NATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION COMMITTEE (NEOC)

CENTRAL MONITORING MISSION REPORT

September, 2011

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Objectives: To access the effectiveness of the Voter Registration (VR) process (with the photo ID card) and role of the stakeholders to make it effective and viable in concerned districts.

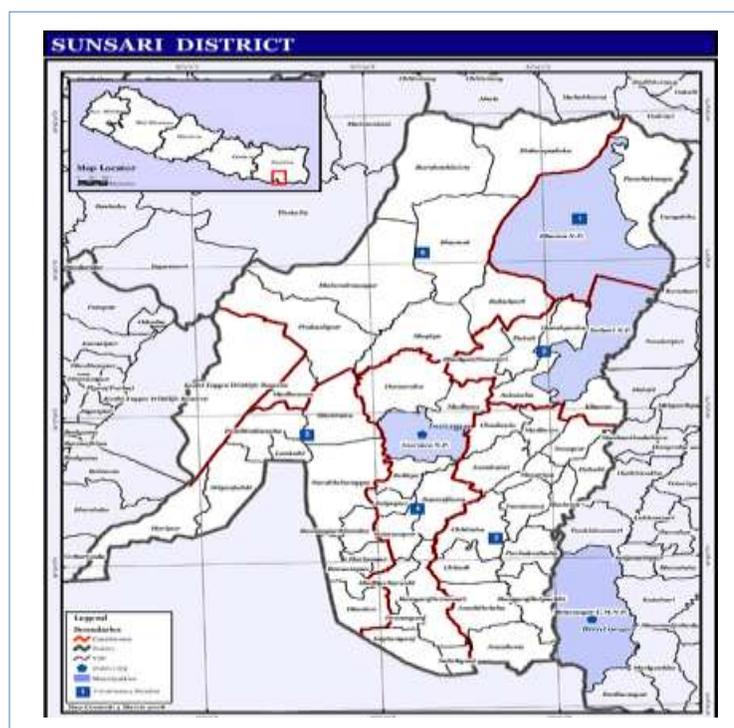**Methodology:** Collection of information and feedback through individual;

(1) Meeting with the related government officials and major political party leaders at the district headquarters.

(2) Meeting with potential voters at marginalized section of the society outside district headquarters in the concerned municipalities

(3) Meeting with members of civil society and journalists at the concerned district headquarters.

(4) Meeting with the local NEOC district observers and officials

A. Eastern Development Region – Sunsari District

Report on Voter Registration Process:

Lying at the eastern development region, Sunsari, a part of Khosi Zone is a terai-madesh based district. Major cities in Sunsari district are Dharan (the third largest city in Nepal), Itahari, Tarahara, Duhabi, and Inaruwa. The district contains 6 electoral regions, 3 municipality, 49 VDCs and 15 illakas.

NEOC is carrying out the field observation of ongoing Voter Registration (VR) with photograph in the district through its observers. In this regard, the report of field monitoring performed by NEOC Central committee members is as follows.

1. Effectiveness of Voter Registration Process

In Sunsari, the VR with photograph program has been already completed (except for the continuation process, registration centers placed at the district election office, district administration office and in few ilaka offices), and the ratio in which registration need to be, is found much higher to expectation; however the figure is lower compared to CA election.

Voter Registered during 2064 CA Poll: 477973
Expected/target Registration for this time: 60% (as of 2064 CA Poll) = 286784
Registration up to date: 107.50% (as of target forecasted) = 308391

The following causes are deemed responsible for the decrease in voter registration:

- Lack of adequate information dissemination (to the target group)
- Political frustration and annoyance among the Voters
- Parties inactiveness (to sentient voters and manage to make their registration)
- Lack of sufficient voter education
- Absence of public activities of CSOs
- Problem of transportation for women, senior citizens and the disabled
- Problem of language and citizenship issues
- Indifference towards registration by the voters especially residing in urban centres, etc.

2. Role of Political Parties and Civil Society

The role play of the political parties and civil society regarding the ongoing VR process seems unsatisfactory. No visible move for the dissemination of the information and mobilization of personnel regarding voter education and awareness were observed. Likewise, there have been no directions and circulars from the political parties to their cadres in this regard. Similarly, there seems almost no pro-action from the local media and nongovernmental organizations of the districts.

