Nepal to receive three times more development cooperation support from EU during 2014-2020

There is good news for the countries in Asia partnering with the European Union. A programming seminar held in Brussels in March, 2014 to identify the ways of stepping up the existing ties of development cooperation raised the hopes of many after it was announced that development cooperation funds for Asia will go up by 20% in the present programming cycle 2014-20120 compared to the previous programming cycle 2007-2013.

Finance Minister, Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat participated in the seminar along with Joint Secretary and Head of International Cooperation Division at the Finance Ministry, Madhu Kumar Marasini.

Nepalese Ambassador to the EU, Ram Mani Pokharel was also present at the meeting joined by EU Ambassador to Nepal, Rensje Teerink.

The development cooperation assistance to Nepal will be increased three times for the 2014-2020 programming cycle, Rensje Teerink, Ambassador and Head of the European Union Delegation to Nepal said. She said that the EU supports the Nepalese government’s efforts to graduate from its LDC status by 2020. Technical and vocational training has been identified as a new area of cooperation. This partnership is extremely important to foster Nepal’s competitive capacity and it is a new project that the EU has been working on, Ambassador Teerink said.

She expressed satisfaction over the achievements made so far in the education sector by Nepal. The EU is one of the oldest contributors to the education sector. It has been assisting the Government of Nepal through sector budget support. A total of 136.4 million euros, 38% of the 360 million euros earmarked for the new programming cycle has been set aside for education. Although there has been significant progress in enrolment rates, the major challenge is to ensure quality education.

The European Union has been assisting Nepal in three major areas, the first being the consolidation of peace and stability, second one education and third being economic capacity building and trade facilitation. A total envelope of 120 million euros was allocated for the period spanning from 2007 to 2013. The EU accounts for 20% of the total disbursement of funds to Nepal from foreign donors in the year 2012/2013. The major contribution has been for the peace process that has now come a long way following the holding of the second Constituent Assembly elections.

Besides, the three major sectors, the EU has supported sectors such as food security, renewable energy, human rights and environmental conservation.

The development sectors that have been prioritised for 2014-2020 are rural development, agriculture, elections and public finance management.
EU EOM presents final report on observation of the second CA elections

Eva Joly, Chief Observer, European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) to Nepal presented the mission’s final report on its observation of the second Constituent Assembly elections to Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uperti on 13 February, 2014.

The EU-EOM concluded that the elections were overall credible and conducive to the consolidation of democracy and that the Election Commission of Nepal acted independently and impartially throughout the whole electoral process.

Addressing a press conference, Joly said that the quality of the forthcoming elections and the confidence of voters depend significantly on the continued commitment of all stakeholders to advance electoral processes in Nepal. These processes have to be inclusive, transparent and credible.

“We hope our suggestions will be of service to all Nepalese citizens to build a peaceful and democratic future for Nepal.”

Promotion of the right of political representation as well as equal suffrage, increased transparency of political party financing and a consolidated legal framework are among the main recommendations included in the report.

The EU EOM’s Final Report offers a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of the 2013 electoral process, namely the legal framework, the work of the electoral administration, voter registration, nomination of candidates, the electoral campaign, the role of the media, voting, counting and tabulation processes and the resolution of electoral complaints and appeals. Some of the key recommendations presented by the EU EOM are:

- Adoption of constitutionally guaranteed rules on allocation of political parties’ elected proportional representation seats, by binding political parties to respect the candidate’s order established within their closed lists or through other measures aimed at guaranteeing that the voters can determine who is elected.

- More transparency in political parties’ funding by imposing provisions requiring the disclosure of sources of funding.

- Amendment of the quota rules set out in the electoral law to further the participation of women and traditionally marginalised groups in political life.

- Adoption of procedures for reconciliation of all figures regarding the voting process – number of ballots received, used, spoiled, returned and cast, as well as the number of voters’ names marked off in the voters’ list to increase the transparency of the voting and counting process.

- Facilitation of voter registration through the production of other official documents which include photographic ID, instead of a citizenship certificate to ensure the enfranchisement of eligible voters.

- Revision of the Press Council Act to reinforce its legal authority and contemplating more effective sanctions to be applied in response to violations of the Code of Conduct by the media.

- A proper and comprehensive implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2007, would contribute to a more free media environment, in line with international commitments.

