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**AIN STRATEGIC PLAN  
FOR 2014 - 2016**

# AIN STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2014-2016

## 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Association of International INGOs, AIN, founded in 1996 is a Network of international non-governmental organizations. AIN's mission is to be a strong, proactive, and accountable network of INGOs in Nepal which promotes poverty reduction, sustainable peace and equitable development, human rights, social inclusion and good governance among its members and their partners.

AIN<sup>1</sup> operates on behalf of its members under the guidance of a three-year strategic plan. The Strategic Plan 2014-2016 is a revision of the previous Strategic Plan 2011-2013. The document gives a brief introduction on AIN, its working modality, mission, principles and objectives as per the Articles of Association. It then outlines the current context in which AIN operates and articulates AIN's key objectives and activities for the next three years. This document is meant to serve as a guide for AIN and its members as activities are planned and implemented. It also should serve as a reference which may help external partners better understand AIN and its intentions.

### **The key priorities for AIN during the period 2014-2016 are:**

1. Develop jointly with government a clear and stable administrative framework for the work of INGOs,
2. Promote a more accurate portrayal of our work in Nepal society,
3. Strengthen our field level coordination,
4. Strengthen AIN's ability to be a platform for sharing information
5. Reinforce AIN as a meaningful player in the dialogue with external development partners and government,
6. Improve the quality of interaction in plenaries and of working groups
7. Foster members' and development partners' focus on marginalisation and vulnerability

### **Disclaimer**

AIN has made considerable effort to accommodate the issues and concerns of its members and stakeholders while charting out this Strategic Plan. Given the diverse interests of development stakeholders in Nepal, AIN has had to prioritise the issues and concentrate on AIN's role as a network of INGOs, as distinct from the roles of individual member organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> NGO stands for Non-Governmental Organisation, and throughout this paper refers to any civil society organisation operating in Nepal

## 2– INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background

#### 2.1.1 Structure of the Strategy Paper

This Strategy Paper consists of three parts: an introduction, a contextual analysis, and the strategy.. The INTRODUCTION provides information about AIN, its history, principles, functions and operating structure. The CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS provides a political, social and economic overview of Nepal and covers the influencing factors on the role of INGOs in the current development environment. The STRATEGY describes where and how AIN intends to direct its focus and involvement. It begins with the foundational documents, the mission, objectives and roles, and then elaborates on major areas of interest.

#### 2.1.2 Process

The strategic planning process for AIN for 2014-2016 was led by a strategic planning team of AIN Steering Committee (SC) and External Dialogue and Partnership (EDP) members. This team incorporated internal and external information. AIN members through a plenary review provided feedback to the document. The following documents were reviewed and formed the basis for the AIN strategic plan team to develop this strategy document:

- AIN Strategic Plan, 2011-2013
- AIN Articles of Association of March 2004
- AIN Annual Membership Survey 2012
- AIN Strategy Plan 2011- 2013 Evaluation Feedback from Plenary of April 2013
- AIN Steering Committee Team Building Interaction 24 July 2013

The AIN Strategic plan aims to support an enhanced understanding and appreciation of AIN's development interventions. This Strategic plan is as a *Guiding Document* to ensure effective implementation of AIN's goals.

### 2.2 About AIN

The Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN) was founded in 1996 as an informal gathering for mutual learning through sharing of information. Over the last eighteen years, AIN has become more active and influential. Along with its growth, additional challenges have emerged, including the raising of expectations both internally and externally as AIN has increasingly taken on more responsibility.

Since then, AIN has become a common platform for members to discuss and share mutual issues and learn from each other. AIN provides members with information, connects members to related organisations for support, and represents its members with donors and government. It also provides a platform for coordination.

The membership within AIN is for international NGOs only and is voluntary. AIN membership currently stands at 113, which represents a strong voice for INGOs in Nepal.

AIN is neither an NGO nor an INGO, and does not function as a donor. It is a network of INGOs that functions as outlined in this paper.