3. Work efficiency of the Observers

All the electoral regions of Sunsari are included in observation by the field monitors being deployed. Each observer is found doing their duty with loyalty and hardship. There have been no incidents of obstacles and disturbances form political parties and other stakeholders. However, in places with high geographical intricacy, the VR process was completed with much difficulty followed by mobilization of volunteers along with ECN Officials.

4. VR postpone and other difficulties

No stretched postponement of VR process is found in Sunsari district, except few short delay and hurdles. In Bakhauri VDC lying in the southern belt was affected with the hurdle that led damage of 4 computers and other accessories; locals blame Limbuwan based activist was responsible for the event. Similar type of obstacles was also inspected in northern VDCs where Limbuwan movement is associated. Likewiss

Madhesi groups also created disturbances in Chimini VDC concerning the citizenship and federalism issues.

Besides, due to lack of citizenship, most of the voters are far from registration. Specially, poor and disadvantaged groups are the main sufferers. So, some accused that compulsory citizenship is a deceitful act and at the same time others suggested that citizenship acquiring should be a simultaneous process. Likewise, remotely located registration centers were also the problem: about 8 registration centers were more than 5 Kilometers apart, which is against the standard guidelines of the ECN.

5. Geographical Remoteness and Access

In Sunsari district, due to geographical difficulties, many voters were found devoid of registration. In this regard, mostly *dalits*, ethnic communities, *janajatis* were found lurking behind. Some residents of far-flung VDCs need to make a whole day journey just to reach the registration centres; and this also adds a more financial burden behind physical pain and loss of time to them. Although ECN had done its best to make the easy asses for such distant dwellers, but even now it do not felt enough and more mobile teams need to be sent for the registration of the left behind.

6. Equality and Access

In the district, being registration points at far distance, elderly population, people with disabilities were found deprived of registration. In the other hand, VR process being held in the rainy season (mansoon), far-flung VDCs and most of the youth being remaining out of the country for different work related factors, etc were the prime causes for their deprivation from the registration. However, it is felt that election commission has tried its best to make the registration with equality and easy access.

Here it's worth mentioning that few people have reported language is causing a barrier in registration process- which is associated with ECN's ineffectiveness. Nepali is taught in Maitheli, e.g. in Hampur/ Shreepur VDCs. So, it is hard to make the local people aware in the matter as communication (language) gap is making barrier in information flow.

7. Local Administration and Security Agency

For the registration activity carried out in Sunsari, there has been excellent support from local administration. In most of the registration centers, often 1-2 security personnel were arranged depending upon the necessity. But further increase in security personnel was deemed necessary in some areas, as in Limbuwan where few troubles were experienced.

SUGGESTIONS:

- As voter registration is a continuous process, observation activity should be made continuous further more and voter education related awareness program should be carried out.

- There should be colossal dissemination of information regarding the importance of voter registration up to local level in local languages and using local Medias.

- Registration points should be setup in the respective places regarding civil workers, army barracks, police, and staff of different organizations and so on. Also, the centers should be lesser than 5 kilometers apart- as claimed by the ECN.

- There is a need for special action from the ECN regarding the registration of Nepali citizens living in foreign countries.

- A special campaign should be run to make the citizenship certificates' of those who do not posses it even being fulfilling the necessary criteria.

- Teams of officials from the election commission should reach every VDCs and *toles* to make the registration of every liable citizen.

- A special management is needed for the registration of *dalits, janajatis*, and ethnic communities, marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

- Management of travel facility is felt necessary in case of women (of some communities, especially Muslims), senior citizens and the disabled.

B. Central Development Region - Nuwakot & Dhanusha Districts

Nuwakot lies in the Central Development Region and comprises of one municipality, 61 VDCs, three constituencies and 13 areas. In constituency one, there are 20 VDCs, two has 23 VDCs, and three has 18 VDCs. In the voter registration process being carried out by ECN, there are a total of 110 centers namely 99 in the VDC level and 11 in the municipality.

