

The Asia Foundation
Strengthening Advocacy and Local Government Accountability
CA No. 367-A-00-01-00130-00

PROGRESS REPORT
October – December 2002

Summary of Program Activities in Current Reporting Period:

- **Follow-up advocacy training to lead group members**
- **District-level participatory workshops**
- **Local-level linkage activities**
- **National-level linkage workshop**
- **Reflective workshop**
- **Inter-district exchange visits**
- **Preparatory activities for joint brainstorming with local government**
- **Public hearings**
- **Research on Public Interest Litigation (PIL)**

Follow-up advocacy training to lead group members

Following basic lead group members' (LGM) training and a review of their performance, Pro Public and INSEC organized further follow-up lead group training in all four districts focusing on problem-solving, good governance issues, natural resource management, and effective advocacy. Pro Public trained 249 lead group members and representatives of FECOFUN and NFIWUAN in three-day sessions during November and December 2002. INSEC trained 160 women lead group members in two-day sessions during December 2002.

District-level participatory workshops

Pro Public and INSEC each conducted one-day district-level participatory workshops to share and discuss assessments originating from stakeholders' experiences with the project to date. In addition to lead group members and district watchdog committee members, representatives of government line agencies, NGOs, INGOs, and local government participated in these workshops. Pro Public organized four workshops each in November and December 2002 that were attended by 323 and 276 participants respectively. INSEC organized five workshops in October, November, and December 2002 with 182 participants. These workshops not only identified issues of common interests and developed future strategies for joint action but also improved interactions between participating users/women and key government agencies. While the workshops were structured to focus on internal governance issues within federations/coalitions, some were successful in eliciting written commitments of support from government agencies and authorities that participated.

Local-level linkage activities

Given the important role of media in advocacy and local government accountability, journalists have consistently been invited to participate in or observe the training, participatory workshops, and interactive meetings organized by Pro Public, Forest Action, and INSEC. In addition to these standing invitations to the media, Pro Public organized interactive meetings with local media and idea shapers to feed experiences and success stories from the project. The resulting media coverage has begun

contributing to raising awareness in local communities. INSEC organized five workshops in September and December involving a total of 160 participants from media, local NGOs, and PIL groups. INSEC-led coalitions also organized a 'Meet the Press' event in Saptari district to encourage the press to champion women's movements at the grassroots.

National-level linkage workshops

Fostering linkages from local to national levels is an important project activity planned for the articulation of local-level issues in national policy debate. This activity was started in November by INSEC and December by Pro Public, who each organized national-level linkage workshops. Pro Public's workshop had 62 participants, including district and national representatives of FECOFUN and NFIWUAN, watchdog committee members, and representatives from Ministry of Local Development, Department of Irrigation, Department of Forestry, INGOs, NGOs, journalists, and resource persons. INSEC's workshop had 62 participants, including the Assistant Minister of Women, Children, and Social Welfare; and representatives from Beyond Beijing Committee, Sancharika Samuha, Women Security Pressure Groups, Alliance Against Trafficking of Women and Children, National Network against Trafficking of Girls, National Human Rights Commission, National Women's Commission, district-level women's coalitions watchdog committees, and INGOs.

Reflective Workshop

Forest Action organized a Reflective Workshop in November 2002 to share experiences of the project to date and build forward-looking strategies as a single group. The agenda for the workshop included critical reflection on events and processes relating to the project and conceptual orientation on monitoring, adaptive management, and action learning. The workshop also dealt with appropriate methodologies to collect PMP data. A total of 33 project and staff members of Pro Public, INSEC, and Forest Action participated. The workshop, above all, was seen as beneficial in improving cooperation and coordination among the implementing partners.

Inter-district exchange visits

Organized by INSEC in October and Pro Public in November, inter-district exchange visits provided opportunities for users/women's groups to replicate best practices vis-à-vis advocacy actions, internal governance, alliance building, and institutional development and strengthening of federations/coalitions. Pro Public organized visits for 246 participants in all four districts, while INSEC organized a two-day exchange meeting for 120 women representing all target VDCs in Lahan, Siraha district. Field officers and social mobilizers organized and facilitated the visits between groups.

Preparatory activities for joint brainstorming with local government

In preparation for joint brainstorming meetings in the second year of the project, Pro Public finalized their study on "Review of Existing Policies, Acts, and Regulations Relating to Forest, Irrigation, and Local Self-Governance in Nepal". The review scrutinized existing rules, regulations, and procedures that are problematic to practice at the local level. Using this review, Pro Public will now disseminate the findings at the field level and explore avenues for improved partnerships between federations and the local government.

Public hearings

Watchdog committees constituted by INSEC for women's issues in all four districts conducted situation analysis, data collection, data analysis, planning, and analysis of government budget and programs for women. The committees held a total of 21 regular meetings in the four districts, and are continuing to collect data from their respective DDC and VDC offices. Two public hearings were conducted on the basis of these analyses in Saptari and Siraha districts.

Research on Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

All district-level women's coalitions are beginning to document and research potential PIL issues. The coalition from Dhanusha district is already planning a PIL on behalf of victims of violence perpetrated by accusations of witchcraft.

Issues and Challenges during the period:

- All public hearings could not be held as scheduled. While INSEC could organize two public hearings in two districts, Pro Public postponed the public hearings they support to early in the second year.

Correction:

- Watchdog committees constituted by INSEC for women's issues consist of seven to eight members and not five members as reported earlier.