

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

PROGRESS REPORT
July - September 2002

Summary of Program Activities in Current Reporting Period:

- **Baseline survey**
- **Lead Group Members (LGM) training**
- **Reflective workshop**
- **Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting**
- **District-level partnership meetings**
- **District-level participatory workshops**
- **Media linkage**
- **Preparatory activities for joint brainstorming with local government**
- **Public scrutiny**

Baseline survey

Following a two-day research training session, Pro Public completed the baseline survey for forest and irrigation users groups in a total of 32 VDCs in July. INSEC, the partner for women's groups, completed a one-day orientation in July and completed the baseline in 20 VDCs in August. The survey methodology, designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, was developed in consultation with the Foundation. In addition to users groups, the baseline survey targeted other stakeholders such as the general public, government line agencies, women elected leaders, and representatives from the district chapters of the Federation of Community Forest Users Groups in Nepal (FECOFUN) and the National Federation of Irrigation Water Users Associations in Nepal (NFIWUAN). The baseline data is being analyzed and draft reports prepared.

Lead Group Members (LGM) training

In July, Pro Public completed a five-day advocacy training workshop for lead group members. A total of 231 representatives of FECOFUN and NFIWUAN and 16 social mobilizers from the four program districts attended the training. In August, INSEC completed LGM training for 119 lead group members from four districts.

Reflective workshop

In order to foster continued learning and common understanding of the project and its goals among all partner NGO staff, Forest Action organized a three-day reflective workshop on August 10-12 in Siraha district. Project staff from INSEC, Pro Public, Forest Action, and the Foundation attended the workshop, which focused on sharing field experiences, planning activities earlier postponed, devising improved advocacy actions, and addressing challenges such as the absence of representative local government. Participants viewed the workshop as valuable for improving field implementation and for enhancing cooperation and coordination between the field-based staff of partner NGOs.

Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting

In a PSC meeting organized on August 27th at the Foundation office, partners discussed and revised the implementation schedule in order to implement all activities postponed earlier. They also discussed the details of reports due to USAID in October 2002.

District-level partnership meetings

Pro Public organized four district-level partnership meetings in late August. The purpose of these meetings was to acquaint government line agencies, local authorities, journalists, lawyers, NGOs, other key stakeholders, and FECOFUN and NFIWUAN district chapters about the project and to begin the formal process of cooperation to optimize local ownership and assistance for the project. Attended by 127 participants, the meetings helped to identify and clarify fundamental problems concerning natural resource management policy and implementation; identified key issues of common interest; and established coordination and working relations among key stakeholders. All participating organizations/agencies provided written declarations that committed them to strengthening users groups and committees, improving coordination, assisting in institutional reform, and maintaining transparency.

District-level participatory workshops

Pro Public and INSEC organized district-level participatory workshops for forest and irrigation users group members, as well as the women's coalitions. Pro Public conducted four of these workshops in the second week of September for 272 participants, while INSEC's eight workshops were conducted for 321 participants between July and September. Representatives from related line agencies were also present for interaction. Workshop participants identified problem areas and developed strategies to address them, discussed key activities and achievements following the LGM training, and decided to establish networks with stakeholders in the districts.

Media linkage

Both Pro Public and INSEC worked to improve their working relationships with local media through district-level meetings with journalists. Journalists are and will continue to be invited to all important activities conducted under this project. The improved relationship is evidenced in the comprehensive media coverage of almost all of the major activities of this project, both at local and national levels.

Preparatory activities for joint brainstorming with local government

In September, following a series of consultation meetings with experts at the national level, and with the help of a law and decentralization expert, Pro Public prepared a draft "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 in practice at the local level.

In early September, as a first step for reviewing the Local Self-Governance Act in relation to women, INSEC organized a national-level workshop in Kathmandu. Based on feedback received by individuals and representatives of organizations working on women's issues, INSEC prepared a draft agenda for brainstorming with local government in the four project districts. At the district-level, INSEC also organized eight brainstorming sessions with local government, in the presence of representatives from women's coalitions. A total of 220 people attended the brainstorming sessions.

Public scrutiny

Pro Public formed a seven-member watchdog committee in each of the four program districts. The committees are comprised of two members each from FECOFUN and NFIWUAN district chapters, one member from the Good Governance Radio Listeners' Clubs (GGRLC), and two retired government officials as advisors. A five-day watchdog committee training was conducted for 28 committee members in late September to equip them with skills necessary to conduct public scrutiny activities. These include knowledge of natural resource management issues; development-related data collection; good governance; budget analysis; and networking. The four district-level project officers present at the training highlighted the salient features of the project. The training also served as a forum to foster a relationship between committee members and the federations. Regular monthly meetings are planned for the watchdog committees, with the responsibility to record the proceedings given to the GGRLC representatives.