Dhanusha, which also lies in the Central Development Region comprises of 6 constituencies, 101 VDCs and one municipality. NEOC observers are observing the VR process in the district and recently the central monitoring team consisting of NEOC officials carried out the VR observation in the district. The observation was carried out based on the checklist prepared for the mission.

Summary of the report is as follows:

1. **Effectiveness of the VR process**
    In Nuwakot district it was found that the media was informed about the VR process but the information was not sufficient. Regarding the voters, they had lost their belief from the political parties and thus the voters from the public to the elite groups have not participated in the VR process.

    Similarly, in Dhanusha district, the voter registration process was started in VDCs and municipality before the district election office issued order to begin the registration. As in Nuwakot district, people have lost their faith towards the political parties and most of them have not registered their names.

2. **Role of political parties and the civil society**
    In both Nuwakot and Dhanusha districts the political parties and civil society have not given much importance to the VR process. Similarly, the district election office has not carried out any sort of dialogue, interaction and discussions among the political party and civil society. The media,

nongovernmental organizations and other concerned stakeholders have not played a role to motivate the gene.

3. **Observers work ability**

   The observers have carried out the observation in both rural and urban VDCs along with interactions and discussions among Dalit, indigenous, janajati, slum people and minorities. Similarly, in Dhanusha district the observers have carried out observation in all the 6 constituencies and carried out interviews, interactions and group discussions among the people and concerned stakeholders.

4. **Registration postponement and other intricacies**

   In Nuwakot, no such cases were reported in connection with the disruptions caused by any political parties during the VR process. However, in the first couple of days in Dhanusha district after coming to know that citizenship was compulsory for registration, the Madesh based political parties disrupted the process in the district election office by surrounding the office seized the computer cables and wires. Later on, the disruptions decreased on the coming days and thus the VR process was successfully completed.

   In Nuwakot and Dhanusha, the citizenship issue deprived the poor, Dalits, indigenous, janajatis, minorities, third gender and marginalized groups.

5. **Geographical difficulty and accessibility**

   In Nuwakot, due to the geographical condition most of the people are deprived of registering their names in the VR process. Among the deprived are poor, Dalits, indigenous, janajaits, minorities and marginalized groups. Also due to the environmental calamity the displaced, internally displaced due to the conflict were deprived from registration.

   Similarly, in Dhanusha district too, the poor, Dalits, indigenous, janajatis, minorities and marginalized groups were deprived from the VR process. Mostly, the people residing in the remote part of Chure region such as Dalits, poor, farmers, indigenous, janajatis, marginalized groups were deprived from the process.

6. **Equality and accessibility**

   In Nuwakot and Dhanusha district the VR process was being carried out in a non discriminative manner. In the process there was less participation and involvement from the senior citizens, disabled people, poor, laborers and slum people.

7. **Local administration and security sector**

   In both the districts, there were two security personnel each in the VR centers and there were no incidents reported as such. According to the security personnel the security can be increased depending on the scenario. However, there is a need to increase the security as the existing security is not sufficient.
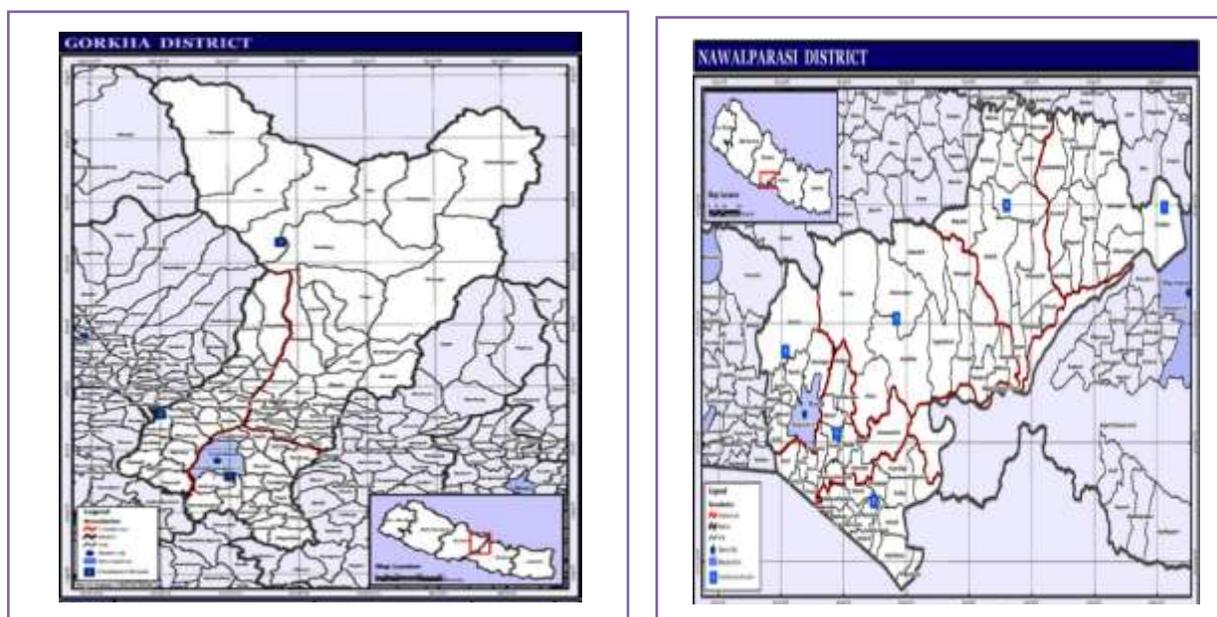
SUGGESTIONS:

