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## Rethinking group-based development approach in Nepal: Ways forward

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## RETHINKING GROUP-BASED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH IN NEPAL: WAYS FORWARD<sup>1</sup>

Stuty Maskey\*

### ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, the role of 'group-formation' for community development has drawn substantial interest from policy makers, academics and development practitioners. This paper aims to examine the growing popularity of these development groups especially in the context where 'groups' are now the common entry point in most development programmes and projects in Nepal. The increasing popularity of the group approach, however, brings attention to some important questions. Is group formation a sin-qua-non for community development? Does group mobilisation always work out as per expectation?

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a complete alternate option to the group approach but rather raise a note of caution on why excessive reliance on this approach must be viewed cautiously. By highlighting some issues related to this approach, this paper claims that although groups formed for community development have great potential, they should not be viewed as a panacea for developing communities; instead they should be viewed as an important component in tackling developmental challenges.

**Key words:** community development; group model; social mobilisation; development approach

### INTRODUCTION

This paper emerged out of an exploratory study of the growing popularity of group-based development approach in Nepal. Group formation and group-

oriented activities are now a common implementation strategy for most development programmes and projects. However, excessive reliance on this approach must be viewed with caution.

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Since the establishment of democracy in 1990, the principal entry-point in the programme designs of most development agencies, programmes and projects in Nepal has been 'groups'. These groups are favored as the basic unit for development intervention due to two significant advantages. The first is that governments and other organisations can reach a large number of marginalised rural people effectively through the group approach. The second is that distributing resources to groups rather than to individuals is faster and more cost-effective (Stringfellow *et al.*, 1997). Additionally, process of group formation contributes to the empowerment of group-members therefore strengthening collective bargaining power, raising awareness on rights and responsibilities of the citizens and the state, and enabling the poor and discriminated to engage in decision-making processes (Baas, 1997).

While the group approach for development has become popular only recently, it is important to note that it is not an entirely new concept for Nepal. Group model is based on the framework of 'collective action' and it existed in Nepal before these concepts were articulated in these terms. There are several examples of traditional community groups typically based on community-support, religion, caste, or self-help in Nepal. However, this study does not look into the development or role of such self-initiated customary groups but rather focuses on the advent of

'sponsored' groups, formed and mobilised by a government agency or an external agent, such as NGOs.

Literature indicates that a definite date is not identified for the conception of 'group formation' as a development approach. However, there are references that the approach evolved as an alternate to the dominant 'top-down/ trickle down' approach to development in the 1970s (Sanyal, 1996). Critics of the trickle down approach claimed that the state targeted mainly on growth of gross domestic product and overlooked redistributive measures while the market did not offer fair benefits for those who lacked knowledge, information, assets, or a steady source of income (Reddy & Manak, 2005). Group-model emerged as a concept of 'participatory development', also referred to as 'development from below' or 'bottom-up approach'. Around the 1980s, this model caught the attention of policy makers and national governments and by 1990s, it was adopted as a valid model for community development (Satterthwaite & Sauter, 2008). Donor agencies as well as aid-recipient governments rapidly adopted group-formation approach to form issue-specific groups in order to foster development from below.

### **The Process of Group Mobilisation**

Group approach was introduced in the development discourse in Nepal around 1960s and early 1970s through users' groups for public assets management such

as drinking water, forest and irrigation systems (UNDP, 2002). In the early stages, it created scope for another actor, *viz.*, 'Non-Governmental Organisation' (NGO) that played a pivotal role in implementing the formation process. This followed the development of an approach that was designed to organise and form these development groups. This was the Social Mobilisation (SM) process. Groups were formed only after the members/ community underwent a process of SM (Wijayaratna, 2004).

### **Social mobilisation-the concept**

The key to most of the group formation process at the community level is the concept of 'social mobilisation' (LGCDP, 2008). Broadly, SM is seen as a catalysing process by which people living in a community are organised into groups to share and discuss problems, to seek solutions by mobilising resources, and to become more active participants in the decision-making processes that impact their lives (UNDP, 2002).

The Government of Nepal (GoN) supports social mobilisation as development model for rural communities (DLGSP, 2009). SM is now the most recognised approach for group formation. However, there are as many guidelines to SM as there are donors and line agencies pursuing it. In practice, any process of empowerment, inclusion, or social and political awareness in groups is termed as SM. The exercise could be targeting just one component or contributing to a holistic poverty

reduction goal. SM has become a generic term to define any process of organising people into groups.

