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## Perception of Bureaucracy on the Role of NGOs in Irrigation Programs

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### Executive Summary

Nepal has a history of 35 years of planned irrigation development. Before this, farmers managed 823 million hectares of irrigated land. Up to seventh plan (1986-90), 547788 ha was managed by farmers and 267000 ha was managed by the irrigation agencies. Irrigation development planning has to be tied up with food grain requirement of Nepal by 1995, some 600,000 mt/year of cereal have to be produced in order to balance the present food deficit. For this, two alternatives are at hand 1) increasing new irrigated area and 2) improving the performance of existing irrigation schemes.

The first approach needs huge amounts of money while the latter is low cost, involving a variety of intervention options. The Department of Irrigation lacks both the capability and the capacity to invest vast amounts of money, so, the involvement of NGOs is justified for the second alternative of improving existing irrigation schemes.

The new irrigation policy of 2049, through its sub clause 3.2 and others, allowed enough room to support NGO involvement. There are many concepts regarding the selection and utilization of experience of NGOs in the irrigation sector. The issues of NGOs' job, accountability, work performance, and roles are the main topics that are necessary for discussion in order to bridge the gap in understanding between NGOs and the irrigation sector.

Although, the present development needs in the irrigation sector justify the urgent need for NGO involvement, the credibility and capacity of NGOs have to be increased through intensive training.

Non-profit oriented organizations must be given first preference. The service, roles, responsibility and accountability of a NGO can be achieved with proper evaluation to allow for optimum desired performance.

### History of Irrigation Development in Nepal

Before 1950, major irrigation scheme development was undertaken by the farmers of Nepal. Today's data show that nearly 823000 ha of irrigated area are being managed by Nepalese farmers. During 1932-45 the Chandra Canal (the first irrigation project undertaken by the government) was constructed. During this decade the Juddha Canal and Jagdishpur barrage in Sarlahi and Kapilbastu districts were initiated. During 1950-55 some irrigation projects like the Kosi and Gandaki irrigation development projects agreement were initiated. Other medium sized irrigation projects were started

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than this). But development and well being of the people will cause decline in the population growth rate in future.

The above table shows a great difference in food grain requirement and food grain actually obtained from present agricultural irrigation practice. (item no. 4 and 5).

### **Critical Factors Affecting Agriculture Production**

Besides other critical production support services, irrigation alone contributes to agricultural yield. If irrigation is given a share of the responsibility for a greater role in agricultural production, a mandate for irrigation and management changes will allow for performance improvement of existing irrigated areas. So in order to make up the present food deficit, the Department of Irrigation should run two types of irrigation program with the following clear cut visions.

- a) New irrigation area development at the rate of 50,000 ha/year
- b) Performance improvement program at the rate of 100,000 ha/year

New irrigation development would add 3 t/ha/year to rainfed yield whereas performance improvement program would add 3-4 t/ha/year on normal irrigated areas. Performance improvement program costs Rs. 2,000-10,000/ha where as new irrigation cost Rs. 60,000-80,000/ha. A target of 600,000 MT/year to cover the food deficit can be achieved if the above mandate is given to the Department of Irrigation. Or, any combination between (1) and (2) can be made based on food requirement and budget.

Increasing production through performance improvement program is a low cost effective approach which many developing countries are unaware of. These programs include, irrigation management transfer, joint management, systematic canal operation and maintenance, system rehabilitation and performance improvement assistance to farmer managed irrigation schemes. Assessment, implementation and evaluation of such programs need multi-disciplinary approaches which are not available in the Irrigation Department.

### **Performance of Irrigation Development and Management**

The total area completed up to seventh Five Year Plan is only 51% of the total targeted during a 35 year period. The average annual rate of irrigation development in the country is only 16,000 ha. During Sixth and Seventh Plan the achievement was higher, because during this period many agencies shared the programs.

If the food deficit is to be made up by only new irrigated area, then nearly 150,000 ha of cultivated area have to be brought under irrigation each year. In this case, nearly Rs. 9 Arab is needed annually. However, if the food deficit is to be totally made up by performance improvement program nearly 150,000 ha have to be developed annually and the total cost comes to be Rs. 30-60 crore. It involves more than 200 trainings, many problems solving researches, gangs of water users organization development, lot of production service support promoting personnel and units. These are all beyond the present capability and capacity of Department of Irrigation. It needs tremendous quantity of manpower support from NGOs.

## **NGOs Support In Irrigation**

If irrigation development is to be planned to support food grain requirement of the country, then a variety of new interventions with new technologies have to be implemented in the irrigation sectors. These new innovations and methods have to be managed by one central unit and implemented by many more agencies in the country. Many NGOs' national or international were involved in the irrigation development process of the past. At present, the following NGOs are working in different activities of irrigation development association with the Department of Irrigation. The last two of this list are international, non-profit organizations while the first six are profit-oriented consulting firms. It is thus important to differentiate between the various types of "non-government" institutions.

### **Irrigation Development Works**

- a) Nipon Koe (P. Ltd.) Japan - Morang Sunsari Irrigation Project - Assisting project in design, supervision of irrigation system development and management. This company is providing similar service to project management of Narayani Irrigation Project.
- b) Sir, Halcrow and partners, England - Mahakali Irrigation Project - Assisting project in design development.
- c) Tahal Internation, Israel - Bhairawa Lumbini Tubewell - Assisting project in design and development of tubewell.
- d) Shamhu Construction Company, Korea - Babai Irrigation Project - Assisting in project construction.
- e) NIA Consult, Philippine and East Consult (P) Ltd., Nepal - Irrigation Sector Program - Assisting in promoting participatory irrigation development program.
- f) CADI, USA and GEOCE, Nepal - Irrigation Management Project funded by USAID - Assisting in promoting irrigation management concept and skill in Department of Irrigation.
- g) International Labour Organization - Special Public works programs and technical assistance to Dhaulagiri Irrigation Development Project.
- h) International Irrigation Management Institute - Irrigation Management Research assistance to Department of Irrigation.