INSEC formed a five-member watchdog committee in each of the four program districts in August. The training for watchdog committees was conducted in September, providing skills to initiate public scrutiny relating to women's issues in local government.

Issues and challenges during the period:

- **NFIWUAN lacks district-level representation in Siraha and Saptari Districts.** To address this challenge, representatives from Kamala (Siraha) and Koshi (Saptari) irrigation systems, as members of the major irrigation systems in those two districts, were included in the LGM training. It is likely these two irrigation systems will become part of future NFIWUAN district chapters/committees.
- **Nine representatives from selected lead users groups could not attend training.** They are expected to be included in refresher training.
- **The restriction on public gatherings imposed during the national emergency hindered advocacy initiatives and limited some group and federation-level activities.**

Data collected for Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)

Performance Indicators	Indicators definition	Frequency	Achievements
Goal-level:			

<p><u>PI: 1</u></p> <p>Advocacy-generated changes in local government policies and practices related to forest, water, and women's issues</p>	<p><u>Indicator 1:</u></p> <p>5% increase in local government decisions addressing federation/coalition issues</p>	<p>Annual</p>	<p><u>Results: PI: 1</u></p> <p>% increase not available until finalization of baseline survey reports.</p> <p>Specific accomplishments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ District-level coalitions of women's groups consolidated/ formed in all four districts. ▪ Of the issues identified by groups/federations, six advocacy campaigns have already been conducted. ▪ In response to advocacy on women's leadership development training, both Local Development Office and District Development Committees committed to conduct women's leadership training in all 15 program VDCs of Siraha district. ▪ Written ten-point commitment papers received from all related line agencies to respond to forest and irrigation issues raised by users groups, committees, and federations. ▪ Users committee budget made public by one irrigation committee (Sukhthor Irrigation Committee) in Siraha district, and posted in various public places.
<p><u>PI 2</u></p> <p>Sustainable mechanisms to ensure local government accountability</p>	<p><u>Indicator 2.A</u></p> <p>Watchdog committees established</p> <p><u>Indicator 2.B</u></p> <p>3 participatory meetings per federation/coalition with local government attended by federations/coalitions or their constituent members</p>	<p>Annual</p> <p>Annual</p>	<p><u>Results: 2.A</u></p> <p>Total of eight district-level watchdog committees established: one watchdog committee each in of four districts to work on natural resource management issues, and one watchdog committee each to work on women's issues.</p> <p><u>Results 2.B</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ INSEC organized 8 participatory meetings attended by women's coalitions and representatives from government offices. ▪ Pro Public organized 8 participatory meetings attended by forest and irrigation users groups, representatives from government offices, and other stakeholders.
<p>Objective 1:</p>			

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 coalition-level advocacy campaigns conducted will help identify more issues of mutual interests ▪ 4 district-level partnership meeting conducted will help solidify women's groups and coalitions for joint advocacy ▪ 4 district-level advocacy campaigns organized by women's groups were joint advocacy campaigns by multiple groups
Objective 2:			
<u>PI: 2</u> Local development initiatives jointly planned and implemented	<u>PI: 2</u> 1 joint local development initiative planned and implemented in each district	Annual	<u>Results: 2</u> No joint local development initiatives yet. However: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National-level consultations were conducted as a first major step for joint local development initiatives ▪ Draft agendas developed for local level partnership between the federation/coalitions and local government will help in finalizing joint development initiatives ▪ Written commitments from 15 VDCs in one district received by women's groups indicates one joint development initiative by the government and women's groups at the VDC-level
Objective 3:			
<u>PI: 3</u> More transparency in government spending on forest, water, and women's issues	<u>PI: 3.A</u> 1 per federation/coalition watchdog activity (public hearings/audits) per district <u>PI:3.B</u> 3 public disclosures of government spending by each federation/coalition in each district	Annual	<u>Results: 3.A</u> No results yet. However: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 8 watchdog committees established (see result 2A above) ▪ Watchdog activities began from the fourth quarter, to be reported next quarter <u>Results: 3.B</u> No results yet. However: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In each district, one meeting took place with DDC to collect information on local development budget by women's groups/coalitions. Over-time tracking of this data will enable public disclosure.