

Public Opinion Collection by CA

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To institutionalise democracy, it is not only the representatives of the people but also participation of the people is also required. For a constitution that is drafted after struggle, revolution and people's movement, it is imperative that people's feelings and aspirations are met through interactions and meetings with them to collect their suggestions during the constitution-drafting process. To reflect the people's aspirations after the People's Movement II, opinions were collected by the 10 thematic committees and the constitutional committee. The collection process itself was coordinated by the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee.

A total of 40 teams comprising of CA members were involved in the opinion-collection process. This process got completed though it was a challenge to prepare the questionnaires, fill them in the districts, collect them and study them to get the results at the end. This also raised some questions regarding the format of the questionnaires, filling process, its analysis and usefulness.

Some of the questions pertained to the sampling process, misspellings, CA members not being serious while filling out the questionnaires or employing the low-ranking officials to fill out the forms which raised the complaints of carelessness. Questions were raised regarding the inclusion of closed-ended questions and their non-analysis by the Committee and also the lack of analytical framework for open-ended questions. However, this Committee had played important role in establishing a mechanism for collection opinions from the central to the local level, collecting suggestions from the media, coordinating with other institutions and organisations to conduct discussion at the local level.

Working area of the Committee

Committee on Citizens is one of the three procedural committees formed to assist in the administrative and procedural work in the CA. basically, the working area of all the committees were defined where they were tasked with ease of access of the general people to the CA and coordination of effective communication regarding the constitution-drafting process and its activities among different stakeholders.

The Committee also had the responsibility to monitor and evaluate activities of the state, NGOs and INGOs, civil society and media regarding the CA, constitution-drafting process and its regular activities; to inform the citizens the process of participating in the constitution-drafting process; to monitor the media centre.

Work plan of the Committee

The Committee had prepared a clear mandate for itself to make its work more effective and manageable. It had planned to establish and manage an information centre. It had also planned to collect and disseminate information from the CA as well as request for general people's participation in the constitution-drafting through different media. It had also aimed to collect information through making people aware through the government media as well as different media, pamphlets, hoarding boards by inviting people to submit suggestions and opinions.

It had also prepared a draft to develop the capacity of the staff within the Committee and related officials. Its another objective was to coordinate government and public intuitions for collecting suggestions, under which to inform the public, NGOs and INGOS, private institutions, professional bodies, civil societies and citizens organisations were also involved.

The Committee had planned to establish a website/email to disseminate the activities of the Constituent Assembly and to encourage participation in constitution-drafting to collect suggestions as well. It included the establishment of centres, asking the chief district officers to coordinate the efforts, conducting discussion programmes from the central to the local level, running a hotline number and fax, and also collecting suggestions from Nepali in foreign countries.

The Committee had planned to collect, classify and forward the suggestions from the general populace, civil society, professional association, students, farmers, labours, religious, sportspersons and disabled associations/groups, NGOs, community organisations, civil society organisations and various federations, women's, indigenous, Janajati, Dalit, Muslim, Madhesi, backward and marginalised area, human rights activists to respective committees. In addition, its responsibility also included monitoring of the media centre, documentation and updating the collected suggestions.

Its responsibility increased more than it had planned. The meeting of January 23, 2009 between the CA Chairperson and different committee chairpersons also decided to give additional responsibility to this Committee, which included establishing a mechanism from the district to the local level and identifying persons and organisations. Also, it was also tasked with formation of a mechanism that included district-level NGOs, clubs, communities, active political parties and their sister organisations, representatives from women, Dalit, Muslim and minorities, active professional organisations, federations, indigenous social institutions. It also had the responsibility of conducting seminars, workshops and discussion programmes in the districts, electoral constituencies and villages.

What did the Committee do?

The Committee set up two opinion collection boxes at the western and southern gates of the Singha Durbar to collect suggestions from the public for constitution-drafting process. Another one was placed at the western gate of the CA building in New Baneshwor. There was a provision to forward details to this Committee of all the meetings and activities in different committees and the Committee gathered information from other committees. Experts were called in to discuss the role of the Committee and different ministries were consulted to seek their support in making the public opinion collection process regarding the constitution drafting more effective. The Committee also issued public service announcement in the media urging public participation in the constitution-drafting process. The Committee also gathered suggestions from districts with the chief district officer coordinating the heads of different government offices, representatives of political parties, VDC secretaries, and journalists.

The Committee had directed all the district government offices to establish a contact office and set up suggestion boxes to collect suggestion regarding constitution drafting. It had also conducted several discussion sessions with media houses on making the constitution-drafting process accessible to the general populace.

To ensure ease of access of general people on the constitution-drafting process, the Committee had held interaction programmes with officials from different organisations, experts and civil society; formed a mechanism to collect suggestions from central to

district level; directed the ministries and relevant organisations to assist the 40 CA teams going to collect the opinions from the people. The Committee had forwarded the suggestions received through the CA teams, different organisations, individuals and toll-free number to respective committees. Altogether, it had received 549,763 suggestions.

A dispute arose between the Committee on Citizens and the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee. Some members of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee objected to the suggestion collection by the Citizen Relations Committee. The dispute was settled only after it was clarified that the Committee on Citizens' role would be during the drafting of the constitution and the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee would have additional responsibility after the draft has been prepared. A meeting of the CA and chairs of different committees settled the dispute.

Table: Suggestions

S. N.	Committee	CA teams	Others (unknown sources)	Email	Citizen Relations Committee	Total
1	Constitutional Committee	26,663	246	--	228	27,137
2	Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles	28,109	22,951	--	40,826	91,886
3	Committee on the Protection of the Rights of the Minorities and Marginalised Communities	41,250	219	--	10,271	51,740
4	Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power	46,742	825	23	13,340	60,930
5	Committee on Determining the Structure of the Legislative Body	37,033	72	20	967	38,092
6	Committee for Determining the Form of the Government	46,402	--	1	11,120	57,523
7	Judicial	48,215	318	--	761	49,294

	Systems Committee					
8	Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies	33,702	108	72	5894	39,776
9	Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing	36,981	89	--	1594	38,664
10	Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity	34,906	197	--	1197	36,300
11	National Interest Preservation Committee	48,985	68	--	9368	58,421
Total		428,988	25,093	116	95,566	549,763

Source: Committee on Citizen

Table: Details of suggestions received and sent to thematic committees

S. N.	Committee	04/26/2008	04/17/2009	04/19/2009	04/20/2009	04/26/2009	05/10/2009	05/11/2009	05/18/2009	05/19/2009	Total
1	Constitutional Committee	52	*	104	--	7	3	--	--	62	228
2	Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles	10,664	17,870	122	2068	7287	772	748	1235	60	40,826
3	Committee on the Protection of the Rights of the Minorities and Marginalised Communities	719	7884	81	1288	8	37	12	6	236	10,271
4	Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power	31	9626	85	1782	11	171	1568	6	60	13,340
5	Committee on Determining the Structure of the Legislative Body	1	7	91	81	8	2	714	6	57	967
6	Committee for Determining the Form of the Government	47	7859	111	1280	9	121	1615	6	72	11,120
7	Judicial Systems	10	3	91	81	6	13	495	6	56	761

	Committee										
8	Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies	1	4588	62	1165	7	6	--	6	59	5894
9	Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing	128	8	87	86	5	18	1204	6	52	1594
10	Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity	14	13	86	177	8	9	826	6	58	1197
11	National Interest Preservation Committee	18	7645	87	1167	6	19	335	6	85	9368
Total											95,566