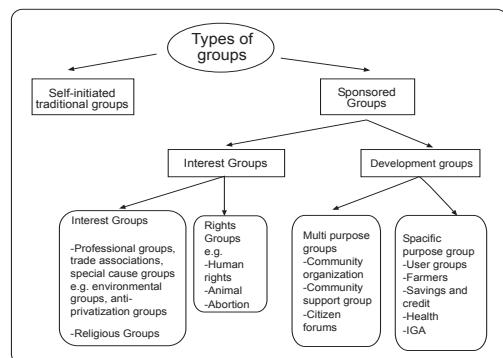
In this light, this study considers the definition proposed by Ministry of Local Development (MLD), which is more specifically related to SM for poverty reduction. MLD has defined SM as a process of making people aware of their rights and responsibilities in society in order to help break social barriers especially for disadvantaged groups (DAGs) to change their social, economic, and/or political situation (Ministry of Local Development, 2010). The definition is based on the premise that the dominant top-down centralised development approach did not address locally identified specific issues and concerns across all sectors and therefore inherent inequalities of access and opportunities emerged in society. MLD's guideline emphasises that the new focus of SM is to empower citizens and enable them to engage with the state and make the local government and service providers accountable to the people.

Therefore, groups formed under SM for poverty reduction approach can have significant impacts on enhancing livelihood options for the group-members (especially DAGs). Secondly, since such groups are created democratically, they take full responsibility of inclusion and equity as well as ensure that the local level service providers are accountable to the people.

## Group Typology

Although no official record of the number of groups formed in Nepal exists, a report estimated that by 2004, there were more than 400,000 groups (LGCDP, 2009). Groups are responsible for mobilising and delivering services across a range of sectors. The increasing role of group based development approach necessitates the need for an overview of the variety of groups that exist. Broadly, groups can be classified into two types -the self-initiated 'traditional' groups and the contemporary 'sponsored' groups promoted or supported by state agencies, NGOs, development programmes, and projects (see Figure).

**Figure 1: Typology of groups**



For the purpose of this study, sponsored groups have been further divided into two types, based on their functions. The first type includes 'interest groups' and 'right groups'. These groups focus on a political process of transformation (Browne, 1990). They are usually narrow in focus and dependent on organised supporters. They have specific public policy goals

pursued through relevant lobbying tactics (Cornwall & Celestine, 2004). Some examples of such groups are trade associations, human rights groups, clean air lobbying groups etc.

**Table 1: Overall preliminary estimate of micro-level and sectoral groups in Nepal**

SN	Group category	Number
1.	Savings and credit	208,054
2.	Agriculture	76,963
3.	Non-formal education	40,994
4.	Irrigation	26,487
5.	Natural Resource management	15,685
6.	Multi-functional Groups	12,150
7.	Other NGOs	5,625
8.	Infrastructure	5,331
9.	Health	2,814
10.	Drinking water supply	2,363
<b>Total</b>		<b>396,466</b>

(Source: Biggs, Gurung & Messerschmidt, 2004)

The second type includes groups that focus on livelihood improvement through access to assets and services. Such groups also have more broad-based development goals such as inclusion, equity and governance, and intentions to contribute to national goals of poverty reduction. Examples include user groups such as community forest user groups, water user groups, agriculture groups, mother's groups, saving and credit

groups, education, health, enterprise and income generation groups. These groups are generally referred as social or development groups. This study focuses on this second type of groups. Community organisations, citizen forums, user groups such as forest user groups, water user groups, savings and credit, micro finance, enterprise, income generation groups etc. are all such development groups that are in the contemporary Nepali context sponsored either by donor projects or by NGOs or directly by government agencies.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

While local groups of various types have their origins in the distant past of Nepali history, the advent of 'sponsored development groups' and more importantly the rapid increase of such groups is a very recent phenomenon. Group formation has become such an integral part of the development process that local villagers can expect to receive services of agencies only by forming groups. At the same time, donor agencies and NGOs mostly start their interventions after formation of community level groups.

