

Sharing & Discussion Programme on Local Governance, Reconstruction & Role of Civil Society

Introduction

Jagaran Nepal, with the invaluable aid of Architecture And Development (A&D) and assistance of Cities Unies France (CUF), conducted a discussion program titled “Sharing and Discussion Program on Local Governance, Reconstruction & Role of Civil Society” on 13th April, 2017 in Greenwich Village Hotel, Kupandole . The program saw 40 participants who consisted of Earthquake victims from Kavre, Sindhupalchowk, Ramehchap, Dolakha along with the representatives of various NGOs (Non-Government Organization) working in the reconstruction programs in the areas. The program featured a panel with panelists **Mr. Ludovic Jonard (Executive Director of A&D)** and **Mr. Bertand Gallet (Executive Director of CUF)**. The panel was moderated by **Ms. Sharmila Karki (Founding President of Jagaran Nepal and Former President of NGO Federation Nepal)**. The objective of the program was to carry out a round table discussion focusing on the issues and problems of reconstruction, after the April 2015 earthquake, in local communities and the role of local government and civil societies in the amelioration of the process.

The program began with Mr. Jonard talking about the issues that the program was going to focus on. He put forward the following issues for the participants to discuss:

- What are the good practices we can highlight and support towards a more participatory planning and management of the built environment, at the community level?
- What are the current institutional opportunities of improving the participation of civil society in local governance in Nepal?
- How Nepalese NGOs and Civil Societies can be better involved in the local governance (Village Council, ward level)? What strategy can be put forward in coordination with the Nepalese partners?
- What can be the role of an international organization like CUF, in order to support the decentralization process? What strategy can it implement in coordination with Nepali Partners?
- How can Jagaran Nepal, one of the leading NGOs working for women’s participation in decision making, peace and governance can work together?



Then Ms. Sharmila Karki opined that since the local election is about to be held, the focus should be on local authorities and holding them accountable in the process of reconstruction in the earthquake affected areas. She talked about CUF and its work in capacity building of local authorities and how the organization will play an important role in the coming days as Nepal adopts federalism.

Subsequently Mr. Gallet addressed the floor with an introduction to CUF and its work internationally. CUF is a Federation of French local and regional governments involved in international relations and in particular, decentralized cooperation. In his opinion, projects are more about transfer of capacity, budget to local authorities and not the transfer of autonomy itself. He firmly put forward his belief that the approach to helping communities should start from the bottom moving upwards rather than the other way around. He exemplified the advantage of a decentralized government and stated how the system allows election of new people and provides access to the younger generation to the government. He clarified on how the system ensures an equal chance for women and the youth to be a part of the government bringing about the possibility of change and also a renewal of people in the government.

Open Floor Discussion

The later phase of the program had 'open floor' and endowed participants with an opportunity to put forward their ideas. Mr. Parshuram Upadhyay, representing Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCPD), talked about how the constitution has endowed room for the civil societies' and women's upward mobility. He put forward the caveat that in order for the constitutional provision to take effect, local elections need to be held so that women can actuate their rights. He commended civil societies for acting as a firm watchdog for good governance and opined that the governance system needed to be extend out of Singhdurbar to the local level. He extended his optimism and said that Nepal may become a champion of local governance in South Asia.



Similarly, researcher Mr. Sanjay Chaudhary asserted that there had been an 'institutional gap' in governance due to an absence of elected local body entailed by lack of election. He put forward his belief that the decentralization may help everyone have basic knowledge with everyone receiving training and

learning new things at the local level itself. He said that all party mechanism has lessened women's participation. He ended his remarks by questioning the accountability of engineers and bureaucratic involved in reconstruction.

Ms. Subechhya Bindu from Working Women Journalists talked about media and its influence with public. She said that although the media wants to help shine a positive light on the NGOs, political instability in the country prevents them from doing so. She also talked about media monitoring and gender perspective. She said that women are more vulnerable, even though it may seem that more images of equality may surface, they obscure the vulnerability of women. She shared her belief that decentralization may bring the stability required for positive changes.

Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa from National Disaster Management Network Nepal (DiMANN), said that disaster and development need to go hand in hand. Our country has a disaster relief act however; it does not focus on risk reduction approach. He shared that the government had drafted a bill that had gone into the parliament and despite home ministry's efforts the act has not come into force. He also talked about the clash of interest in resource mobilization and also the lack of coordination in governance mechanism. He says that, if planned, recovery can be effective. Through local election, people can be trained. He also said that there should be investment in capacity building which will help in sustainable building. Meanwhile, Mr. Simone Giovetti representing CUF put forward his query regarding the first responder in a disaster and asked who the first responders in case of Nepal were. Mr. Thapa clarified that the *de facto* first responders were the local people and civil society because most of the villages are not equipped with relief materials. However, he mentioned that with the election, preparedness should be given to newly elected members from the very beginning.

Ms. Sadhana Shrestha and Ms. Urmila Shrestha from TEWA, recalled their experience working in disaster relief activities. They added that local election could be taken as an opportunity for reconstruction where CSOs could play an important role. Similarly, Ms. Bhawana Bhatta from NGO Federation of Nepal shared that the populace have a negative perception of NGOs resulting from ineffective aid distribution. She clarified that aids were distributed to easily accessible households only while hard-to-reach households and households of marginalized people were deprived of aids. She claimed that such ineffectiveness could be reformed with the help of election.

The observations and suggestions of Community people from the affected areas

From Dolakha, Ms. Devi Siwakoti said that during the disaster, since there was no local body, nobody knew what to do or how to allocate the tasks. She suggested that civil society should become more active in such places. She suggested monthly monitoring of projects including feedbacks after a certain period.

From Kavre, Ms. Devi Mijar talked about how development partners come with their own vision and plans and try to implement what they believe is best. Instead, they should survey and study the community and make a proposal according to the needs of the community. They should make action plans for local empowerment. Civil society and local government should work together for best results.

From Sindhupalchowk, Mr. Khid Bahadur Shrestha reiterated how Sindhupalchok was hit hard by earthquake and talked about his and the community's problems with reconstruction. Their houses were on guthi land which is a land in name of government. He said that the land ownership certificates had not

been easy to get. There are also funding issues coming from the land ownership problems. He believes that the Central to local transition may make things more accessible easing the processes and making reconstruction feasible.



Mr Navaraj Pathik, from Ramechhap, clarified that there were a myriad of technical problems regarding reconstruction. He shared his frustration regarding the constantly changing housing regulation and the standard that it had put forward making it difficult to keep up and work. He added that the institutional memory of authorities endorsing blueprints of houses were problematically low which meant, he added, every new officer would interpret the rules differently. He emphasized on clarifying and defining the rules and regulations. He suggested that problem regarding uterine collapse faced by 40 % women due to improper planning of the houses (design flaw of stoves) can be mitigated if proper planning regarding the construction of the houses (mitigating design flaw of stoves) is conducted. He added that the legal obstacle in reconstruction arose due to legal registration of lands. He clarified that since the lands are, in most of the cases, registered in husband's name who are abroad, wives could do little to start the legal procedure of reconstruction.

Conclusion

Ms. Karki clarified that national reconstruction authority's policies and programs were not in favor of civil society. She added that the space for civil societies are shrinking and are, wrongly, blamed for embezzlement of donations. She added that CSOs are given a bad reputation. She emphasized on the need of change in perspective toward CSOs and said that CSOs needed to vindicate their honors. She added that CSOs could play a major role in capacity enhancement of local authority level. She asserted that there needs to be an effective and proper coordination among bureaucrats, civil society, politicians, and community people. She opined that using local resources for reconstruction shall be considered.

Mr. Dipak Bashyal from Jagaran Nepal mentioned that though there existed a disaster management coordination committee in the district, due to "top-down approach" used by central authority to community, people in community lacked ownership. Similarly, Ms. Meena Bista and Ms. Benu Maya Gurung representing AATWIN opined that the rate of human trafficking had increased after the

earthquake and said that there should be an increase in awareness programs, provisions of which shall be made by the local level.

Mr. Jonard in his concluding remarks emphasized on the difference between funding reconstruction and funding capacity for reconstruction and said that his organization was involved in funding the capacity for reconstruction. He suggested that everyone should look after practical matter solving problems. He clarified that the point was to take the project and give it to the users where the community people are the end users. He asserted that it was an an ongoing process and praised the resilience of Nepali people. He added that local election could be taken as an opportunity to form policies and strategies in field level. He opined that the stakeholders of the program should set an example and rise above the 'blame game'. He added that they should focus on developing local level partnership and ended his address by alluding to the possibility of having a follow session to the day's discussion after further thoughts and discussions.