

Transparency International Nepal

News Scan Database

Keeping in view the lack of study on print media behavior towards corruption in society, a survey type research has been undertaken. It has provided a baseline in this respect.

Objectives

News Scan Database is a study of news on corruption published in national newspapers. It is a tool of gathering corruption stories from the newspapers, analysing them and generating reports. The main objectives of this study are to determine the extent and nature of corruption and its effects.

Altogether six newspapers (Kantipur, Himalaya Times Nepal Samacharpatra, Rajdhani, The Rising Nepal and Space Time Today) were scanned in this study out of which four Nepali dailies were of private sector and two English dailies - one government and the other private. The newspapers were selected on a random basis.

Types of Corruption Stories

The selected newspapers were closely studied for identification of corruption stories as per the types of corruption defined for the study. Types of corruption defined by the study were bribery, misuse of resources, abuse of power, refusal to provide service/perform duties, fraud and nepotism.

Findings

- **Sector Involved In Corruption By Types**

During the news scan survey, it was found that fraud was widespread in other sector with 247 cases in Govt. level with 194 cases and in Private sector with 130 cases. The govt. department level was found to be the most corrupt sector with 558 cases. Other types of corruption prevalent in govt. level were refusal to provide services (120), Bribery (95), misuse of govt. facilities and properties (88) and abuse of power (57).

Other sector (Businessman, Individual, Judges, Political representatives and MPs etc) was found to be the second corrupt sector.

- **Person Involved In Corruption By Types**

The table below depicts that fraud was found to be the most practiced mode of corruption with 188 and 236 reported cases against govt. officials and other respectively. According to the survey, it seems that the least happening type of corruption was Nepotism with 13 cases mostly against the govt. officials.

- **Victims of Corruption**

The table 7 showed that about half (48.2%) of the total number of cases was of Government being the victim of corruption. The government officials were responsible for this because while comparing the results of the tables (5 & 6) it was found that the most corrupt sector and most corrupt people are government level and government officials respectively. It was also interesting to note that only 1.4% of government officials were the victims of corruption. After government, it was the citizens who were suffering due to corruption with 22.7% of the reported corruption stories.

- **Effects of Reported Corruption Cases**

During the survey, the corruption stories reported different types of impact of corruption. Some stories were related to environmental degradation, some reported about violation of human and citizen's rights. But the majority of cases reflected violation of law and order. The reported case against it was 949 out of 1536 cases, followed by financial loss with 355 cases.

Trend

The news-scan has produced some behavioral trends of print media form the perspective of corruption coverage besides displaying features of writing on the theme. The following findings are noteworthy:

- ♦ the print media, even the leading one, has not yet developed a systematic way of covering corruption.
- ♦ corruption stories are usually incomplete ; they do not have sources; papers have not developed a method of chasing corruption - event to the final spot.
- ♦ reporters appear to have a sense of fear in exposing corruption; this gets reflected in coverage.
- ♦ it is very difficult to draw conclusion on effect from corruption by reading papers.
- ♦ analyzing of corruption stories published by leading dailies cannot by itself pretend to represent the whole corruption scenario; the news can statistics should, therefore, be used with due attention to what has been described in various tables.

Some ideas that basically guide media coverage of corruption stories in Nepal

Corruption coverage in Nepali media is not done in vacuum of ideas. The Nepali media people cover the corruption being guided by the Watchdog theory of the Press. They strongly believe that the press should contribute to the broad public cause. Convinced that exposure of crime could deter in its own way the crime in one hand and on the other help penalize the wrong doer, they appear determined to help the cause of good governance also by covering the hidden network of corruption.

They understand what TI Source Book 2000 has said about information. That is why they are dedicated to spread information about corruption, all its dimensions and anti-corruption activities undertaken or planned to control or eliminate it.

"Without information there is no accountability", says the Source Book, adding "Information is power, and the more people who possess it, the more power is distributed. Access to information on the part of the people is fundamental to a nation's integrity system. Without it, democratic structures cannot operate as they should, and individuals are left unable to enforce their rights – perhaps not even knowing that their rights have been infringed. The principal vehicle for taking information to the public is an independent and free media."

Nepali journalists strongly believe that the press can serve as a powerful counterforce to fight corruption. This has made them chase corruption. The press is both free and independent. Yet they have not been able to do as much as they like to. Media intimidation is one factor that has discouraged journalists to cover corruption in a desirable manner. Financial weakness of the media is another. Lack of journalistic skills is also one defect that does not allow the press people to contribute most to investigative journalism and corruption coverage. But their fight against corruption –doers is on and will continue.

Media persons in Nepal are convinced that the public has the right to information and they know that they have to provide the same to them. They often say "a better informed public can better participate in the democratic process." Although the absence of the right to information act in Nepal has hindered the corruption coverage, the journalists are working hard to extract as much information about corruption as possible.

One may wonder why Nepali media, with all such lofty ideals behind them, are simply failing to cover corruption widely and effectively. The question can be answered only after one studies the financial background of the media, culture of advertisement and number of readers, viewers, and listeners.