Nepal has witnessed the emergence of a striking number of different groups at various levels -- village, community, and national levels. These groups have become exemplary models for community participation, awareness and more recently for greater inclusiveness of disadvantaged members of society. There

are several documented cases of micro finance groups providing credit to raise the economic opportunity and status of Dalit households or allowing access to emergency funds during times of need for marginalised women. While there are noted advantages of group-formation for community development, policy-makers and development practitioners must pro-actively begin to examine the fallouts of excessive dependence on 'group model' as a development strategy.

One outcome of the proliferation of a numerous groups at the community level is multiple-membership of individuals in several groups. This cause double counting when any analysis is conducted. At the same time, the proliferation of groups creates 'group fatigue'—a concept that indicates a situation where group-members struggle to keep up with excess number of group meetings and activities (Thorp, Stewart & Heyer, 2005). As group membership demands time, members of disadvantaged and poor households are discouraged to participate, as the opportunity cost of group meetings tends to be very high for them. This negatively impacts the objective of social development, which is to break social barriers especially for DAGs and the poor and thereby to change their social, economic and political situation.

Another problem with the group-based approach is the standard practice of 'social mobilisation' approach for group formation process. The current practice of

SM is formulaic process that takes place through external agents called mobilisers (Biggs, Gurung & Messerschmidt, 2004). One of the major criticisms of such a practice is that mobilisers as jobholders are driven by job-specific targets. Their interest is in creating a given number of groups and providing continuous support for group development. However, this support continues only till the project lasts and the groups become very dependent on SM. Furthermore, groups under such situations dissolve as soon as the mobilisation service is phased out.

Besides the sustainability part, the other strong criticism of development groups is that the process has not been successful in checking the capture of power and resources by elites (Iversen *et al.*, 2006). The classic example would be that of community fund or revolving fund. Many a times, community groups set norms such as the rate of borrowing, meeting days/time and those who lack any basic capital or any physical assets as collateral are perceived as untrustworthy of loan repayment. This leads to their exclusion. There is high risk of the elites and politically influential individuals controlling the community funds in such groups.

This paper is an exploratory study in attempting to understand group based development approach in Nepal. Since there is little Nepal-specific literature on groups as vehicles to deliver services and since there is limited time and resources, this paper does not go into a detailed

analysis. The purposes of development groups are diverse: some seek to break social and economic barriers for DAGs and the poor, while others seek to create abilities of groups to take full responsibility of ownership, inclusion, accountability and empowerment. A much more detailed analysis is required to make a strong case of whether 'group formation' is a *sin-qua-non* for community development or if there are alternate strategies for development intervention. This paper, however, aims to raise the question as to why excessive reliance on 'groups' as development strategy must be viewed with caution.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Group model is based on some crucial underlying assumptions. The arguments in favor of 'group' as a basic unit of operation are complemented by the widely accepted approach of Social Mobilisation (SM) for group formation. SM is a process of nurturing collective consciousness, social cohesion, collective action, networks of trust and social equity (Baas, 1997). Therefore, after groups undergo a process of SM, it is expected that group-members are empowered and become responsible community members with voice and influence in group-based decisions. Further, they are expected to be socially conscious individuals with keen interest for access to resources for all, especially the marginalised groups. Moreover, development groups formed

under SM process are considered fine demonstrations of local level 'good governance'.

The questions that arise from these assumptions therefore are:

- a. Is the group approach a fine demonstration of the practice of good governance at the community level?
- b. What are the problems due to 'too many groups'? How can they be tackled?

The paper will test these assumptions on the broad criteria of good governance – ownership, equity, transparency and accountability and analyse how the 'group model' performs. Further, it will discuss the problems with too many groups, and what could be the likely solutions to manage this.

## METHODOLOGY

### Secondary data

The study is primarily based on secondary documents. First it focused on understanding why and how group approach emerged as a dominant development tool for bottom-up development, and exposed its underlying assumption. Relevant research on the topic, including international experiences were referred to build up this argument. The assumptions were then tested against four broad criteria of good governance – ownership, equity, transparency and

accountability. The findings were based on an assessment of the approach against specific assumptions that formed the underpinnings of a successful group performance.