- Since the citizenship is mandatory for the VR process, the citizenship providing group should be deployed in the districts and villages. The process of providing citizenship should be made transparent in the Terai districts.

- Targeted voter education in the districts should be initiated and given continuity.

- VR should be carried out once again in the VDCs named to be located in the geographically rural areas.

- In the VR process, instead of the teachers, eligible member from the civil society should be deployed.

- Local media in their local language should be motivated to inform people about importance of VR.

- Special team of collectors should be deployed in jail, police stations, camps, campus and organizations.

- Local newspapers and FMs should also be involved in the VR process.

- Special arrangements should be made for the displaced people.

C. Western Development Region – Gorkha and Nawalparasi Districts

Report on Voter Registration Process:

Lying at the western development region, Gorkha is a mountainous district whereas Nawalparasi district lies at terai. In Gorkha district there are 3 electoral regions, 1 municipality, 66 VDCs and 13 illakas. In this district, 59 VDCs and 1 municipality lies in the mountain region whereas 7 VDCs namely- Sirdibas, Bihi, loho, Prok, Samagaon, Chumchet and Chekpargadi are situated in mountain region.

Similarly, in Nawalparasi district there are 6 electoral regions, 1 municipality, 63 VDCs and 15 illakas. Geographically divided into three parts, in this district, in mountain region there are 17 VDCs, in inner terai 20 VDCs and 37 VDCs and 1 municipality are along terai region.

NEOC is carrying out the field observation of ongoing Voter Registration (VR) with photograph in these districts through its observers. In this regard, the report of field monitoring performed by NEOC Central Committee members and office staff is as follows:

1. Effectiveness of Voter Registration Process

In both of these districts, the VR with photograph program has been already completed, but ratio in which registration need to be, is found much below. The following causes are responsible for such a decrease in voter registration:

- Lack of enough information dissemination
- Political frustration and irritation in the Voters
- Lack of voter education
- Knowingly not doing registration by the voters residing in the city areas, etc.

2. Role of Political Parties and Civil Society

The role play of the political parties and civil society regarding the ongoing VR process seems a bit laxity. Likewise, there have been no directions and orders from the political parties to their cadres in this regard. Similarly, there seems almost no role play from the local media and non government organizations of the districts.

3. Work efficiency of the Observers

All the electoral regions of Gorkha and Nawalparasi are included. Each observer is found doing their duty with loyalty and hardship. There have been no incidents of obstacles and disturbances form political parties and other stakeholders. In places with high geographical intricacy, the VR process was completed with much difficulty.

4. VR postpone and other difficulties

No postponement of VR process is found in Gorkha district. But, due to lack of citizenship, most of the voters are far from registration. In case of Nawalparasi, due to obstruction made by *Madesh* centered parties, in the municipality the VR process was postponed for about 10 months and consequently no registration was carried out in the VDCs at the time.