- Strengthening the implementation of rules and principles for accurate, balanced and responsible journalism, specifically on election coverage, is required.

The EU EOM was present in Nepal from 4 October to 11 December 2013, following an invitation from the Government of Nepal and the Election Commission. In total, the mission deployed 112 observers from 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland across the country to observe and assess the whole electoral process in accordance with the national laws and international and regional commitments for genuine elections agreed upon by Nepal.

The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation signed at the United Nations in October 2005.
EU Film Festival 2014
Celebrating Womanhood

The Delegation of the European Union to Nepal organised the third edition of the European Union Film Festival "Celebrating Women" from 19 February to 23 February at the Kumari QFX-Hall 2 in Kalapokhari, Kathmandu.

A total of 17 movies from 16 different EU Member States were screened at the festival. One of the movies, "Six Days," that was screened was produced by the Kivinna till Kivinna Foundation based in Sweden with funding from EU Instrument for Stability.

Six Days is a universal story of women’s courage and survival in the aftermath of war and highlights the work of three women’s rights activists Lanja (Journalist in Iraq), Nelly (Social Worker in Liberia) and Maia (Health Worker in Abkhazia, breakaway faction of Georgia).

Movies from UK, Denmark, Germany, Italy, France, Finland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain, Netherland and Sweden were screened at the festival.

The festival was opened by Ambassador Rensje Teerink, Head of the European Union Delegation to Nepal on 19 February, 2014.

Addressing the opening, Ambassador Teerink said that the movies to be screened at the festival showed the diversity of Europe and the unity that has been forged through amity, cooperation, quest for peace and respect for each other’s rights.

The film festival had a mixed audience, most of them being young students from colleges. Other participants included expats, representatives of NGO/INGOs and development partners. The movie "Six Days" was the most attended.

Mr. Narayan Bhattarai, a retired civil servant, who worked with the Ministry of Education was among the committed audiences at the festival. "Festivals like this are rare to find and it is indeed a good opportunity for movie lovers to get the taste of Europe through movies," Mr. Bhattarai said when asked to comment why he was so much drawn to the festival.

UK movie ‘Fast Girls’ screened on the first day received 130 participants.

A total of 2037 people participated in the EU Film Festival.
Over four thousand informal waste workers benefit from EU-funded PRISM project

Waste pickers from the five municipalities in the Kathmandu valley literally burst into tears at the final closing workshop in May when recalling their past days of mistreatment. Sharing their bitter moments of not receiving respect for their work, they said that the situation has now turned out to be different. "We now feel that our work is being widely respected and people have begun to appreciate our contribution," they said at the final closing workshop of the EU-funded project implemented by Practical Action.

Shyam Thakuri, President, Informal Waste Pickers' Organisation said that the project succeeded to instil confidence among the informal waste pickers who are now able to lead a respected life. The project was able to raise widespread awareness in the five different urban centres with the general people witnessing a change in the way they view the status of the workers, a contended Thakuri shared.

Addressing the workshop, EU Ambassador, Ms. Rensje Teerink said the project had been highly complementary to the EU’s bilateral cooperation in Nepal for the new Multiannual Indicative Plan (MIP 2014-2020) with three focal areas: rural development, education and governance.

"We hope to draw lessons for at least 2 of the focal areas, thus expanding income and employment opportunities for informal workers," she said.

Poverty Reduction of Informal Workers in Solid Waste Management (PRISM) that was launched in May 2011 concluded successfully in May 2014. The project aimed at ensuring social protection of waste pickers in the informal sector. The inception of a cooperative for depositing and mobilizing the savings of the workers, introducing the provision of health insurance for the workers coupled with an awareness raising programme to make their profession more dignified were some of the major achievement of the project.

The project was run in partnership with the Centre for Integrated Urban Development. Dr Shirish Singh, Head of Urban Water, Sanitation and Waste Programme at Practical Action, presented the impact of the project during the event. According to him, a total of 4,341 informal waste workers have directly benefited from the project intervention.

He also added that at least 25 major waste based enterprises have been created by the Informal Waste Workers (IWWs) after getting support from the project. Such enterprises include; waste plastic handicrafts, compost making, sack production, bio-briquette production, rickshaw and scrap centres among others. Special guest of the event Hari Bans Acharya and Madan Krishna Shrestha expressed the importance of respecting waste workers for their contribution in solid waste management.

