NGO Governance in Nepal: Convoluted Exercise for Ideal Desire

Govind Prasad Dhakal, Shree Krishna Shrestha
Central Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Bagmati, Nepal

The people based NGO movement in Nepal is tightly knotted with the restoration of democracy in 1990 that has opened up broad avenues relating to people’s right. At the beginning these NGOs have centered their activities mainly in making people aware about the rights, policy advocacy for the issues that impinge upon the lives of people and playing the role of watch-dog in government activities. Gradually, they expanded their activities horizontally covering almost all the activities that have been undertaken by government and private sector thus influencing the lives of the people. NGO friendly policies and programs are able to create this participatory environment of NGOs in the matters of governance in Nepal. These NGOs are present in every parts of Nepal and their number has been increased exponentially. At present, it is estimated that there are more than 50,000 NGOs having more than 400,000 members and mobilize more than 20% of total budget of Nepal (SWC, 2008) though hardly 3000 of this total are actually working. Initially these NGOs in Nepal were governed by broad working model i.e. working and managing by same people in the organization and claiming that they have helped significantly to uplift the poor and creating noble social capital in their working areas even under many constraints and challenges. But this trend has been gradually changing. Now many professionals are finding the space in NGOs and research and teaching on NGOs are giving importance.

However, information about the activities of NGOs, as perceived, is air tightened. Only limited members could have access to the information. NGOs stakeholders are demanding to be more transparent and give meaningful participation of target groups in their activities. Donor dependence of NGOs is also a long pending issue which is not letting them to be local demand friendly (Dhakal, 2007). Generally the preference is given to the programs preferred by respective donors. Owing to this environment donor agencies are also pressurizing NGOs to be more transparent, accountable, and participatory and adopt the principles of good governance in their management. Government of Nepal is also seriously thinking to make the NGOs (TYIP, 2007) follow these governing principles in the management and working. Because of these factors there is a growing trend that NGOs be more governance friendly in Nepal and be more responsibility toward government, public and donors. This paper is a part of the ongoing project on governance in Nepal jointly carried on by University of Bergen, Norway and Central Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University, Nepal which aims to explore:

- Whether the Nepalese NGOs are transparent, accountable and participatory?
- How much NGOs are governance friendly?
- Are NGOs in Nepal financially donor dependent?
- How is their management system or are they truly following the concept of civil society or influenced by the family or peer groups?
- What are the difficulties of NGOs in governance matters in Nepal?

Besides the secondary sources of information from the published documents from the government, I/NGOs and international donors, the primary information will be collected from 25 purposefully selected NGOs that have adopted good governance system in their working in Nepal. The research will focus on transparency, accountability, and participatory approach followed by the NGOs and their pursuance in achieving the broader objective of good governance through participation in development. For this financial system, selection of programs, their implementation, participation with governmental- local and national and the role of general public in such matters will be examined. Observation and focus group discussion with the authorities in the government, NGOs and the affected people from the programs will be done.

This paper expects that the NGOs have contributed a lot to the governance development in Nepal. Their management style, despite general perception, are following transparency, being
more accountable, and following the principles of participation in governance. These are now becoming professional rather than family based management and following the basic principles of good governance.

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