5. Geographical Remoteness and Access

In Gorkha district due to geographical difficulties, many voters were found devoid of registration. In this regard, mostly *dalits*, ethnic communities, *janajatis* were found lurking behind. Likewise, in Nawalparasi district, Ruchang, Naram, Dadazheri, Rakuwa Daubadi and Varatipur VDCs being very remote, in these VDCs most of the dalit communities- Sharki and Bishwokarma, and ethnic-janajati communities- Magar caste population were deprived from the voter registration.

6. Equality and Access

In these districts, being registration points at far distance, elderly population, people with disabilities were found deprived of registration. In the other hand, VR process being held in the rainy season, most of the youth being remaining out of the country for different work related factors, etc were the prime causes for their deprivation from the registration.

7. Local Administration and Security Agency

In the registration activity going on in Gorkha and Nawalparasi, there has been good support from local administration. In every registration point, a total of two security personnel were arranged. But further increase in security personnel is deemed necessary. Likewise, in Nawalparasi district, there was postponing of the registration process for some time during which no interference was seen from the security agents.

SUGGESTIONS:

- As voter registration is a continuous process, observation activity should be made continuous further more.

- Voters' education related awareness program should be carried out.

- There should be colossal dissemination of information regarding the importance of voter registration up to local level in local languages and using local Medias.

- Registration points should be setup in the respective places regarding civil workers, army barracks, police, and staff of different organizations and so on

- There is a need of special action from the Election Commission regarding the registration of Nepali citizens living in foreign countries.

- A special campaign should be run to make the citizenship certificates' of those who do not posses it even being fulfilling the necessary criteria.

- Teams of officials from the election commission should reach every VDCs and *toles* to make the registration of every liable citizen.

- A special management is needed for the registration of *dalits, janajatis*, and ethnic communities, marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

D. Mid-western Development Region - Banke, Rukum and Dang Districts

NEOC recently completed its monitoring mission to the Mid-western development region to observe the voter registration process. The mission was comprised of Banke, Dang and Rukum districts. Banke consists of four constituencies, one municipality and 46 VDCs whereas Dang consists of five constituencies, two municipalities (Tulsipur and Ghorahi) along with 39 VDCs and there are two constituencies and 43 VDCs in Rukum. There are no municipalities in this district. In Dang and Rukum districts, voter registration process has been completed and the data is being processed by the ECN whereas in Banke, the process has been disrupted by the Madesh based political parties.

The central monitoring mission comprised of NEOC executive members carried out the monitoring in Banke on 19a and 20 September 2011 based on the checklist prepared for the mission. The mission report of Banke is as follows:

1. **The Effectiveness of voter registration process**
    The voter registration process in the district has not been widely covered by the local based media and newspapers in the local language. However, the central region initiated to cover the issue of VR to some extent. Since the VR process in the district has been disrupted by the Madesh based political party, the local media were not able to disseminate the information out of fear but some local NGOs were in the process to coordinate among themselves to bring out the issue. According to district election office Banke, the technical materials required for the VR process were found to be abundant and non discrimination policy was implemented in the process.

2. **Role of political parties and civil society**
    Major political parties have shown positive consent towards the VR process whereas the Madesh based parties have raised objection to the process due to the issue of citizenship. Some of their demands were citizenship should not be mandatory since all the Nepalese do not possess citizenship, in the process of registration birth registration, land ownership document (lalpoorja) or marriage certificate which portrays the identity of a person should be used as a base. According to the citizenship act 2063 (BS) based on the birth right, Nepali citizenship has been provided and those citizens have been able to receive Nepali citizenship for their children in most of the districts whereas in Banke such provision is not available and should be introduced immediately. Unless

the provision comes to effect soon, the voter registration process is unlikely to proceed based on the Nepali citizenship only.

Till date Kanchanpur, Baijapur, Khaskhus, Mahadevpuri, Binauna and Fatehpur VDCs along with a few VDCs in Nepalgunj municipality have undergone registration.