The project was able to identify 8,047 IWWs among which 1,635 are female. 59 IWWs’ groups were formed after the project intervention. PRISM promoted the achievement of social protection and recognition to IWWs and helped to strengthen the capacity of informal waste workers for collective bargaining and enhancing their technical and entrepreneurial skills. The project also introduced nine different social protection schemes for their better income and secured livelihood. A total of 1,550 IWWs were able to benefit from a health care scheme. Similarly, 2,775, 634, and 518 people benefitted from preventive health care, child protection and women protection schemes respectively. Apart from these, a total of 414 IWWs has benefitted from different other schemes.

The participants in the programme were government officials, donors and non-government organisation, experts, advocacy groups, civil society members, project beneficiaries, private organisations and media personnel.
Europe Day 2014 marked

Europe Day 2014, the day marking the construction of the beginning of Europe was observed on the 9th of May. Vice President, Parmananda Jha was the chief guest of the special programme that had the presence of high ranking government officials, development partners, leaders of different political parties, civil society, academic and business leaders and members of the diplomatic community.

Addressing the programme, EU Ambassador to Nepal, Ms. Rensje Teerink said that the 9th of May marked the beginning of a new way of doing things in Europe. It was on this day, sixty-two years back, that Robert Schuman, the then Foreign Minister of France called for a united Europe. Schuman’s appeal to the countries in Europe to abandon warfare and embrace mutual cooperation has borne fruit and today Europe stands out as a peaceful continent.

The founding fathers of Europe showed the vision, the needed perseverance, sense of responsibility and a high level of integrity to steer Europe through difficult times. While the European Union does not solve all problems, it provides a framework to find solutions in a negotiated manner.

The motto of the EU is “unity in diversity.” The EU considers diversity as a source of richness and is very proud that Europe hosts so many languages and cultures.

Nepal is one of the richest countries in the world when it comes to diversity. Nepal’s current diversity needs to be well respected and managed to create equal opportunities for individual Nepalese, Ambassador Teerink said.

“The leaders in contemporary Nepal have now a historic opportunity to provide an inclusive environment to all the Nepalese and make this country an example of peaceful integration.”

“The EU together with its Member States, is Nepal’s largest donor and above all, a very close friend. The EU wishes to see a peaceful stable and inclusive Nepal which will allow the citizens of this country to fulfil their aspirations,” she said.

The EU stepped forward to support the 2nd Constituent Assembly elections with the belief that elections were the only way out to give a new political course to the country. The EU now hopes that the consolidation of democracy will be completed successfully.

The EU’s engagement in Nepal will become more prominent in the years ahead and will be focussed on areas which are key to the prosperity of Nepal such as rural development, education and democratic governance. EU’s development assistance will be tripled in the next seven years [from the initial allotment of Euro 120 million in the period 2007-2013 to Euro 360 million in the period 2014-2020.

EU Member State Ambassadors along with the EU Ambassador join Vice President, Parmananda Jha at the Europe Day function
Latvia becomes 18th Member State to adopt Euro

On 1 January 2014, Latvia adopted the euro as its official currency and the changeover is running smoothly and according to plan. The previous national currency – the lat – has been phased out.

Thanks to the careful preparations, the start of the changeover was successful. No major problems were encountered and banks and retailers were generally doing well with the first days of the changeover.

By the end of Thursday 2 January, 30% of payments in shops were made in euro only and 94% of customers were getting their change in euro. No major problems were observed in banks or in the retail sector. According to a recent survey conducted by the European Commission, a large proportion of Latvians already had euro.

Cash two days before the changeover: 52% had euro banknotes and 64% had euro coins – typically from trips abroad, but many also got euros from an exchange in a bank or post office in Latvia or coins from euro starter kits. The widespread holdings of euro cash in advance of €-day contributed to a smoother cash changeover. The conversion of ATMs (cash dispensers) went smoothly and virtually all ATMs have been distributing euro banknotes as from the first hour of 1 January. Furthermore, several branches of the three largest banks were open for cash services on Wednesday 1 January.