To support the findings, three national programmes with a common development goal of contributing to the national goal of poverty reduction were selected. All of them are multi-lateral donor-funded programmes and are strongly endorsed by the concerned ministries. Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP) is managed and implemented by Ministry of Local Development (MLD). Micro Entrepreneurs Development Programme (MEDEP) is a joint initiative of Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MICS) and United National Development Programme (UNDP); and Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) was established under Poverty Alleviation Fund Act 2063 with the prime minister as the chairperson of the board. These programmes are managed by professional staffs hired via competitive measures.

The three programmes used SM as a common approach to facilitate the process of group formation. A matrix for the three programmes to assess their commitment and capacities to contribute to the end goal was created based on review of the programme documents, progress reports, mid-term reviews, social mobilisation guidelines and related reports.

### **Key informant interviews**

Three social mobilisers from Khotang district (Nunthala VDC, Bijaykharka VDC, Buipa VDC) and two from Okhaldhunga (Katunje VDC, Kuntadevi VDC) were interviewed to understand challenges and issues related to social mobilisation. A structured questionnaire form was also filled by all of the mobilisers. However, much more information was gathered from informal unstructured interaction sessions held with them. One ranger from Ramechhap district (Ramechhap VDC) was also interviewed to understand the view of government employee regarding social mobilisers and the interface with their roles.

To strengthen the findings and clear any confusion, key resource persons at the three selected programmes namely LGCDP, PAF and MEDEP were interviewed. The information collected from them was used to strengthen the findings from the secondary review.

## **ANALYSIS**

Groups' performance was assessed against the underlying assumption of good governance. The areas of enquiry were ownership, equity, transparency and accountability of group model to the members of the group and to the larger community. The analysis was based on review of secondary sources.

**Ownership:** The underlying assumption related to ownership in groups is

that members become partners in development rather than passive recipient of services. This increases ownership and therefore sustainability of activities.

The analysis from available resources verifies that this is, however, not always the case (Sanyal, 1996). Two types of situation impede the realisation of this objective. Firstly, group-formation is an activity initiated by an external agent. Most of the time groups are increasingly dependent on an external agent (mobiliser and NGOs) to carry forward the activities of the groups. Once the programme/project phases out, so does the follow-up of the mobilisers and then groups tend to become dysfunctional.

Secondly, the problem of multiple group membership also impacts negatively on ownership of the group (Van Heck, 2003). Not only does this create disinterest among group members but also often, a single individual is involved in the management committees of several groups, causing conflict of interest and time.

**Equity:** The assumptions related to equity aspect of group-formation is that SM as an approach positively discriminates in favor of DAGs, the poor and women for representation and access to economic, social and political opportunities. When assessed whether this objective of group-formation is met or not, two outcomes were identified. As far as gender inclusion was concerned, group-formation has largely been effective (Pandolfelli,

Meinzen-Dick & Dohrn, 2007). Several mandatory obligations such as quota or compulsory representations of women in groups are mainly attributed for this outcome. However, of late, the need for 'meaningful participation' rather than 'token membership' is increasingly called for (Razavi, 2002).

The other assumption of the inclusion of DAGs and poor is perhaps the most criticised outcome of group formation. Critics argue that all groups contain some element of power and control contributing to alienation and inequality within groups. The chronically poor are always disadvantaged in groups and often captured by elites unless homogenous class based groups for very-poor are formed (Thorp, Stewart & Heyer, 2005). Such a tendency is high for group-funds since those who lack basic capital or physical assets as collateral are perceived as untrustworthy loan recipients. Secondly, those with low income have a high opportunity-cost of labor-time and wage and are therefore discouraged from participating in meetings.

#### **Transparency and Accountability:**

The third argument in favor of group-formation is that it promotes transparency and accountability. Proponents argue that groups promote a practice of providing information access to the public through proper accounting system, public hearing, social/public audits, monitoring & evaluation, information boards etc. Groups are also claimed to

ensure accountability since SM and group-members perceive joint responsibility to contribute to the targeted result. Participatory planning for group activities permits members to have a say in the planning process which also enhances individual commitment (Van Heck, 2003). Examples of forest user groups that have their own source of income and manage revolving fund as well as contribute 35% for community development are good examples in support of this assumption. Groups with strong SM and support in information management are able to accomplish such accountability. However, in larger projects where higher standard of bookkeeping is required, NGOs' continuous support is crucial and dependency is high.