Though political parties have deployed their cadres in the local level to successfully collect data for the VR process their participation in the voter registration process do not seem to be effective enough. Similarly, the role of civil society and the media have not shown their participation at a high level however, a few organizations are effectively participating in the process. The issue of citizenship that has caused disruptions in the VR process is trying to be solved but to no avail.

3. **Observers' work ability**
   The observers are deployed in the districts in a uniform manner and have been in constant coordination with the concerned stakeholders. In the process of observation, the observers have not confronted any problems in relation with the organizations. The observers are observing and carrying out their responsibility in an effective manner and submitted reports to NEOC central office from time to time.

4. **Registration postponement and other intricacies**
   The issue of citizenship raised by the Madesh based political parties have disrupted the VR process and till date has not been able to proceed. Though the dialogues are taking place in the local level and in the regional level along with several group discussions no one has been able to solve the issue. The disruption by the party began once the Supreme Court and the ECN made citizenship mandatory for the VR process.

5. **Geographical difficulty and accessibility**
   VR process has been completed in Kanchanpur, Baijapur, Khaskhus, Mahadevpuri, Binauna and Fatehpur VDCs which are among the rural and backward districts of the region. The election registration team deployed by ECN stayed in those areas for a short period of time for the registration process. Thus, most of the people in those regions were deprived of registering their names and also being the farming season, the people were busy with their agricultural activities.

6. **Equality and accessibility**
   The VR data collection process in the 6 VDCs has been completed in a non-discriminatory manner. In the process dalit, marginalized, third gender, minorities along with other secluded groups was present.

7. **Local administration and Security sector**
   According to the district election office, two security personnel were deployed in each VDC during the registration process which was not sufficient. Based on the order of the Government of Nepal, the ECN was provided with security for the VR process. However, the security that was deployed did not interfere with the disruptions caused in the VR process based on the issue of citizenship, since this was a political matter and should be solved in the political level according to the security sector.

SUGGESTIONS

- To resolve the issue of Nepali citizenship and carry on with the VR process, there should be coordination and collaboration in the central level among the concerned stakeholders.

- Since the information of VR is only being disseminated from the central level, the initiation should be made at the local level inclusive of the electronic and print media in the local language which is widely used to make the VR process effective.

- The issue of citizenship has disrupted the VR process and disputes are taking place on the issue which needs to be solved and the observation going on the district should be given continuity.
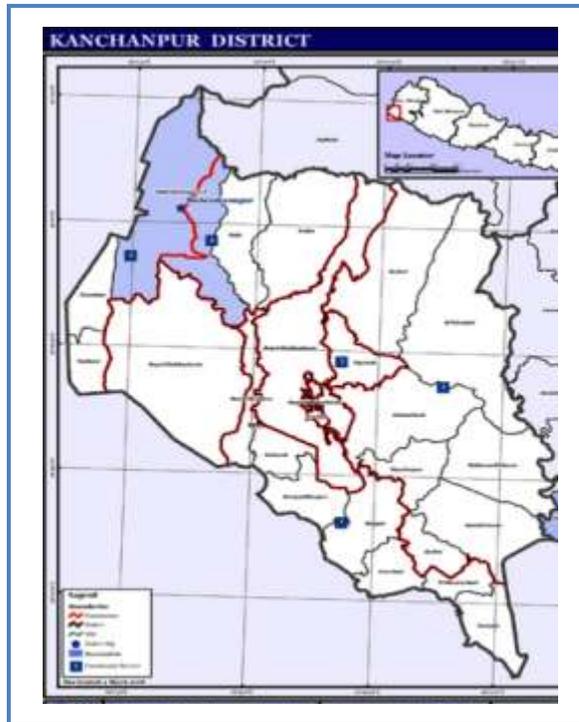
E. Far-western Development Region – Kanchanpur District

Effectiveness of the campaign of voter registration:

Publicity through radio and local news paper were conducted in the district during the initial stage of registration process. Media were useful for publicity to the people who often listen to the local radio or read national and local news papers. However, the people living outside headquarters or not having access to these sources were abandoned from the information.

People, who were left out for registration were not very keen to register their names and not so enthusiastic about the process. The reasons were mainly being busy with their day to day work, costly to go to the district headquarters and moreover frustration over the activities of the major political parties at the national level.

