

Building CSO Enabling Environment in Nepal (BEEN)

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) held the larger portion and the leading group within the wider family of civil society. The leading engagement of NGOs and CBOs with its past actions at national and global level has proved that they have strong positive influence for the democratic, fair and just governance of state and the market. NGOs/CBOs have, therefore, evolved as important and most influential actors for promoting good governance, transparency, effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability along with other actors on the field. The NGOs are active as major and efficient collaborators for delivery of essential services to the deprived and vulnerable population; as influential advocates of marginalized groups and excluded communities; and knowledgeable advisors on public policy to the government. In addition, NGOs/CBOs are increasingly considered to be the catalytic agents, pressure groups and watchdogs in promoting public accountability. With the recognition of role played by NGOs in Nepal, the Constitution of Nepal and 14th National Plan has recognized civil society as essential development partner.

The existing legal provisions in the country regarding the formation of NGOs/CBOs are fairly enabling. But, there are some procedural hindrances and their amendment could further enhance the enabling environment for the operation of NGOs/CBOs aiming to deepen democracy and widen public engagement in governance. The Constitution of Nepal has recognized the people's fundamental rights of freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of thought, conscience and expression. However, it is also important to ensure the practical application of such freedom by state authorities with the promulgation of facilitating laws and lifting barriers to the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. The civil society of Nepal has call for government to take step towards amendment of existing laws and policies since last one decade, the new federal state model and republic constitution has developed an enabling ground. Yet, one of the draft legislations (Social Welfare and Development Act and Association Registration Act) as made public by the Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare for the public consultation has been observed having few provisions as non-complying with the constitutional provisions and international human rights standards.

With the promulgation of new constitution and entry into the new restructured state system, the NGOs/CBOs and civil society in Nepal have to strengthen its efforts further on improving enabling environment. Particularly with the devolution of power to the state and local government, the time has demanded for an intensified actions and collaboration with government for creating a safer and enabling space for civil society to sustain and strengthen federal republic democracy.

In recent years, the civil society around the world has been observing a shrinking space with the rise of populism, fundamentalism, terrorism, securitization and militarized nationalist ideologies. The liberalization of market and privatization of public services along with increasing market control over the civil society actions has also led to narrow the civil society space. In Nepal too, The NGOs/CBOs in have started to feel that their space is gradually shrinking in recent years with application of bureaucratic hassles and multiple approval and coordination requirements by policies. The ad hoc policies, guidelines and notices issued by various authorities of government have been contributing to limit the independency of NGOs and their function as independent democratic actors. At the same time NGOs credibility have been publicly questions in some cases too.

Therefore, The NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN) has recognized that the time has come to take leading initiatives for widening and maintaining independent, safe and enabling civil society space through close coordination, cooperation and advocacy actions with the government. The NFN has been also working hard to maintain public trust and credibility through strengthen NGOs' performance to be open and transparent, engaging and responsive, and continually learning and being accountable to the public. NFN has recognized the need of capacity building of CSOs to make them able for analyzing the situation of enabling environment and able to take advocacy actions to protect their freedom, independency and safer space.

NFN, being the lead and umbrella organization of more than six thousand NGOs in Nepal, have started the initiative for building enabling environment for entire CSOs and to promote transparency and accountability among the CSOs, through the project entitled "Building CSO Enabling Environment in Nepal (BEEN)". This project is an integral part of Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) implemented by FHI 360 with financial support from USAID.

Goal

Goal of this project is to strengthen enabling environment for civil society in the country.

Objectives

BEEN wants to achieve following three objectives:

- 1) Improved legal and policy framework, based on international standards, to create an enabling environment for civil society
- 2) Improved public understanding and confidence in the role of civil society organizations (CSOs)
- 3) Improved self-regulation of the sector and internal governance of CSOs

Duration

Total duration of BEEN project is 36 Months, starting from January 01, 2017 and ending on December 31, 2019.

Target Groups

NGOs; CSOs' networks, alliances, federations and coalitions; policy influencers; and activists those representing the voices of women and marginalized people are the target groups of the project.