Corruption coverage in Nepali media can neither be termed normal nor average. It is far below that and hits at times the worrying point. Compared to the corruption coverage in press in other developing countries, the country's record is disappointing. But the defective or incomplete or scanty coverage of corruption should not be construed as lack of ideas behind corruption coverage. Nepali media are in a paradoxical position: they know they should cover corruption well and in time but they are not doing that. Appropriate training for journalists and boosting the number of users of media products should be emphasized to address the problem positively.

What Next

Investigative journalism, as the corruption reports suggest practically, is quite new in Nepal. Journalists covering corruption beat should be trained for this. Moreover, the owners and editors should also be sensitized about how to handle corruption for making them more informative, reliable and readable. For all these a four -step scheme should be launched.

- weeklong investigative journalism for corruption reporters
- seminar on contemporary corruption themes for editors and owners

- interaction on corruption cases among journalists, lawyers and civil society leaders
- talk programme by foreign corruption experts

Keeping in view the spread of media in Nepal, the coverage of corruption could be taken as an important force that can play a significant part in making people aware of it and effortful in eliminating the same to the best of their ability. It might be relevant to have a brief survey of their status, accountability and relation with the civil society at this point.

The mass media particularly the newspapers, television and radio constitute the main arena in which journalists play key role as members of the civil society in eliminating corruption. According to the Economic Survey, by mid-April, the total number of newspaper registered in various districts of the Kingdom reached over 2,870. Among these are 193 dailies, 9 half-weeklies, 1,008 weeklies, 220 bi-weeklies, 787 monthlies, 205 bi-monthlies, 334 quarterlies, 15 four-monthlies, 49 half-yearlies, and 50 yearlies. All possess potentiality to use corruption stories for educating people and ensuring good governance.

Television broadcast, which started in Nepal in 1985, has recently been switched over to satellite transmission through Sagarmatha Satellite Earth Station ensuring its viewability throughout the country and abroad. Nepal Television (NTV) is currently on air for 16.30 hours every day through its three studios, one regional programme production and broadcasting centers in Kohalpur and 11 transmitting centers. A metro channel is in pipeline. Some 165 cable operators have obtained licenses to operate Cable Television transmission. Any corruption –communication would not be complete if this channel is not used properly.

Radio Nepal, established in 1950 A.D. commands countrywide coverage and is considered the most popular media in Nepal. It has, since 1995, been broadcasting songs and music in national language through its medium wave transmission centers established in all five development regions of the country. FM transmission is new sensation and out of 20 private companies licensed to operate radio centers through FM system, 15 agencies have already started their operations. Although at present they have not been effectively used for communicating anti-corruption messages, the possibility should be explored and utilized.

Journalists working for the media mentioned above function under the umbrella of the professional organization Federation of Nepali Journalists, which stresses code of conduct and has devised one jointly with Nepal Press Council. (Source: Patrakar Achar Samhita 2055B.S. (1998)) The code like any other code of professional organizations stresses anti-corruption activities. "Keep yourself morally fit and make others behave fairly and, if possible, in accordance with the code in practice." The message is clear: all journalists should dedicate themselves to anti-corruption activities. They should behave in an uncorrupted manner and help anti-corruption measures spread for ensuring good governance for broad public benefit.

The scheme, mentioned above, will be able to create an atmosphere for investigative journalism among the media people. It is very necessary to change

the concept of confining corruption to bribe and a few irregularities in public offices. The broad perspective of National Integrity System should be understood and applied by all corruption writers. Journalists should be helped and motivated to cover the corruption stories from National Integrity System (NIS) perspective. They should be encouraged to report so extensively that readers can be updated with the latest in corruption.

It will also be useful for those who man the newsroom. Because of their ignorance of NIS and corruption, they very often do not use information sent to them from anti-corruption bodies or institutions engaged in work meant for elimination of corruption. Preparing the news - producers for using corruption stories willingly is the need of the hour. And this can be addressed by the scheme.

Upgrading beat coverage in newspaper offices could also be helped by this scheme. Helping those who work under this beat through regular supply of information would ultimately help the cause of public education on corruption.

One study had shown: the news reports display enthusiasm of journalists to cover corruption. However, from the journalistic point of view they have number of areas, which need improvement. The reliability of most stories is in question for they lack sources. Most do not care to quote sources and give the impression that the news has been prepared at the desk. This shortcoming is the result of lack of training on the part of the journalist in the field of investigative journalism. The scheme directly responds to this.

Orientation programmes as envisaged by the scheme also encourage corruption reporters to have enough follow-up news stories on corruption. The practice of picking up stories and leaving them midway is not good from the viewpoint of information. They should be covered completely and all questions of readers should be answered in the cycle. There should be no half-done or un-done segment in corruption stories.

The scheme could be instrumental in transmitting the skills of digging the grass-root cause of corruption and hidden network of corruption to the reporters. This will ultimately help erode the pressure tactics and threatening practices to discourage corruption reporters. When the whole community is educated about all dimensions of corruption and NIS, corruption writers may not be in a position of working timidly under the Damocles' Sword of the corrupted.