



Science for the People - Science Foundation Project Six-monthly Report (November, 2012 – April, 2013)

Skill Knowledge and Innovation Task Force (SKI)

1. Background

Pursuant to the resolution passed by NRN Regional meeting in Sydney in September, 2012, a project fund was raised to start work on some of the identified areas of popular science concern under the project head: Science for the People Project. The NRN-ICC issued a ToR under which a Project Steering Committee was formed under the chair of Dr. Raju Adhikari and senior journalist Gokul Pokhrel appointed as coordinator. The Steering committee was later expanded to 10 members and was given a regional character.

The Steering Committee composition

1. D. Raju Adhikari, Australia	Chair
2. Dr. Hemraj Sharma, UK	member
3. Dr. Pramod Dhakal, Canada	“
4. Dr. Shovakar Dhakal, AIT, Thailand	“
5. Dr. Drona Rasali, Canada	“
6. Dr. Ambika Adhikari, USA	“
7. Dr. Benu Adhikari, Australia	“
8. Mr. Mana K.C., Oceania	“
9. Mr. Raesh Rana, NRN Secretariat	+
10. Gokul Pokhrel, Nepal	Coordinator
11. Mr. Bhagirath Yogi, U.K.	Adviser

2. Finalization of Project proposal and programs

Based on the concept paper submitted at the Regional Conference, a project proposal was prepared listing therein eight program heads for implementation during the year 2013. Following extensive deliberations

among the members, the proposal was adopted at the meeting held on 20 January, 2013 with an estimate of NRs 662,000.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held on 20 January, 2013 via SKYPE, coordinated from NRN secretariat. Mr. Rajesh Rana, Executive Director of NRN secretariat could not attend the meeting due to sudden demise of his mother on that day.

Members attending the meeting:

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|------------------------|---|--------|
| 1. Dr. Raju Adhikari | - | Chair |
| 2. Dr. Hemraj Sharma | - | member |
| 3. Dr. Pramod Dhakal | - | “ |
| 4. Dr. Ambika Adhikari | - | “ |
| 5. Dr. Drona Rasali | - | “ |
| 6. Mr. Gokul Pokhrel | - | “ |

Decisions of the meeting

- * The project proposal was adopted after incorporating the suggestions and comments received from the members.
- * The transfer of the donation amount of NRs 900,000(USD 10,000 equivalent) by Patron Dr. Upendra Mahato was acknowledged with a vote of thanks.
- * The meeting approved a budget estimate of Rs.662, 000.00 to cover the expenses of activities as listed in the project document.
- * The following eminent persons were included in the Committee giving it more a regional character.
 - i. Dr. Benu Adhikari, Associate Professor at Ballarat University, Australia.
 - ii. Dr. Shovakar Dhakal, Associate Professor at AIT, Bangkok, Thailand.
 - iii. Mr. Bhagirath Yogi, Journalist at BBC Nepali Service, UK.

3. Programs and activities

- (a) **Policy Dialogue on Science, Media and People**
One day seminar: 31 March, 2013
Implementing agency: Nepalese Science Journalists Association (NESJA)

Venue: Conference Hall, Department of Information,
Media Village, Sinamangal, Kathmandu
No. of participants: 40
Program support from NRN fund: Rs.40, 000
Implementation status: Program completed and Report
submitted within the specified time.

Description of activities:

NESJA was founded in 2012 by a group of enthusiastic science journalists and writers with a mission of promoting science awakening among the masses by effectively deploying the skills and knowledge of journalism and information dissemination through mass media networks in Nepal. Over the last few years, there has been extensive growth of advocacy media NGOs in sector specific areas, such as, environment, health, education, economy and finance, tourism, sports, agriculture, trade and commerce, women and children, etc As an exception, the founding of this organization espousing the cause of media participation on the specific information dissemination requirements of S&T sector seemed to be an welcome addition.

Conference proceedings

The conference was declared open with an address by Mr. Dipendra Bahadur Chhetri, Vice-chairman of National Planning Commission, GoN. Mr. Chhetri dwelt on the challenges to science journalism and advised to” disseminate knowledge and information about scientific findings that could help bring change in the society through the practice of journalistic skills and media partnership.”

Guest speaker Dr. Han Heijnen, environmental sanitation engineer with WHO/Nepal held ‘science journalism as the most challenging field that could provide an opportunity to talented writers and journalist to serve the society.

Special guest, Mr. Shiva Gaonle, President of Nepal Federation of Journalists (FNJ) advised to ‘use knowledge and skills as two important tools to combat negative effects of superstitions and dogmas in the society’. He, however, cautioned “science reporting fellowships programs could have adverse effects on the ingenuity of aggressive reporters and the mission compromised if the program is not supported by a proper guidance mechanism.”

Another speaker Dr. Dinesh Bhuj, former director at NAST gave vivid examples of ignorance related mishaps which could have been prevented through simple awareness creation and counseling. The incidents included: rally of naked girls in Bardia district to appease rain gods during drought; the poignant death of three laborers digging a deep well, an incident that could have been prevented if the persons knew about lighting a candle and lowering it to the bottom of the well to check the availability of oxygen.

The opening session was also addressed by Dr. Pramod Dhakal, Mr. Gokul Pokhrel, Rajesh Sada, professor at Nepal Engineering College and NTV journalist Govind Dhital.

Technical session

During the technical session, three theme papers were presented and discussed. These were:

1. Role of journalists in reporting on science by Dr. Han Heijnen, Environmental Sanitation Engineer.
2. Peoples' experience and Facts of changing climate: Impact and Responses by Ms. Anushiya Shrestha of Nepal Engineering College.
3. Science Journalism – Why and How? By Mr. Gokul Pokhrel and Dr. Pramod Dhakal.

