

The Asia Foundation
Strengthening Advocacy and Local Government Accountability
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PROGRESS REPORT
April-June 2003

Summary of Program Activities in Current Reporting Period:

- **Reflective workshops**
- **Refresher training to social mobilizers**
- **Community meetings**
- **Advocacy follow-up training to Lead Group members**
- **Self monitoring**
- **Orientation/training to federation/coalition district chapters**
- **District-level participatory workshops for service providers**
- **District-level FECOFUN workshops**
- **Public hearings**
- **Feedback to media and policy makers**
- **District-level participatory workshops**
- **Local-national linkage workshop**
- **Review and action plan development workshops**
- **Issues and concerns**
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Reflective workshops

The project's reflective workshops have become a crucial method to review and modify ongoing field activities and to identify and discuss issues and strategies of implementation. As agreed in the last reflective workshop, Forest Action organized a workshop each for Pro Public and INSEC in the third week of May. The two-day workshops were conducted in Siraha, with a total of 41 participants from the three partner NGOs. Participants reviewed project activities, discussed and resolved problems, discussed project success indicators and measurement, and brainstormed facilitation skills needed for upcoming workshops. Two major issues discussed during the workshop were: whether to encourage advocacy for or against landless households living adjacent to forest areas, and whether or not to facilitate the formation of separate user groups by dividing forest area according to wealth categorization. The final recommendation from the floor was to follow the principle of social justice, i.e. to be partial to the weaker section of the community, whenever such issues arise.

Refresher training to social mobilizers

Following the Forest Action-led refresher TOT for master trainers in the last reporting period, Pro Public and INSEC separately organized follow-up training to their 24 social mobilizers in May. Facilitated by the master trainers, the training imparted skills and techniques that are necessary to conduct community meetings (see below) with disadvantaged groups for social mobilization and effective advocacy. The training was participatory, with learning inputs from the project's first year.

Community meetings

Community meetings were designed as one way to encompass and involve additional users groups, particularly women and the disadvantaged, in the project. Facilitated by social mobilizers, the one-day community meetings focused on natural resource management, groups' sustainability, their participation in public affairs, identification of issues for public action, building alliances, and conducting public action through larger groups. Pro Public organized a total of 162 community meetings involving 3,395 participants (1710 were women) from 77 VDCs in the four project districts. Similarly, INSEC's organized 183 community meetings, with 2,982 participants (2,899 were women) from the four project districts.

Advocacy follow-up training to Lead Group members

Also following on the Forest Action-led refresher TOT for master trainers in the last reporting period, Pro Public and INSEC separately organized follow-up advocacy training to the Lead Group members (LGMs) and representatives from FECOFUN, NFIWUAN, and district-based women's coalitions in May. The three-day training had 126 forest, 109 irrigation, and 140 women LGMs. Forest Action reported that the contents of the training were found to be highly relevant especially because they sought to provide practical insights on good governance, people-centered advocacy, and systematic planning of actions.

Self monitoring

Self monitoring was introduced in the project as a tool to promote action learning at the grassroots in the three thematic areas of forestry, irrigation, and women, in order to facilitate people-centered advocacy that is stays relevant. In addition, self monitoring also encourages target groups to measure the success of their actions as a unit. Forest Action developed and piloted the tool with all three types of target groups before providing it to Pro Public and INSEC social mobilizers at a workshop in May. The workshop included concepts of action learning, implementation of learning, and reflection on their actions to maximize learning. This will lead to a process of self-assessment that encourages groups to consolidate their capacity to question and even challenge existing power structures in society, and to ensure equity and good governance within and outside the groups. Self monitoring has been particularly effective with rights-based advocacy endeavors, as it helps identify advocacy issues, build ownership, and mobilize people. Social mobilizers are now continually holding community meetings to pass on self-monitoring skills to the target groups.

Orientation/training to federation/coalition district chapters

The first year of the project focused on strengthening lead groups to bring up issues from the grassroots level. Second year activities have expanded that focus to qualitatively link lead groups to the district-chapters of federations/coalitions through advocacy capacity building. This part of the project's strategic approach helps the transmission and amplification of grassroots issues to the appropriate platforms at each level of public action. Pro Public and INSEC organized a one-day orientation/training workshop to the district chapters of forest, irrigation, and women's federations/coalitions in all four districts in May. A total of 219 representatives from federations and 141 women from women's coalitions participated in the training, which also included some central committee members of federations. In addition to highlighting project components and progress and the rights and responsibilities of federations/coalitions towards their member groups, the

workshop synthesized the lead group training materials with special focus on advocacy skills and future strategies of federation/coalitions. Each orientation/training session came up with federations/coalitions' advocacy action plans for the following few months. The master trainers facilitated this activity.

The most significant outcome of this activity was the formation of NFIWUAN chapters in Saptari and Siraha districts. Prior to this workshop, Pro Public had been working directly with the irrigation systems in these districts because of the absence of district chapters. The district chapter committees are represented by the same systems that are lead groups under this project.