## 2.3 AIN Principles

AIN is guided by shared principles and values of equitable development, which are in line with international standards of human rights. These include:

- AIN members are international non-governmental, non-profit, non party-affiliated organisations working in Nepal to advance the public good, including human rights, sustainable development, environmental protection, and humanitarian response.
- AIN member organisations implement their programmes without discrimination regarding gender, race, caste, ethnic origin, geographical location, disability, political affiliation, or religion, whilst acknowledging that adhering to these principles may involve affirmative action.
- AIN and its members are committed to contributing to an improved quality of life for Nepal's people, especially the poor and excluded, and focus assistance on reducing poverty, meeting the immediate needs and conditions of the poorest people, and enabling communities to be self-sufficient and empowered.
- AIN members ensure their work tackles discrimination, social exclusion and injustice.
- AIN members work with and through local partners – including communities, community based organisations, and government bodies –in planning and implementation of development programmes, as well as with national NGOs, donors and the government on policy advocacy.
- In order to ensure broad ownership of members' work, AIN seeks to be transparent and accountable and to communicate intentions – and widen and deepen dialogue – with partners at all levels.
- As a network of INGOs, AIN recognises that all aid can influence conflict situations and create incentives and disincentives for peace. All AIN member programmes contribute to the strengthening of democratic norms and systems that allow for the nonviolent resolution of conflict.
- AIN and its members mutually respect each other's independence and creativity, while recognising the necessity of discussion and dialogue, and the benefits to be gained from close interaction and coordination.

As per the articles of association, AIN will contribute to its mission and aims through the objectives outlined below:

- 1) AIN members are engaging and coordinating with other development and humanitarian actors, including government bodies, NGOs, NGO associations, and funding partners.
- 2) INGOs in Nepal are continually improving systems towards increased accountability, transparency and diversity.
- 3) AIN members have access to guidance and resources.
- 4) AIN members are collaborating in areas of common interest.

AIN does not do the following:

- AIN doesn't solicit proposals for projects and doesn't fund projects.
- AIN doesn't generally partner with individual organisations; as a network, it engages with similar associations or federations.

## 2.5 AIN Operations and Ways of Working

AIN holds an annual election to select executive committee members from among nominated staff of the member organisations. This group, called the Steering Committee, comprises of 11 members and reports to the AIN Plenary, which meets regularly.

AIN has a Secretariat with office space normally provided by one of its members without any charge, and currently it is housed within the Save the Children Office. The Secretariat has an Office Manager and a Programme Coordinator. In addition, a part-time Liaison Consultant helps to fulfil the requirements of the AIN's member administrative needs.

AIN raises an annual subscription from its members to pay for the salary and operating costs of its secretariat staff. In addition, working groups or individual members may contribute money for joint activities. All Steering Committee and other members engage in AIN activities voluntarily.

## 2.6 AIN Working Groups

AIN members operate a number of working groups that are responsible to take forward some of the most important thematic issues in the interest of its members. At the beginning of 2014 the following groups were functioning:

- Capacity Building
- Disaster Management and Climate Change
- Education
- Health
- Peace and Youth
- Disability
- Child Protection

In addition to these formal groups, a number of informal coalitions exist among AIN members based on shared geographical working areas (specifically, at present there are working groups for Far Western and Eastern regions). These working groups respond to the needs and interests of AIN members, and thus may change over time. They foster a common knowledge and understanding among member INGOs of the changing context, and liaise with relevant external stakeholders, including line ministries and government bodies. The working groups may raise contributions from members for joint activities. Additionally, member organisations may apply directly for funding for such activities, as AIN does not apply for funds itself. AIN has been providing a seed money for each Working Groups for their events and activities since 2013.

AIN also has two cross-cutting teams:

- **Safety and Security:** the safety and security team discuss issues of concern and the way forward for AIN members, and connect these through the Basic Operating Guidelines<sup>2</sup> Officer
- **External Dialogue and Partnership (EDP):** the EDP team focuses on high-level relationships and works with senior level government representatives on strategic issues along with Membership service on pertinent issues.

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<sup>2</sup>In Nepal, the impartiality of aid and the degree of access to the needy has been codified through the UN and donor agencies' Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs), a set of measurable working principles that organisations have to apply and advocate on. The BOGs Officer is appointed by this coalition.

- Social Inclusion Action Group: The Social Inclusion Action Group is a multi-agency and multi-donor coordination forum on social inclusion, established in 2005 with the objective of exchanging experiences among its members with the ultimate goal of constructively influencing the social inclusion agenda in Nepal in an informed manner, including through the promotion of workforce diversity. The AIN is currently represented in the SIAG Steering Committee through one of the AIN SC members.

