

Press Release

{Unofficial translation of the Press release (28th June 2016) in response to the Kantipur article published on 25th June 2016}

Local Governance and Community Development Program (LGCDP) is a national framework programme of Government of Nepal which aims to strengthen local governance processes while ensuring quality and transparent services at the local level through local bodies. It is supported by 14 development partners. In the present context, whereby elected local bodies representatives have been absent for more than 13 years, the programme via its social mobilization component has been instrumental in establishing and strengthening linkage between local government and citizens. The programme has established grassroot organizations such as Ward Citizens Forum (WCF) and Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs) which has been vital in strengthening participatory planning process and contributed in poverty reduction. With the programme's support, there are altogether 7,59,568 members in 31,414 WCFs established in 3157 VDCs and 217 Municipalities. WCFs have been instrumental in identifying and prioritizing local needs, ensuring identified priorities are implemented. Likewise, the programme has established 8484 CACs in all VDCs and Municipalities comprising of 2,09,264 members who are engaged in socio economic development.

The ministry has taken various efforts to promote downward accountability. Local bodies have institutionalized public hearing and public audit by involving WCFs. Due to lack of social awareness in maintaining social harmony, community cooperation, mitigating and eradicating social evils (open defecation, child marriage, gender based violence, racial discrimination, witchhunt practices, dowry system, etc), there has been number of challenges in communities such as less school enrollment, delayed vaccinations, absence of vital events registration amongst others. In this regard, WCFs and CACs have played important role in increasing public awareness and addressing such social evils.

LGCDP is providing Rs. 6000 per annum to each WCF as logistic support which is used in buying registers, papers and markers. Similarly, in order to conduct ReFLECT sessions, CACs received a sum of Rs. 30,000 annually. Moreover, a sum of Rs. 1 lakh has been provided to 4045 CACs as one time seed grant and to support small income generation activities. Likewise, in the past two years, 3416 CACs have received 315 thousand to support small community infrastructure and income generation activities. CAC members are the only authority that is responsible to consensually decide on spending this revolving fund; deciding where and how the fund is utilized, what infrastructure support it goes to, its timeline, etc. This social mobilization process whereby large number of people are engaged in the social transformation process in deprived community and engaged in collective decision making has also been recognized as 'Silent Revolution' by a recently conducted independent study by an international agency.

The mandate of CAC formation is that it has to be established amongst the most deprived settlement within the poorest ward of the VDC, and is represented by most deprived members of that settlement - poor, women, dalits, indigenous and endangered groups. Based on approved guideline, conditional grant to CAC is directly deposited into its account by local bodies. As mentioned previously, this grant is utilized by CAC members towards small infrastructure

support and small income generation activities on mutual agreement. It is CAC members' responsibility together to choose, decide on the budget, implement, and monitor the activity.

Thus, the ministry draws serious attention towards negative comments made in various newspapers regarding the programme and its operation. Also, the newspaper quoted source to be from the Ministry is baseless, and the ministry strongly objects on reporting based on such baseless sources. The Ministry has been regularly monitoring, and conducting investigation on any irregularities reported, and necessary actions have been taken against the guilty.

Therefore, the ministry appeals all media outlets to be supportive in more constructive and productive criticism instead of publishing news that provides wrong message and creates wrong impression about the programme, and against the community institutions created by the programme that have been instrumental in socio-economic empowerment of deprived communities and their social transformation. It can also discourage organizations, development partners, service providers supporting such institutions, and especially hurt the morale of the target groups.

Chhabi Rijal
National Programme Manager
Local Governance and Community Development Programme
Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development