

Summary Report on the four-day Regional Workshop on Civil Society Organizations and Aid Effectiveness (South and West Asia)

29 October - 1 November 2007

Kathmandu, Nepal

In co-operation with the NGO Federation of Nepal, the Reality of Aid Network, the Nepal Policy Institute, the Least Developed Countries Watch (LDC Watch) and the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), a four-day *Regional Workshop on Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and Aid Effectiveness in South and West Asia* was held in Kathmandu from 29 October to 1st November 2007. This regional workshop was a part of the work plan of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) Advisory Group on CSOs and Aid Effectiveness.

The entire idea of conducting this workshop was driven by the need to address the perspectives of and concerns on aid effectiveness in countries in development, voiced by civil society organizations. They are considered equally (equally with whom? 1st world?) responsible for shaping the global aid architecture. CSOs play a crucial role in the development as they are the distinctive contributors to aid effectiveness and administer their work as watchdog. By advocating on behalf of the poor and the needy they act as a significant channel for aid delivery.

The debatable issues of concessionary loans as a form of development assistance, debt crisis and conditionality have constantly been critiqued and questioned by the CSOs in recent times. Nonetheless these issues got sidelined in the past as there was a constant debate on the identity and the roles of CSOs as development actors, particularly in regard to democratic movements. At the same time, there are some evidences where the knowledge about issues surrounding aid effectiveness among civil society organizations themselves seems very limited. Therefore this regional workshop strove for bridging a gap of knowledge by addressing issues concerning the recognition and role of CSOs and highlighting issues of the aid effectiveness agenda among broader circles of the development community.

The Workshop was divided into two parts. The first two days, 29 and 30 October 2007 was a "CSOs-only Preparation Workshop", followed by a two-day "Multi-Stakeholders Workshop" on 31st October and 1st November 2007. Along with the NGOs, INGOs, government officials including Ministries, Members of the National Planning Commission and donors were present. Prior to the workshop, the NGO Federation of Nepal had arranged several preparatory meetings for Donors, INGOs, Governments, and Civil Society Organizations, particularly with networks, alliances and federations. The preparatory meetings chalked down the areas of priority and identified good practices and challenges that the CSOs encounter in their work. It was thus particularly helpful for the presenters to select their topics of presentation.

The sessions of the main workshop were dedicated to *ownership, harmonization, alignment, mutual accountability, conditionality, debts, grants, debt burden, tied aid, 'voices' and recognition of CSOs, North-South CSO relationships and on models of donor support*. Members of CSOs and development workers raised questions and initiated dialogues pinpointing the donor agencies on their failure to keep up to their commitments regarding effective aid delivery. They brought in case studies from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Yemen and Nepal which showed that around 60 per cent of the aid amount is diverted back to the donor countries in the name of technical assistance and in other forms. The studies also revealed that the CSOs in developing countries indeed play a significant role though their contribution in this sector is hardly acknowledged by their respective governments and donors. In the lack of mere coordination and trust among donors, governments and CSOs, it was clearly felt that the key principles for aid reform will never be achieved until the recognition and 'voices' of CSOs as well as mutual accountability is attained.

Another major discussion in the workshop was about the applicability and limitations of the 2005 Paris Declaration on CSOs. The major debate surrounded issues on the efficiency of the Paris Declaration, which in itself is considered a limited and half-hearted attempt for aid regime reform without any participatory space for CSOs in the formulating process. Further to this, the limited representation of CSOs particularly those engaged in the issues of women, children, dalits, indigenous people, tribal, differently able persons, sexual minorities, senior citizens, peasants, migrants, refugees and other excluded groups have narrowed down the broad-based civil society space and strengthened donors' influence. Its failure to address fundamental problems of the global aid architecture further enhances the continuation of development plans under donor's control in the future.