People were not aware that the voter registration card could be translated to the national identity card. Local EC office was also not confident about it happening. In fact the district EC office did not take photograph records of the persons who were below the age of 18 holding citizenship certificates. According to the district office in charge, these people were not subject receive ID card. However, people who were interested, their names were registered in a record book.

Voter registration is a continued process in the district. Also the registration of the non district voters is continued. There are three locations for the ongoing voting registration: (1) District Election Commission Office, (2) Chief District Office and (3) Regional administrative office, Tribhuwan Basti, Belauri. On 19 september, on the day we visited the EC office there were 13 people registered, out of whom 3 were non district voters.There were two types of committees to execute the task of voter registration:

(1) District Coordination Committee, a core group, that could meet frequently, constituted under the chairmanship of Chief District Officer (CDO) and members being, Local Development Officer (LDO), District Education Officer (DEO), Superintendent of Police (SP), APF SP, DEC officer.

(2) District support coordination committee, including the core group members of committee no (1), a larger group was formed that representing district health officer, women development officer, Executive officer of municipality, FNJ, representatives of political parties representing in CA, presidents of teachers associations.

Originally voters were 2, 84,319 and up to now the number of registration is 1, 60,943 (up to the month of Asard). According to EC district office the target, of the registration, has been met. Out of total 1, 64, 916 including the security forces and the non district voters registered so far are 144 only.

Role of Political parties and civil society:

Political party leaders are aware of the process of voter registration. Initially they formally as well as informally informed the respective units in the district about the event. However, much of enthusiasm was not shown by them while the process of registration. People are not happy with the performances of the parties, which has affected their active participation. The parties are fully aware of its importance and believe that once the elections are announce there will be full swing of participation from them. They have also suggested sending a second round team to the villages after Dasain and before Tihar, so that the people who will come to their respective homes for the festival will have opportunity to register.

Though there were representatives from FNJ or teachers group, representative of the civil society were not adequate in the District support coordination committee. Media disseminated information about voter registration, whenever they received advertisement expenses. Except in the beginning, there were no regular interactions with the media about the progress of the VR in the district.

Effectiveness of field observers:

Field observers visited field activities of the voter registration and related offices at the headquarters. They found difficulties in collecting the data because the format of EC VR did not comply with observation questionnaires from NEOC eg. the EC entered data on the basis of gender and not on the ethnicity or marginalized community, data so far are not made public, hence, many questions related to were irrelevant eg grouping status, final list, the correction opportunity, the complain process could not apply.

Obstructions to VR and others:

Obstructions of any nature not found.

Geographical remoteness and access:

Not applied in this district.

Security and local administration:

District police office sent circular to all the police units of the districts to cooperate the VR process. Security from the police side was sufficient. No complaint in the police office received. VDC secretary were mobilized by constituting village coordination committee under his/her chairmanship. During the registration process, the technical team was not up to the mark, which resulted to the delay in the registration. Teachers were used as volunteers that affected the classes of the schools. Moreover, the

selection of the teachers was done according to the agreed quota of the major political parties, which was unfortunate. Unemployed youth could have been better options for the job.

The CDO office has started to register voters name in its office with the support of the ECN. Eligible voters who come to make citizenship certificate are also asked to follow the process of voter registration immediately.

So far two District support coordination meetings in the initial stage of the campaign were held.

Equality and access:

Did not find any noted and substantial complain regarding this issue. However, some of the village dwellers of the marginalized community were not aware of the campaign, because, according to them, neither they have radio to listen nor have time from their daily work to take interest. Moreover, they said it is costly for them to go to the district headquarters and could not affort lose the whole day wage. No political parties have approached them for this campaign.

Recommendations:

1. Send second round teams in the villages so that it can cover the persons who return to their homes in holiday and other left out people.

2. District EC office should conduct regular interactions with the civil society and press about the progress of the campaign.

3. Conduct regular District support coordination meeting to update and activate.

4. Maximize and ensure the active role of the political parties, civil society and press.

5. Ensure other local mode of publicity to make it more participatory and effective.

6. Ensure clarity on the national identity card among the officials and general public.

Some Glimpses:

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