



SUCCESS STORY

Promoting Good Governance in Eastern Terai



OTI/Nepal

Youth facilitators explain Citizen Charters to a women's group in Siraha. The charters outline the duties and responsibilities of local government.



OTI/Nepal

The secretary of the local VDC answers questions during a public meeting in Siraha.

July 2009 – Nepal's transition to peace has been plagued by complications, including a general breakdown of law and order and, in many areas, an absence of functional and representative government bodies at the local level. High expectations have given way to frustrations, which are especially acute in communities where citizens have little say over local development priorities.

The growing disenchantment has made it clear that communities need a larger role in the decision-making processes that allocate public goods. And to help address such needs, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided support to three local partners in the eastern Terai district of Siraha for an effort to engage citizens in identifying development priorities and communicating their wishes to local government officials.

One activity helped residents organize to elect a new slate of members for a users committee. The secretary of the Village Development Committee (VDC, the community-level administrative district) and local political leaders had handpicked the former members, so it was a first—and empowering—step fostering democracy at the local level.

In another VDC, the community pressured the users committee to open the process used to manage development activities to public scrutiny. And in yet another VDC, residents organized to identify development priorities important to the community, deciding that an electrical connection was needed and making it the community's top priority in the current fiscal year.

These activities have also empowered women to raise their voices about issues that unfairly burden them. For example, in response to concerns raised by women during a community meeting, a VDC agreed to increase the women's daily labor rate to par with the rate their male counterparts receive. In another jurisdiction, women were able to persuade the committee secretary and local political leaders to allocate funds for skill development training targeting women from the Uraun community, one of the most disadvantaged groups in Manahaur VDC.

These OTI-supported efforts to educate people about the workings of local government have had a twofold effect: First, they have brought communities together to promote good government initiatives and, second, they have promoted government transparency and accountability.