### **New Irrigation Policy 2049 and Its Provision**

The new irrigation policy 2049 through its sub clause no. 3.2 has adequately explained the involvement of private or non-government organizations (NGOs) in irrigation program implementation and operation.

Also for individual irrigation systems, NGOs can implement irrigation programs on a cost-sharing basis. This provision is made in sub clause 3.32 of the irrigation policy 2049.

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A great emphasis on developing and expanding the construction and management of farmer managed irrigation system is given. In these systems, users will be NGO owners and construct, maintain and operate the irrigation system.

## **Lessons Learned and Concepts about NGOs**

### **Realization**

Need for NGOs is realized because of the following reasons:

- a) NGO services are mostly realized by the donors only. In the project paper, the need for NGOs is written and hence NGOs are employed. It is the general concept of how NGOs enter the irrigation sector. In many donor assisted projects, this occurs often.
- b) NGO services are needed because the work load is unmanageable. When a huge amount of budget is available, ambitious programs are made. When it seems unmanageable by the agency unit, NGO services are sought.

### **Selection**

- a) NGO selection and nomination is the job of superiors. The working unit chief or officers never refer or discuss the type, quality and need for NGOs. So, NGOs appear on superior's will and disappear by that person's will. What are the responsibilities and tasks of the NGO is not clear.
- b) Expatriate NGOs are for the donor's interests alone. Expatriate NGOs are donor driven and depend on the interest of the donor. Such NGOs should not be consulted or much discussion be had with them because donors would be offended and hence, money does not come.

### **Utilization**

- a) NGO involvement in the implementation unit has many advantages:
  - If NGO certifies difficult tasks, it is easily accepted by donors and listened by superiors.
  - Many technically difficult and objectionable tasks can be passed onto the NGO.
  - If any process, procedures or design goes wrong, NGOs can be used as shield, by taking the blame.
- b) They can be good advisors and helpful when the need arises. Some NGOs really supply competitive and knowledgeable personnel who can be of great help and use when needed.

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### **Experience**

- a) Not all NGOs have adequate experience to deal with problems. NGOs and their personnel submit manipulated bio-datas, so, when they are put in actual situations, their inadequate performance de-motivates local farmers for further involvement.
- b) NGOs employ new and inexperienced persons generally to make a higher profit. NGOs are mostly profit oriented, so, irrespective of institutional welfare, they are more centered to their benefit and profit. So, sincere devotion, sacrifice and painstaking effort cannot be expected with inexperienced NGOs.

### **Program Sustainability**

- a) Program implementation through NGO is very costly and unsustainable. Programs like canal operation and maintenance which takes long time to establish becomes a costly business if it is run through NGOs.
- b) Only short period program should be run through NGOs.

### **Issues and Problems**

The following issues and problems were experienced by many while working with NGOs.

- a) Leadership and personality issue: NGOs and their personnel working reflect uncomfortable behavioral activities that has led to ambiguity in the leadership role needed to accomplish the organizational objective. Whether NGO is responsible to accomplish the job or the agency being assisted by the NGO is not clear often.
- b) Job description issue: Generally, in the terms of reference of NGO the word 'assistance', 'ensure' and 'coordinate' are seen. These are ill defined and mis-interpreted frequently to suit the situation.
- c) Accountability issue: To whom, to what level and how the NGOs are accountable are not mentioned and briefed to client office. This leads a luxurious stay and unproductive output of NGO. Whom should NGO be accountable for?
- d) Work performance issue: A NGO has never been found penalized for its wrong program lead, unproductive program concept, and wrong system design. Who should supervise, monitor and control such NGO. Great complaints were listened about wrong feasibility study in sector program.
- e) Issues regarding the roles: Expansion of irrigation development training has become the fun of many agencies now in irrigation sector. Are these NGOs responsible for uplifting the capability of rural poor or do they have development role, or guiding role or assisting role?

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If they have implementation role, how about maintaining or stabilizing role? Whether such role is really beneficial to rural poor?

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions and recommendations can be made regarding the involvement of NGOs in irrigation sector development in Nepal.

- a) If irrigation development planning is to be tied up with food grain requirement and population growth of the country; and if cost effective approaches are to be followed varieties of interventions efforts through many more organizations (NGOs) is a must to balance food deficit in the country.
- b) For performance improvement focused irrigation intervention programs local NGOs' performance is not adequate and also INGOs performance is unbalanced to local needs, so there is a need to be highly specific and particular in selecting both of these NGOs.
- c) To develop credibility and reliability of the services of NGOs conduct intensive training for performance improvement irrigation programs. Adopt learning process and process documentation activities on all these programs. This is the only way to be mature for implementing appropriate technology suited to locality.
- d) Profit oriented NGOs are unsustainable for frequent needs, hence, promote non-profit organizations. These organizations (national or international) must get first preference in the program.
- e) Minimize or reduce bureaucratic control on NGOs. Establish a mechanism through which such organizations can have easy access for development resources.
- f) Define criteria of service, roles, responsibility and accountability of NGOs to be employed and strictly monitored and evaluate the performance of NGOs. Make timely decisions on continuing or discontinuing the services of such NGOs.