### 3 – CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Political Context

The Comprehensive Peace Accord has mandated political parties to conclude the peace process and introduce a new democratic Federal Republic Constitution. Though the peace process has resulted in the integration of Armed Forces and political transition, other key parts of the Peace Accord have not been finalised. These include a new Constitution, the set-up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Commission for Investigation of Disappeared Persons. The election for the Constituent Assembly in 2013 has given optimism to the population that the main legal framework will move forward in solving contentious but crucial issues. Consensus over the shape that the Federal System could take may be hard to reach and could lead to political instability. Expectations are high regarding the outcomes of local elections due to take place in 2014. Governance and institutional weaknesses have continued to be a concern both at local and national level, and women continue to be underrepresented in the political space. The rule of law is hard to apply in a context of weak capacity, small resources and political interference.

#### 3.2 Social Context

Nepal is a country with a diverse social structure. This diversity is both a blessing and a challenge. The cast system, feudal and patriarchal social structures, and the diversity of ethnic and geographical groups present challenges to ensure equal opportunities for all. Although the situation has evolved positively in the past years with under-privileged groups gaining more voice and bargaining power through a more comprehensive legislative framework, the road ahead is still long. This is especially a concern regarding women.

#### 3.3 Economic Context

The GDP has grown by an average of 4% per year in the past ten years and poverty has been reduced by 39%<sup>3</sup>. The National Living Standard Survey shows that people living below the poverty line has decreased from 42 in 1996 to 25.4% in 2011<sup>4</sup>. Road access has improved greatly. However, nearly one third of Nepal's youth are working abroad – this shows that the local economy has yet to continue its transition<sup>5</sup>. Struggling to modernise its agriculture and to make the necessary industrial investments (especially in terms of energy), the country's economy is still highly dependent on foreign aid and remittances. Skill development of its population through quality education remains a significant gap.

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<sup>3</sup>UNDAF, 2013 , p 3

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup>ibid

### 3.4 Development Context

Nepal is the country in the world that has managed the fastest progress in its Human Development Index. It is expected that Nepal will reach the MDG of halving poverty by 2015<sup>6</sup>. However the most disadvantaged groups are yet to benefit from this advancement. It is expected that the new MDGs will indeed have a stronger focus on vulnerable and marginalised populations confirming the relevance and added value of INGOs. The GON is working on the next National Strategic Plan as well as a number of other sectoral plans. This will give INGOS a unique opportunity to provide input into development choices of GON based on our experience on the ground and internationally. It will hopefully also push GON to define more clearly and consistently across ministries development priorities and build ownership of plans and results by different levels of government. The donor community has continued to provide financial support to INGOs, however the environment has become more competitive and overall resources are noticeably decreasing - pushing INGOS to work more in consortia and to assert their identity and added value.

Although many INGOs are addressing the issue of preparedness to disasters, many lack in-house humanitarian skills. The impact of a humanitarian crisis (major floods, mega earthquake) should continue to be better understood and integrated into planning and activities of AIN members.

### 3.5 Role of INGOs

International Non-Governmental Organisations are actively engaged in the developmental endeavours of Nepal since the 1950s. In early 2014, there were 178 registered INGOs in Nepal<sup>7</sup>. AIN represents 113 International Non-Governmental Organisations. INGOS seek to bring positive change in society. INGOs are independent and have a separate identity from multilateral and bilateral agencies or foundations. They operate at community, district, regional and national levels depending on their mission and means. The nature of their engagement covers a wide range of development issues such as livelihoods, accountability, health, education, disaster prevention, etc.

INGOs in Nepal normally implement projects in partnership with national and local NGOs, community based organisations (CBOs), local and national government and other development partners, all while contributing to government policies and plans. INGOs' involvement in development has continued even during the ten-year insurgency (1996-2006) when INGOs were able to fill gaps in essential services. This positive role is articulated in the current Approach Paper to the Thirteenth Plan (FY 2013/14 - 2015/16) of the Government of Nepal, which recognises the contributions made by INGOs and seeks their continued support in implementing plans and programs<sup>8</sup>. Specific ministries have also articulated these views, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Population, and the Ministry of Finance.