Despite of criticisms, it is perhaps in issues of transparency and accountability that groups and SMs have played major reformative roles. For instance, in micro credit or savings and credit cooperation, the fact that accounts are accessible and publicly displayed, has put social pressure on loan repayment and paved way for responsible lending practices (Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This study focused on three national programmes, viz. LGCDP, PAF and MEDEP, to assess the current approaches of group-formation process and its impact on community development. The programmes can be broadly compared

as in Table 2. In terms of geographical coverage, LGCDP is implemented in all 75 districts (3915 VDCs), PAF in 40 districts (regular programme supported) and MEDEP in 36 districts, and the programmes had overlaps in geographic coverage. In order

to understand mechanisms envisioned by each programme to address issues related good governance, available documents from each programme were reviewed. An expert from each programme was also met or communicated with over the phone.

**Table 2: Main aspects of the three programmes—LGCDP, PAF and MEDEP**

SN	Features	LGCDP	PAF	MEDEP
1	Government ownership	Implemented by Ministry of Local Development (MLD)	Established by an ordinance in 2004 with the PM as the chair of the governing board. An autonomous institution.	Implemented by Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MICS)
2	Programme life	-July 2008- July 2012 -No cost extension till July 2013 -2 <sup>nd</sup> Phase in plan	-2004-2008 (Phase 1) -2008-2014 (Phase2)	-1998-2003 (Phase1) -2003-2007 (Phase 2) -2008-2012 (Phase 3)
3	Funding from donors	12 development partners provide financial and technical support	World Bank (overall programme), IFAD (capacity building only)	6 donors with AusAid, CIDA and UNDP as lead donors
4	Approach	Participatory community-led, bottom-up development	Demand led community-based, bottom-up development	Participatory community-led, bottom-up development
5	Target groups	Women, poor, discriminated and disadvantaged groups	Poor women, dalits and janajatis and vulnerable communities living below poverty line	Poor HH living below poverty line, women and unemployed youth
6	Purpose	To empower citizens, communities and COs to actively participate in public affairs and increase their capacity to hold local government accountable	To enable rural people obtain basic services in cost-effective and sustainable manner with their direct involvement from planning to management	To address the issues of rural unemployment and lack of economic opportunities for the poor.

SN	Features	LGCDP	PAF	MEDEP
9	SM approach	Long-term working group formation for multiple functions.	Long-term working group formation for multiple functions	Functional group for specific purpose
10	Basic Unit of operation	Ward citizen forum – 1 in 1 ward	Community organisations (COs)- 3 in 1 ward	Micro-entrepreneurs' groups – VDC level, depending on need
11	Main functions	Community awareness, local governance strengthening	Provide COs with revolving fund to start IGA. Fund small infrastructure projects identified and operated by communities	Entrepreneurship development, micro-credit (collateral free) to MEG members

LGCDP envisions that the programme will create sustainable and self-governing groups since their focus is on transformational SM which although is time-consuming, enhances capacity of members for self-reliance (LGCDP, 2008). PAF supports only projects that communities demand while encouraging matching funds as well. Groups formed are called Community Organisations (CO), and PAF supports the formation of networks and cooperatives for such groups. MEDEP promotes establishment of micro entrepreneurs' group. It further helps their associations and federations for market linkages, networks and sustainable enterprises. All three have targeted to reach out to households living below the poverty line, women and other communities they deem as "disadvantaged."

The programme documents have focused strongly on transparency measures. For instance, in case of LGCDP, fiscal transfers to local governments are provided only

after Minimum Conditions Performance Measures (MC/PM) are met. MC/PM system promotes follow-up on internal irregularities at DDC and VDC level as well. LGCDP also publishes regular audit report. In PAF, COs have mandatory provision of display boards at the project sites that incorporate all costs and grants involved. Public hearing and public audit are carried out periodically or at the end of the sub-projects. MEDEP focuses on open bidding process to select Business Development Service Provider (BDSP). There are strict mandates for annual public audit for BDSP as well as for audit of the micro entrepreneurs' associations and federations.

It was inferred that institutional linkages were not present among the three programmes, even as there is clear overlap of interests. For instance, the target populations of all programmes are poor, marginalised, discriminated and disadvantaged households. Poverty Alleviation Fund forms COs in every ward.