Therefore, there were voices raised from women's organizations, peasant's organizations, NGOs working for differently able persons, indigenous nationalities, dalits, federation of community forestry, environmental organizations, human rights and organizations working for various social causes and socially excluded groups. They claimed to end all the donor imposed conditionality and hence recognize the conditions that undermine democratic ownership of the recipient country. In the opening program of the CSO preparatory workshop on 29 October the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal Ms. Sahana Pradhan stressed that the only possibility to make development processes more effective is by strengthening collaboration between the government, civil society and the private sector. In this regard Professor Maheshor Man Shrestha, member of the National Planning Commission of Nepal referred to unequal relationships that exist between the donors and recipient countries, government and civil society organizations and, government and the people that are most affected by aid effectiveness agendas. He stressed for a democratic reform at all levels. Similarly, Dr. Arjun Karki, coordinator of SAAPE and chairperson of LDC Watch critiqued on the patron-client relationships between donors and the governments. He urged that these need to be transformed into partnerships for effective aid utilization and management. Dr Arjun Karki further generally critiqued on the aid policies applied by the IMF and the World Bank.

Following the first two days, another one and a half days were allocated to a tripartite workshop that brought together representatives of CSOs with those of donor agencies and partner governments. On these days, Dr. Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission of Nepal, inaugurated the 'Multi-Stakeholders' Workshop'. He highlighted that the planners of the government and the CSOs need to build trust between each other in order to make the State work. He further stressed on the importance of the identification of lacunas in aid agendas. Those need to be corrected first for effective aid implementation.

Dipendra Chhetri, member of the National Planning Commission highlighted issues related to the so called 'dependency syndrome' created by foreign aid. Eiichi Sadamatsu, representative of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal stressed on the importance of transformation of the donors including the civil society organizations for creating an inclusive environment to manage development processes. Gevenieve Federspiel from Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation said that the CSOs have to dictate their existing agendas to work in the peace and reconstruction process. She added that CSOs have to address governance challenges and get organized to work with the people, in a rather horizontal than vertical way. The mentioned representatives were key note speakers in the workshop.

Dr. Renu Raj Bhandari from the Women Human Rights Defenders Network, Ms. Lucky Sherpa from the National Network of Indigenous Women and Ms. Azrah Talat Sayeed from the Roots for Equity, Pakistan were among those speakers, who particularly highlighted issues regarding women, gender and indigenous people. In their view, they needed to be addressed first when it comes to approaching democratic developments. Ms. Azra further explained how sustainable development is only possible in a stage where there is social solidarity. Dr. Netra Timsina from NGO Federation of Nepal stressed on the issues related to harmonization, alignment, ownership and mutual accountability.

Some of the presenters from CSOs who gave an over view of the aid scenario of their respective countries and emphasized on creating social solidarity by the CSOs for sustainable development were, Karuna Onta and Nabin Subedi from the Association of International NGOs, Antonio Tujan, Jr. from the Reality of Aid Network, Brian Tomilson, an (OECD?) Advisory Group member, Alope Michyari form India (which org??), Ali Ercelen from Pakistan (org??), Rabin Subedi from the Nepal Policy Institute, Dr. Keshab Khadka from the All Nepal Peasants' Federation (ANPFa), Ahmed Swapnam from Voice Bangladesh, Anil Singh from the South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development, India, Jamal Jawahiri from Al Amal, Iraq, Suranjan Kodithuwakku from the Green Movement, Sri Lanka, Mohd Abdul Matin from the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan, Taufik al Bathiagi from Human rights training center-Yemen, Reza Karim Chaudhari from Bangladesh, Shadnaz Khan from UNNAYAN Onneshan, Bangladesh and Taufik Abdul Latif from Social and Democratic Forum, Yemen.

The Workshop facilitated space for important recommendations and suggestions regarding a draft policy paper prepared by the International Civil Society Steering Group for the Accra High Level Forum. It is demanded that the Accra HLF should give more focus on recognizing the central importance of democracy along with poverty reduction, equality and human rights. Some of the participants had argued for an increase in shared decision-making processes within developing countries and for bringing the World Bank and the IMF into the UN governance framework (is this a special term?). Some others again raised general questions on how democratic the UN system actually is or can be.

CSOs in the workshop stressed a clear separation of powers, including an enabling legal requirement within the government, which is a prerequisite for development actors to play a proactive role in all development programs. Reflecting on their own weaknesses and challenges, they (who?!) felt that the CSOs themselves should come up with self-regulatory mechanisms in respect to accountability, transparency and participation.

It is believed that the main concerns raised from the CSOs, the recommendations regarding the Paris Declaration and the draft policy paper prepared by the International Civil Society Steering Group will be followed up most seriously. These issues will consequently flow into/frame the next High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness taking place in Ghana in September 2008.