

The Himalayan Times

Title : EXPERTSPEAK 'INGOs are finding it difficult to fight war on disinformation'

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**INGOs don't seem to be earning good reputation here. What do you say?**

Firstly, we're not happy because all donor agencies, including multilateral and bilateral, are referred to as INGOs here, which is inaccurate. Secondly, all INGOs are indiscriminately lumped into one basket even when mistakes are committed by only a few. This practice of generalising the issues tends to spread the message that all INGOs working here are in the wrong. So we are contemplating on how to fight this war on disinformation, as INGOs are being portrayed as institutions which are working without accountability.

**One of the reasons behind the criticisms is INGOs' reluctance to channel funds through the state treasury — a practice denounced by the government because it complicates the process of finding out how and where the money is being used.**

All INGOs working in Nepal are registered with the Social Welfare Council (SWC), a government body, which regulates INGOs here. So, all information related to INGOs, like their work area, projects they are handling and funds that they have disbursed, is with SWC. And SWC has pledged to provide any information on any INGO within 15 minutes. Also, none of the INGOs here implement projects without getting a nod from SWC. So, it appears there is a lack of coordination between SWC and the Ministry of Finance (MoF). It would, therefore, be appropriate if MoF could work with SWC and come up with a plan to streamline the process, rather than blame INGOs. What should also be clear here is that INGOs are not willing to run from pillar to post, telling different ministries what we are doing and how we are using the funds.

**But a few INGOs are coordinating with MoF in this regard and their commitments are**

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**reflected in the government's annual budget — although the funds that they have pledged to spend here are yet to be channelled through the state treasury.**

INGOs started coordinating with MoF since the formation of Aid Monitoring Platform around three years ago. With the establishment of this body, many INGOs have started providing information on their projects, including disbursements. Based on this information, MoF is currently creating a database. MoF has been cooperating with us in this regard and has been conducting orientation classes on aid platform for INGOs. So far, around 90 INGOs have participated in these orientation classes and we are encouraging other members to take part in these sessions. But again, we want a one-stop service centre and SWC should be strengthened if it is really that weak.

**Another concern raised by many is duplication of INGO-funded projects.**

**As the chief of the umbrella body of INGOs, how do you plan to address this problem?**

We have just prepared a draft of coordination principles and have circulated it among our members for feedback. Once we start adhering to these principles, incidents of duplication will go down. But in my opinion, the problem of duplication has not become that serious. This is because INGOs have to take permission from local governing bodies prior to implement-



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International non-governmental organisations working here are currently making headlines, but not for the right reasons. They have been charged of distributing funds to various projects without first channelling them to the state treasury — a practice which the government says complicates the process of tracing the whereabouts of foreign aid and determining aid effectiveness. They have also been accused of implementing similar types of projects in the same area, creating problem of duplication. **Rupak D Sharma of The Himalayan Times spoke to Ashutosh Tiwari, chairperson of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal and country representative of WaterAid, to find out whether the allegations were true. Excerpts:**

ing projects. This means we cannot run projects unless there is demand at the local level. Besides, we also do a mapping of INGOs working in various sectors and areas to avoid duplication. However, I am not trying to say duplications have not occurred at all. But one should not generalise from a handful of instances.

**Wouldn't creation of a multi-INGO basket fund to support similar types of projects reduce the problem of duplication?**

Every INGO is an indepen-

dent body, which provides advisory services to, arranges funds for, and monitors activities of NGOs working for it.

**But wouldn't creation of a basket fund also address the problem of aid fragmentation, which the government says is reducing the size of project, thus making it difficult to conduct monitoring?**

Yes, it is possible. But it should be a policy decision. Regarding monitoring activi-

ties, the works of INGOs are evaluated by donor agencies, our own headquarters and even SWC. On top of these, we have to adhere to international auditing and governance principles. So, we cannot do whatever we want, and most of the INGOs do not want to take the risk of getting embroiled in scandals, especially those related to embezzlement, as such controversies only tarnish their reputation.

**But it is said corruption level at NGOs is quite high, isn't it?**

Partner NGOs of INGOs

have to abide by codes of conduct and comply with all the laws of the country. However, there are around 41,000 NGOs operating in the country and not all of them are partners of INGOs working here. So, I cannot speak on behalf of all NGOs. Also, I cannot speak on behalf of INGOs that are not our members. You must have heard of SWC's recent decision to cancel the registration of several INGOs. But since they are not our members, I cannot talk about them. We currently have 112 members, out of 192 that have been registered at SWC.