District-level participatory workshops for service providers

In April and May, Forest Action organized a one-day participatory workshop in each of the four project districts to begin to build partnerships between service providers and civil society groups. The workshops explored the possibility of more effective coordination among different service providing organizations at the district level. The workshops also brainstormed the ways to appropriately deal with issues and demands that are come from citizen groups. The participants concluded that there were gaps and problems in delivering services effectively and efficiently, partly due to the increase in demands and lack of commensurate government capacity to address them. All agreed that efforts should persist to devolve authority, especially to the community-based institutions, in order to help service providers cope. A total of 107 representatives of government agencies, NGOs, journalists, and networks participated in these workshops.

District-level FECOFUN workshops

In order to foster and improve working relationships between forests users groups and FECOFUN's district and national chapters, Forest Action organized three two-day workshops in three of the project districts (Dhanusha, Saptari, Sarlahi) in April-May. [The workshop in Siraha was postponed due to schedule conflict with FECOFUN's internal meetings. It is now scheduled in third week of July.] It was agreed in these workshops that there are plenty of opportunities for FECOFUN to reach out to the users groups, identify issues together, assist users groups in securing fundamental rights from the government, ensure rights of the poor are not violated, women and marginal groups have equal access to resources, and act together to achieve the common goal of protecting the interests of forest users. The workshops provided some basic conceptual elements such as fundamental issues in the target districts, principle of social justice, governance, difference between issues and problems [all issues are not problems, *per se*], problem framing, and so on, which were deemed very important in improving the relationship between users and their representative associations. The workshops helped bring a change in FECOFUN executives' perception and produced a commitment to review their conceptual understanding of democratic representation and extant working strategies, so as to be more effective. The workshops had a total of 113 FECOFUN executives and users groups' representatives as participants.

Public hearing

In May, the watchdog committee of Dhanusha district conducted a public hearing on "Transparency of Janakpur Municipality and Gender Sensitive Budget Allocation." A total of 41 participants attended the hearing. The watchdog committee's investigative

report on the Janakpur municipal budget was disseminated on the occasion. All local government bodies and agencies and civil society groups were represented at the hearing.

Feedback to media and policy makers

In Dhanusha district, INSEC conducted an interaction program between local journalists, political activists, and representatives from government bodies and agencies. A total of 26 participants attended the program in May to discuss media, political, and government support to advance women's issues.

District-level participatory workshops

In June, Pro Public organized a participatory workshop in each of the four project districts. Of 268 participants in these workshops, 135 represented the forest federation (FECOFUN) while 133 represented irrigation federation (NFIWUAN). The four INSEC-led participatory workshops included 183 participants representing women's coalitions, women's lead groups, government agencies, and local NGOs. Participants discussed and prioritized advocacy and internal governance issues and actions. The content of the INSEC-led workshops also included strategies for sustaining women's coalitions and soliciting cooperation from local government.

Local-national level workshops

INSEC conducted a national-level interactive workshop on 'Present Legal Instruments on the Minimization of Dowry System and Its Remedies' in early June. A total of 61 participants including representatives from local and national NGOs working on human rights, national media persons, policy advocates, and women rights activists attended the workshop. During this workshop, two actual cases from the project districts were discussed in the presence of the two dowry victims. The cases and the presence of the victims showed the stark contrast between legal provisions for protection of actual victims and practice in real life, thus provoking an interesting debate among the policy advocates and activists present.

Review and action plan development workshops

A one-day workshop was organized for both Pro Public and INSEC-led watchdog committee members in June to review committee progress and develop an action plan for sustained committee action in the future.

Issues and concerns

Projects dealing with complex issues such as governance, citizenship, and resource management (in the context of livelihoods) require substantial investments of time and efforts to show results. After considerable field-level efforts in the first six quarters of the project, partner NGOs are now able to show measurable, exciting results, some that are beginning to exceed project targets. The progress made within, between, and among lead and other groups, district chapters of federations/coalitions, watchdog committees, local government, and media must be maintained if results are to endure and have multiplicative effect. Going into the final quarter of the second year, this is a pressing concern for the Foundation and NGO partners, lead groups, and local supporters of this project.

Project activity chart

Events	Number of events	Conducted by
Objective 1:		
Reflective workshops	2	FA
Refresher training to social mobilizers	2	PP, IN
Community meetings	345	PP (162), IN (183)
Advocacy follow-up training to LGM	2	PP, IN
Self-monitoring workshops	1	FA
Orientation/training to federation/coalition district chapters	8	PP (4), IN (4)
District-level participatory workshops with service provider	4	FA
District-FECOFUN workshops	3	FA
Feedback to media and policy makers	1	IN
District-level participatory workshops	8	PP (4), IN (4)
Local-national linkage workshop	1	IN
Additional meetings with stakeholders	v	All
Objective 3:		
Public hearing	1	IN
Review and action plan development workshops for watchdog committees	2	PP, IN

All: The Asia Foundation, Pro Public, Forest Action, and INSEC

PP: Pro Public

FA: Forest Action

IN: INSEC