Point-of-sale terminals for card payments in shops were likewise successfully converted to the euro in time for the opening of shops on 2 January. Due to the New Year holidays, commercial activity following the first two days of the changeover was lower than normal. According to another survey conducted by the Commission, most people who made a purchase in cash on 2 January used Latvian lats, in order to use the old currency in shops rather than having to go to a bank to exchange them. However, at the end of the second changeover day, 30% of those polled already paid in euros only, which is a very high figure compared to previous changeovers. Commercial banks had received euro banknotes and coins in advance from the Latvian Central Bank and had in turn supplied euro cash to shops and other businesses under a specific contract, so that they could handle payments and return change in euro as of the first changeover day. The successful advance supply of cash enabled a very high number of retailers to provide change in euros. At the end of the second day of the changeover, 94% of the change was already given in the new currency. This is important in order to withdraw the old Latvian lats from circulation as quickly as possible.

After the first two days with their new currency, 25% of citizens polled said they already had only or mostly euro banknotes in their wallet.

EU-funded project on effective implementation of the provision of Right to Information on the right track

The European Union and UNESCO have been moving ahead to bring about significant change in the awareness levels of journalists and the general people regarding the provisions of Right to Information stipulated in the Interim Constitution.

The EU has been supporting the UNESCO implemented project “Empowering people to enjoy their Right to Information for greater accountability of Nepal’s power holders” under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The project is being implemented by UNESCO with the Federation of Nepali Journalist (FNJ) and Citizen’s Campaign for Right to Information (CCRI) as the main partners. FNJ has an extensive network of journalists and advocates for freedom of expression, Right to Information and security of journalists and CCRI has been campaigning for Right to Information since many years.

The project aims at encouraging and empowering citizens to claim their Right to Information as well as making power holders accountable. The provision for the Right to Information was enshrined in the 1990 Constitution, but unfortunately the Act on RTI came only in 2007, which was followed by the establishment of the Nepal Information Commission.

Although RTI is fully guaranteed by the law, full access to public information is still not guaranteed in practice due inter alia to lack of resources, capacities and administrative culture.

The project that started in 2013 Feb will end in 2016 Feb and aims at improving transparency in the Nepalese government and the accountability of its decision-making through a broader implementation of the Right to Information Act. Its specific objectives are to ensure that citizens have access to information that is relevant to them, to contribute to enhance journalists’ role as public watchdogs and to help local government officials to fulfill their duty to share public information.

The project has been organizing local level trainings for journalists and mediators. It has published a handbook on how citizens can effectively use their right to information and awareness-building visibility materials on the strengthening of the democratic system through the proper use of RTI provisions.
Photo Feature

Mr. Andreas Roettger, Head of Cooperation, at the EU Delegation to Nepal interacting with Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Project (ANEIP) beneficiaries in Butwal during a field visit in June.

Mr. Andreas Roettger, Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Nepal participating in a tree plantation programme in the capital in July.

Ambassador Teenink briefs Vice President Parmananda Jha about different EU projects at the Europe Day 2014 function.

Ms. Gemona Hernandez Uitz, Head of the Political, Press and Information section, EU Delegation to Nepal, addressing a food security seminar in the capital.

Participants at the DG European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) South Asia Regional Seminar held in Kathmandu.

New Head of Cooperation, Mr. Andreas Roettger, joins Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission, Mr. Govinda Pokharel for a snap during a reception hosted upon his arrival.

Home Minister Bamdev Gautam launching the 'Strategic Vision Paper' for safer, freer and empowered media prepared by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) under the project 'Safe and Free Media' funded by the European Union.

Ambassador Teenink participating in a talk programme ‘EU-SSARC Relations Towards Deeper Partnership’ organised by the Centre for South Asian Studies in the capital in March.

EU NEPAL NEWS

Newsletter of the Delegation of the European Union to Nepal
EU Fact Sheet

Number of inhabitants (2013): 507.4 million
Number of official languages: 24
Surface area of EU (Km²): 43,817,660
Gross domestic product/capita (2013): €25,600

Average growth rate of real GDP per capita (2013): 0.1%
Average unemployment rate (2013): 10.8%

Europe Day: 09-May
Date of the first European elections: Jun-79

Motto: United in Diversity

Average life expectancy in the EU28 (2013): 78 years

Three Main EU Institutions:
- European Parliament
- European Commission
- Council of the EU

Currency of the 18-member eurozone: Euro

Biggest state (Surface): France
Smallest state (Surface): Malta
Most populated state: Germany
Least populated state: Malta

Source: eurostat_en

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