6-point Declaration

The conference concluded by adopting a 6-point declaration, setting guidelines for future course of action of the Association. These are:

1. Promote the role of science journalism for informing the people about the accomplishments, problems as well as effects of science and technology on the lives of the peoples:
2. Organize programs, in coordination with various stake-holders for the development of professional skills and proficiency among science journalists and writers in order to promote science journalism.
3. Increase partnership with mass media of Nepal in the mission of informing the masses about the events and issues of S&T interest having relevance to the lives of the people.

4. Organize programs offering incentives and rewards to encourage science reporters/writers for in-depth reporting in critical areas of human concern.
5. Resolve to adhere to the standards and principles of objectivity, truth and impartiality and the professional code of ethics for journalists as applicable in the practice of science journalism.
6. Resolve to request various information media (newspapers, journals, radio and televisions) to provide periodic space/time slots for news and views of S&T interest as the expression of their commitment to the movement of S&T awakening and knowledge dissemination among the masses.

Follow-up measures

In the plethora of numerous sector-specific media advocacy groups and NGOs, NESJA is a new addition in an important sector of public interest. But the new organization is yet to build a strong electoral base and partnership links with other stakeholders. Recently, NESJA has hired an office space at a prime location in Bagh Bazar but does not have the means to pay for the rent and cost of other office maintenance.

A week after the seminar, the Sc. Committee coordinator organized a meeting of core group in Baneshwer on 5 April, 2013 to review the outcome of the conference.

Persons attending the meeting:

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| 1. Kapilmani Acharya | Chairman, NESJA |
| 2. Dr. Pramod Dhakal | Sc. Committee member |
| 3. Ms. Sushila Pandit | Environmental journalist |
| 4. Dr. Han Jeinen | Who consultant |
| 5. Mr. Gokul Pokhrel | Project Coordinator |

The meeting reviewed the strength and weaknesses of the one-day dialogue and drew the following conclusions:

- (a) Form a core group of science communicators, writers and journalists;
- (b) Find out potential program areas of science reporting in the media;

- (c) Organize a science awareness and media partnership seminar at a convenient time;
- (d) Organize a colloquium o science popularization during the science education policy conference in October, 2013.

Options

There is a need for mentoring to the new organization for some time in such areas as fund raising, program development and proficiency skills training. While NRN science Committee may not be the right platform for involvement, mentoring for limited purpose can be considered.

4. Constitution Drafting Process for Science Foundation Trust

There has been noticeable progress on this front. Former President of Nepal Bar Association and Sr. Advocate Mr. Biswa Kant Mainali accepted our request to take up this assignment. Subsequently, a preliminary draft was completed and handed over to project coordinator on 11 April, 2013. After initial review, the draft has been circulated to committee members and the process of feedback and comments has been in progress. Once this process is complete, there are chances of having the Science Foundation Trust registered in Nepal much earlier than expected. The Trust is modeled as a non-profit charitable endowment incorporated under the Company Act, making the promoters more responsible than the usual NGO framework which has lately been a subject of controversy in Nepal.

5. Science Education Policy Development Conference

This is a major program component which is under implementation stage. Work on this program started in February this year. A separate project proposal was prepared and circulated to members for comments. After receiving endorsement, the proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Education, GoN on 3 April, 2013, with request for collaboration and forward action. The Ministry is learnt to have accept the proposal in principle and other operational modalities remains to be finalized in the next stage. Tentatively, the dates for the three day conference are proposed on 25-27 October, 2013, shortly after the conclusion of NRN International Conference in Kathmandu.

6. Media Partnership and Science Reporting fellowships Program

During the review period, detailed proposal was prepared, making the program ready for implementation. But since the Project is not itself an implementing agency, considerable time has taken to find an eligible partner for outsourcing the program. Delay has also been caused by adverse comments from various stakeholders in Nepal about the way funds are misused by NGOs and recipients under the title fellowships. Hence, it will be wise to wait for some time before a cautious start can be made by locating a reliable partner organization.

7. Science Education Materials and Equipment Distribution Program

On the advice of Committee members, allocation under this activity head has been put on hold, to be used as a contingency fund. The reason is: the amount being very small and several individuals and charity organizations are already active in various locations of Nepal, operating support programs to schools.

8. Other Activities

- a. On behalf of the Committee, a proposal for collaboration on the Science Fellowship Programs was submitted to NAST in November, 2012. The proposal did not materialize as NAST was stated not in a position to contribute matching funds.
- b. Dr. Pramod Dhakal represented the Committee by his participation in the Bio-technology Fair and Conference held in Kathmandu on 24 – 26 April, 2013. The Organizers had submitted a request to NRN-SKI Forum for financial support and participation. Since the Committee Fund is not a grant administering resource, Promodji has hinted at the possibility of partnership in some fellowship programs as per the prescribed format.

9. Conclusion

- So far, a minimum of the budget has been used, leaving much of the funds to be used for the targeted program heads. During the running six-month period, most of the programs have fair possibility of implementation. Conformity with comparable

professional standards and norms, have been taken into account in such matters as program finalization, release of funds, accountability vis-à-vis performance indicators. A sizeable inventory of concept papers, proposals and reports has been developed so far as resource of the project.

- The Coordinator is grateful to the high standard of cooperation and counseling extended by the Committee chairman Dr. Raju Adhikari, the distinguished members at various stages of program implementation. In the absence of any institutional framework, implementation of the programs had to be relied on outsourcing and the problem incurred in the selection of right and qualified partners is very obvious.
- The project year being an interim phase may prove its worth more in paving a solid institutional ground work for many more initiatives in the coming years. It has already helped forge a homogenous global fraternity of competent S&T professionals and scholars which is indeed a valuable resource for the future.