Final Beneficiaries

Civil society activists, social campaigners and social workers working with poor, marginalized women, vulnerable people, excluded communities including Dalits, Muslims, indigenous nationalities, differently able people, sexual minorities, and the people living in remote areas are the final beneficiaries of the project.

Expected results/Outputs

Expected results of the project are following:

- 1.1: CSO friendly policies, acts, rules and regulations are in place
- 1.2: Awareness raised on CSO enabling environment
- 2.1: Improved effectiveness of NGOs with new avenues
- 3.1: Increased awareness on governance and accountability among CSOs

Activities

1.1.1 Advocacy for CSO-friendly legal environment

This activity includes planning workshop on CSO enabling environment, review of draft bills and other relevant policies and laws, develop joint position paper, consultation meeting with CSOs on legal and operational challenges, multi-stakeholder dialogue on minimum standard for an enabling environment at national level, meetings with political leaders, Ministries, parliamentarians, Public Procurement Monitoring Office, and review meeting on enabling environment among the CSOs at centre.

1.1.2 Organize training on CSO enabling environment

This activity includes publication of book on CSO enabling environment, develop a training curriculum, and organize trainings on CSO enabling environment at centre, cluster and district level.

2.1.1 Develop a NGO roadmap and constituency building in changing political landscape

This activity includes pre-consultation meeting at centre on NGO Roadmap and CSO constituency building, consultation meetings at districts and centre level, publish book of NGO roadmap and organize sharing of NGO roadmap in clusters.

2.1.2 Build mutual trust between media and CSOs

Under this activity, BEEN will organize meetings with media at centre.

2.1.3 Implementation of recommendation of the perception survey carried out by FHI 360

3.1.1 Expand publicity of NFN's Code of Conduct and Istanbul Principles of CSO Development Effectiveness

This activity includes publication of book on Code of Conduct and Istanbul Principles of CSO Development Effectiveness publish calendar and sticker.

3.1.2 Enhance effectiveness of NFN's Code of Conduct and Istanbul Principles of CSO Development Effectiveness

This activity includes monitoring compliance of NFN's Code of Conduct and Istanbul Principles of CSO Development Effectiveness, and to undertake follow-up actions on the basis of monitoring results.

3.1.3 Collection of self-regulation best practices and incentive to the organization

Budget

Total estimated budget of this project is NRs. 22,319,032, in which NRs. 20,290,030 has been requested with FHI 360/USAID.

Implementation Arrangement

NFN, in close coordination with CS:MAP (*Supported by USAID and implemented by FHI 360*), is solely responsible to implement the entire project activities. Project Management Committee (PMC) has been formed at the centre under the Executive Committee of NFN. Portfolio members and key board members are remained as the members, whereas Executive Director is the member secretary of the committee. A project office has been established inside the central office of NFN.

The project maintains accounting and financial management system according to its norms and policies. But, the project maintains norms and guidelines of FHI 360. Internal control system is maintained to check the potential fiduciary risks.

There are six staffs (including two part-timers) in the project. Programme Coordinator is responsible for overall execution of the project.

The project makes maximum efforts to build collaboration with other projects supported by FHI 360 and USAID at local and national level. Moreover, it collaborates with other like minded organizations, which are working on enabling environment, capacity development and governance improvement.

Monitoring activities include periodic meetings of management committee at centre and yearly review meetings with national level stakeholders. Visits to the districts and monitoring checklist are applied as methods for monitoring. Further, the NFN district chapters review the performances of the project in the districts. Result framework including logical framework, ME Framework and Work-Plan are used as tools for monitoring and evaluation process.

Meeting notes, event reports and quarterly reports are produced. Financial reports are produced monthly and quarterly basis. An outcome monitoring summary is annexed with the annual report to inform the progress against the outcomes as indicated in the log-frame. Periodic reports are submitted to the USAID supported CS:MAP, implemented by FHI 360. The periodic reports can be accessed at NFN's official webpage, www.ngofederation.org.