INGOs implement a number of mechanisms that allow government and Nepal citizens to understand and monitor the work of INGOs and the resources that are utilized<sup>9</sup>. INGOs are also accountable to donors and must comply with the legal framework of their country of registration.

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Social Welfare Council Database 2014

<sup>8</sup> "Promote INGOs and NGOs as development partners by directing their investment towards areas of national priority 5.10 Community Based and Non-Governmental Organisations

<sup>9</sup> This includes: general agreement with the SWC, project agreement, district project assessment committee, central project assessment committee, mid-term evaluation by SWC, final evaluation by SWC, annual financial audit by Ministry of Finance, inspections by the Ministry of Labour and publication of data on GON Aid Management Platform portal.

Given the current political environment, it may take some time to achieve stability and the government's ability to provide services to the needy during this process may be further challenged. In this context, INGOs will need to be ready to support the Government of Nepal and civil society in meeting the needs of the people.

### **3.6 Challenges and Opportunities**

Over the years AIN Membership has increased by many folds. AIN has stood as platform for a credible source of information on general INGO matters and continues to play the role of a civil society institution on matters related to governance, public accountability, poverty reduction, humanitarian assistance, gender, social inclusion and peace-building efforts. AIN has built strong relations with SWC through regular interactions and dialogues on common agendas and concerns. AIN has been able to create links with line Ministries through active Working Groups. AIN has provided opportunities to coordinate activities among INGOs and with donors or government stakeholders to redefine development agendas, priorities, strategies as appropriate, although this can still be improved. Likewise, the donor AIN link has been strengthened over the years in forging common positions vis a vis the government on contentious issues and forming one voice.

There has been challenges in terms of unclarity of the status of INGOs where political parties, government and media see INGOs as donors. The national political polarization has adversely affected local-level work for INGOs. Likewise, frequent and rapid transfers of government staff often hinder work at the local level. INGOs have faced difficulties whenever the Government has introduced new laws and policies that pertain to INGOs without being consulted with AIN. At times INGOs have been the target of unjustified negative criticism from the media and government, either deliberately or for lack of information, but always without clear and sufficient evidence or analysis. This is clearly an area of concern as it may ultimately undermine the developmental and humanitarian space for INGOs. Evidence that this space is shrinking is noticeable.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.7 The Need for Coordination, and Comparative Advantage of AIN**

In this context, AIN's role is growing with almost two-decade-old tenure in Nepal, since 1996 as the only widely recognised network of INGOs in Nepal, AIN has the advantage of being able to speak with one voice on behalf of INGOs working in Nepal, as well as being the main entry point for other actors wanting to engage with INGOs as a group. AIN has adiverserange of membership organisations in terms of budget and staff size, scope of work, technical expertise, innovations and international & national presence on one single platform. AIN is financially accountable to the members: AIN finances are audited every year.

The Steering Committee (SC) with a healthy mix of Nepalese and international INGO representatives has proved to be a strong base upon which AIN can develop clear positions on important issues. They have access to Government Stakeholders in key Ministries, SWC, NPC, Department of Labour and Inland Revenue Department to name a few.

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<sup>10</sup>For example, project agreements will only pass if at least 50 % of the project budget is hardware and a maximum of 20% is on salaries and running costs, restricting other forms of interventions that allow INGOs to develop capacity and skills, address peace building, do advocacy, etc.

AIN has the comparative advantage of being able to link with global/regional networks of INGOs elsewhere. Through the extended international network of its members, AIN can also bring in various resources, knowledge, and experience that are relevant to the development needs of Nepal. AIN has a responsive and effective Secretariat that is committed to Membership service and support. Secretariat has been sharing information among Members on administrative requirements, obstacles and how (potentially) to overcome them. Likewise, AIN has been recognized by donors and government institutions as “the” representative body for INGOs. AIN is well known in the development community and among government agencies.

AIN emphasises coordination amongst its members, so that development efforts complement each other and duplication is limited. AIN will foster, facilitate and coordinate dialogue with stakeholders, including the government and donors, on areas of common interest, to ensure effective development partnerships. AIN will work to facilitate the development of sector-wide partnerships, particularly representing the collective position of INGOs. AIN will also work to ensure that the role of INGOs evolves in the changing development environment, including the movement towards a sector-wide approach. Additionally, AIN will work in partnership with national NGOs to ensure the national development plans and policies by the Government of Nepal truly reflect the needs and priorities of the poor and marginalised sections of society. This contributes to preserving our developmental space in terms of funding, environment, access, resources and specific identity.

