent Assembly was dissolved without any achievement once, there is still a need to write the constitution through people's mandate. But, the questions are how, who and when remain unanswered. In democracy, each individual has the right to information. Information plays a very important role in democracy. In some sense, there is press freedom. Citizens have the freedom to expression. It is expected that these will be more systematic in the coming days. But, this will have no meaning if these are not used in an accurate manner for specific objectives and for accurate results.

Democracy does not only come with rights, it also brings responsibilities. Have we been able to fulfill the responsibilities that come along with the practice of freedom? Citizen journalism has been established to understand this.

### **Today's Need**

The need for today is responsible journalism and this is only possible through citizen journalism through covering issues of citizens' concern. In reality, citizen journalism is not only a new mode of journalism, it is a value system established with the development of separate philosophy and journalism. It teaches us that journalism is not only the presentation of news or incidents; it is also fulfilling the responsibility towards the people by identifying the problems and providing solutions. Citizen journalism provides direction to the society. It empowers the citizens and community and helps the weak. It supports in mainstreaming the marginalized groups and community. It makes us understand that citizens are not only consumers of commodities and resources; they are actually the main focus of self governance. It helps people to participate in democratic systems and processes. It acts as a bridge between the government and the citizens.

Citizen journalism increases public awareness and fulfils the role of mode of transformation. It helps to increase the direct participation of people in the policy development and implementation process. It is

also the means to fulfill the responsibilities of journalism by providing speed to democratization, good governance, human development, etc., and to promote responsibilities, transparency, empowerment, etc. It provides a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. It is an exercise of journalism as well as a campaign. Therefore, we can say that citizen journalism is the need for today.

### **Exercise and Concept**

There can be various practical methods to integrate citizen journalism within current trend. Priority of country and media could be different depending upon the situation. Nevertheless, many practices and concepts can be common which can be taken as a guideline for integration of civil journalism.

- Understand your own community and the citizen's life and try to visualize them as topic for news.
- Give priority to the topic rather than the incident. Rather than providing too much information and statistics, look at the impact.
- While selecting the topic, pay attention to whether they can bring changes and whether they can impact the society. Indicate in the news the kind of transformation and the impact that they can bring.
- Maintain a critical perspective on the news but refrain from using abusive language.
- Include the citizen's participation in the reporting process. Select topics such as education, health, service generation, distribution system of resources, social justice, improvements in lifestyle.
- Listen to how the citizens present their problems and the suggestions they provide for the solutions and present this information as news.
- Select social topics and highlight citizen's interest in incident dominated news.
- Give priority to citizen's benefit while reporting on development and industry.
- Try to include tensions and not only conflict and also the possibilities and not only what is already determined.
- Pay attention to preservation of culture but this does not mean that superstitions should find place.
- Journalists are not a special and separate class of the society. They are a member of the society, a citizen or people. They should be unified with the people and work as their representatives.
- The reporting angle should not always be problems, it should seek solutions. Always remember that the solutions should come from the community and not from oneself.
- Let the debates always be open but do not forget that this should look for solutions and not increase the debate.
- Do not neglect the basics of citizen journalism such as democracy, freedom, social justice, etc.
- Journalists have the responsibility to unite the society and provide new concepts to the society.

- Always apply the bottom to top strategy.

Citizen journalism is actual responsible and commercial journalism. If one can integrate the issues of the community and the citizen's, one can become a successful citizen journalist. This not only provides continuity to journalism but also gives the feeling of transformation. It not only provides facilities but also gives satisfaction. All reporting, news, debates, reports, interviews, articles, pictures, scenes should have message, impact and result and this should be linked with the citizens. This will guarantee citizen journalism without looking for any other definitions.

The day first of the training was wrapped with many interaction between resource person and participants. But the Mr. Mahendra Bista requested participants of the training to find and make a story of civic news based on the learning of the first day to understand the effectiveness of the training and enabling participants to grab civic news.

### **Second Day**

Second day started from sharing of the civic news developed by the participants which was given as assignment. Mr. Bista and other resource person made critical comments on the civic news prepared presented by the participants to enhance clarity.

### **3.3 Participants Feedback**

The participants provided following suggestions in feedback session for future use:

- The participants noted that they gained much knowledge in such a short period and committed that they would be able to write better stories in future with more focus on solving problems.
- The training taught us to be more responsible towards the citizens.
- In the context of the region, there are women facing violence but their voice are not heard, there are transportation difficulties and lack of market availability for vegetables – civic journalism can play an important role in this.
- The participants stressed on the need to organize more training for women journalists.
- The participants identified the need to conduct a longer period training and basic journalism training to women journalists.

### **3.4 Recommendation**

Based on the experience of entire training in Kailali and previous experience, MAG recommends following points for future reference;

- Basic journalism training is necessary for women journalist

- Further orientation to women journalist in various topics including civic education is important step to consolidate the current achievement
- Civic education being linked with various aspects, other training on civic education including features writing can be essential asset
- The current trainee should further coaching, follow of their progress on civic education quarterly for one year to develop them as expert of the region

**Annex 1: List of the participants**

**Annex2: Photograph**

**Annex3: Media Clippings**