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## NITI SAMBAD

Since the end of Nepal's civil war in 2006, the country has made substantial progress in constructing a more orderly and inclusive society. The new constitution, adopted in September 2015, paves way for a decentralized governance structure, which promises relief for the nation's many ethnic communities that have long been politically marginalized. Challenges remain, however, and increasing the accountability and responsiveness of the country's political institutions is needed to avert backsliding and a return to the political turmoil of the past.

With federal and provincial elections scheduled to take place before January 2018, and the constitutionally-mandated transition to federalism now underway, Nepal's political institutions will be tested on their ability to decentralize and increase their responsiveness to the public. The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) - consisting of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the National Democratic Institute, and the International Republican Institute - has identified three interrelated programmatic areas that best address Nepal's current needs: improving governance systems to increase transparency, inclusivity, and accountability with the Legislative Parliament (LP); supporting the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) to institutionalize electoral best practices; and empowering political parties to function more effectively, inclusively, and efficiently. Program activities will support greater transparency and commitment to accountability for government agencies.

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

This five year (2017-2022), \$20 million *Niti Sambad* program has a central role in achieving USAID/Nepal's goal of advancing a more democratic, prosperous, and resilient Nepal by strengthening inclusion and participation in political processes. This program will support democratic institutions, strengthen inclusion into political processes and harness political competition as an effective vehicle through which citizens can democratically choose their leaders who will, in turn, set a policy agenda responsive to the needs of the public.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### **SUPPORT TRANSPARENT AND INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS:**

Implement a comprehensive program to strengthen Nepal's electoral system in partnership with the ECN and key civil society leaders and organizations. *Niti Sambad's* efforts will promote greater transparency and support in strengthening Nepal's electoral institutions through civic and voter education campaigns, adapting the legal framework to govern federal elections, and providing technical guidance on out-of-country and absentee voting. These activities will focus on increasing electoral participation of Nepal's most marginalized groups such as Dalits, women and persons with disabilities and build the capacity of civil society organizations to hold government officials accountable. All this comes at an opportune time as Nepal transitions to a federal system.

### **STRENGTHEN PARLIAMENT'S CAPACITY TO DRAFT AND MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION OF EFFECTIVE LEGISLATION**

Assist elected legislators in soliciting citizen input through town-hall meetings and public policy forums. Conduct orientation to support MPs elected to Nepal's first ever federal legislature to understand key aspects of their role. Promote parliamentarian's accountability by empowering local partner CSOs and through the development of monitoring tools and approaches. Organize trainings on research and policy analysis for lawmakers and legislative staff and create lasting linkages with domestic policy researchers to promote use of researched-backed data and evidences while shaping legislative agendas. Assist the national LP secretariat to guide the newly formed sub-national governments to work in partnership the newly implemented federal system.

### **POLITICAL PARTIES FUNCTION MORE INCLUSIVELY AND TRANSPARENTLY**

Encourage and assist political parties to develop responsive policies that take into account the priorities not only of party leadership, but rank-and-file members. This compliments CEPPS's previous successes working with political parties to adopt more inclusive and consultative internal organizational and governance structures. This activity will place particular emphasis on participation of women and members of marginalized communities in program activities, while building the capacity of political parties to reach out to these populations and consider their interests.

### **PROMOTE GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

A unified communication and citizen outreach strategy is critical in informing citizens and maintaining public trust in government institutions. This is particularly important during period of crisis and the lack of which was witnessed during the 2015 earthquake. *Niti Sambad* will continue CEPPS's ongoing support to the Prime Minister's Office, National Reconstruction Authority, and Ministry of Information and Communication to enhance internal communication by improving organizational development and agency performance. The project will also support the ECN to engage more effectively with the media in promoting public knowledge and understanding of electoral procedures under the new constitution. Timely quantitative and qualitative public opinion research will be used to inform the development of responsive and effective communication strategies.