#### **4 –STRATEGY FOR 2014-2016**

AIN would like to express its hope that this Strategy Paper will be instrumental in contributing to the process of building a well-governed, credible, inclusive, just, responsive, and accountable development environment where civil society’s contribution will be further recognised and strengthened in the overall nation building process.

As AIN is a network of INGOs in Nepal, its main purpose is to provide service to its members with regard to their presence and project implementation in Nepal. In relation to the purpose of AIN and its aim, AIN has set out mission and objectives as outlined below.

##### **4.1 Mission**

AIN aims to be a strong, proactive, and accountable network of INGOs in Nepal which promotes poverty reduction, sustainable peace and equitable development, human rights, social inclusion and good governance among its members and their partners.

##### **4.2. Objectives**

AIN will contribute to its mission and aims through the objectives outlined below:

1) **AIN members are engaging and coordinating with other development and humanitarian actors, including government bodies, NGOs, NGO associations, and funding partners.**

Working Approaches:

- collection and dissemination of information on national and international policies, debates and initiatives;
- participation in and engaging with National level forums and agencies including those of the Government of Nepal and
- proactive engagement with development, economic and humanitarian actors, civil society and relevant stakeholders to foster coordination and collective thinking on development issues.

2) **INGOs in Nepal are continually improving systems towards increased accountability, transparency and diversity.**

Working Approaches:

- sharing good practice and quality standards of governance, gender, social inclusion, ethics and transparency;
- encouraging accountability and transparency through various means including CPAC, DPAC, public and social audits, evaluations and annual reports;
- encouraging AIN members to publish information online and
- commit to the Principles of workplace diversity, child protection, non-harassment

3) **AIN members have access to guidance and resources.**

Working Approaches:

- orientations for members on safety and security systems, and development sector relationships;
- working with the Social Welfare Council, Line Ministries and Key Government Bodies to create a clear administrative framework (and particularly to establish an effective one window policy).
- assisting in dissemination of research, policies and practices that support development

4) **AIN members are collaborating in areas of common interest.**

Working Approaches:

- Working groups in areas of common interest to share good practice and to provide inputs into policy development
- Foster a positive image in the Nepali society.

### **4.3 Priority Issues for 2014-2016**

Across the above objectives, AIN anticipates a number of key priority issues over the next strategic period, as identified by AIN members and external partners. These issues include:

1. Develop jointly with government a clear and stable administrative framework for the work of INGOs, especially on areas of INGO supervision and monitoring, taxation and visa – particular to foster more informed working modalities on both sides
2. Promote a more accurate portrayal of our work in Nepal society, especially through engagement with the media and with central government
3. Strengthen coordination amongst ourselves and with other development partners, promoting collaboration and avoiding duplication, esp. at field level
4. Strengthen AIN's ability to be a platform for sharing information a) about the work of its members; b) about AIN; c) about rules and regulations of government; d) about the development community and background information on development and country issues
5. Reinforce AIN as a meaningful player in the dialogue with external development partners and government re: policy and operational space by bringing real life experience from our field work
6. Improve the quality of interaction in plenaries and of working groups
7. Foster members' and development partners' focus on marginalisation and vulnerability

This identification of issues is not binding, but anticipatory. AIN and its members may identify and prioritise other issues as necessary during this period.

#### **4.4 Stakeholder Relationships**

AIN will focus on building meaningful relationships with all its stakeholders to contribute to Nepal's peace and development process. Good relationships and better understanding among stakeholders will help to provide improved services to the AIN membership, recognising that AIN's stakeholders may be different to individual members'.

#### **4.5 Monitoring**

AIN will monitor membership on a yearly basis looking at active participation in AIN (for example plenary, cross-cutting teams and working groups) and compliance with AIN's Code of Conduct and Principles through an online survey. Suggestions will also be collected. This will give direction to future initiatives to meet the members' needs.

AIN will organize a mid-term evaluation and the SC will, on an annual basis, monitor the progress on the strategic plan.