Even if there is an overlap in the working district, LGCDP creates another group called Community Awareness Centers (CAC) for community mobilisation rather than proceeding via COs. When asked about this scenario, LGCDP maintained that their SM process is transformational and therefore sustainable compared to PAF that resorted to transactional SM, which is bound to last only during the project life. PAF on the other hand expressed dissatisfaction over CAC and Ward Citizen Forum (WCF). A representative from PAF opined that their COs could be easily used as the entry point for LGCDP as well.

Addressing the concern of the burden of multiple group membership, LGCDP's social mobilisation specialist expressed that the basic goal of LGCDP is to make citizens more engaged in the public affairs and the local governance institutions more accountable to its citizens. For multiple purposes, LGCDP aims to create long term working groups called CACs under which other sub-groups such as user groups, savings and credit groups can be a part. However, the basic unit of entry for all development interventions must be CACs. The formation of CACs will address issues of duplication. LGCDP's social mobilisation specialist added that harmonisation between donors and a move towards a sector-wide community development approach under the leadership of government will provide the missing link of sustainability to the community led development approach.

Another issue is that of duplication of activities. In several districts where PAF and MEDEP overlap, for similar activities such as entrepreneurship promotion, different groups are mobilised. MEDEP reaches out via BDSP and PAF via COs. The expert from PAF mentioned that many of their entrepreneurship packages as well as those of MEDEP such as Start and Improve your business (SIYB) and Micro enterprise creation and development (MECD) are the same. But not many linkages exist as far as programme implementation is concerned.

In the interaction with social mobilisers, they accepted that in the community level, there is duplication in group-formation and expressed the need to harmonise the process. They explained that the current problem is that if individuals do not become members of more than one group, they miss out crucial benefits. Especially since membership to one group doesn't satisfy all their livelihood needs, individuals become members of several development groups. In response to this issue, Ranger from Ramechhap VDC opined that all programmes either implemented via NGO, donor or government agency should be channeled via one door. Furthermore, she expressed concern over the differences in remuneration of government staff and NGO staff explaining how lower income leads to low perception of government staff by the community members. Responding to this concern, contact persons from LGCDP and PAF maintained that their staffs have a fixed

salary of NPR 7000. They explained that they hire only locals as staff and that the current salary is at par with government staff. Responsible MEDEP staff could not be contacted on this issue.

The review of the three programme documents showed that harmonised development efforts were already highlighted in the programme documents of all three projects. Forging partnership with other organisations working in the same area of operation at the village, district and national level for quick impact and up scaling has been clearly marked. However, a review of the progresses made by the programmes revealed that although some institutional linkages (horizontal and vertical) had been instituted, the priority of all programmes remained in establishing their own social mobilisers, own groups, processes (e.g. well-being ranking) rather than building over what was available from other programmes. One reason cited was that each had its own set of monitoring and evaluation criteria. Similarly, the incentive to create new groups as high because tangible outputs such as number of groups mobilised was easy to monitor and report. According to a report only six programmes/ projects/ agencies work with existing groups or facilitate people to join existing groups in Nepal. Others form new groups to meet their particular objectives (LGCDP, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This paper has examined the underlying assumptions about governance in favor of group-based development approach and concluded that although group formation has a great potential to enable marginalised people to mobilise and strengthen their collective voice, not all group mobilisation work out as per the expectations. There are inherent problems with group formation process such as elite seizure of resources and power, lack of meaningful participation of women and DAGs, increasing dependence of members on the service of social mobiliser especially in sponsored development groups.

Additionally, there are counterproductive issues of overlapping memberships and 'group fatigue' amongst the members and drop out of marginalised and poor due to high opportunity cost of attending group activities and meeting.

A possible solution that came up in the research was to harmonise government's and donors' efforts and group several functions under one type so as to enhance operational efficiency as well as to reduce transactional costs and opportunity costs (time for attending meetings for DAGs). But the feasibility of this proposition in terms of targeted objectives must be assessed through further research.

Group-based approach have been a strong basis for service delivery, empowerment and local decision making process, but there is a need to strengthen its performance through collaboration between stakeholders i.e. state, the civil society and the donor community; and through a government led harmonised social mobilisation process. Through this, the government can mobilise its administrative machinery for large-scale implementation and replication of projects and therefore can play a major role in harmonising group-based development work. It can also substantially support the creation of an enabling policy environment. A harmonised approach reduces transaction costs of project implementation avoiding duplication of funds, group formation processes and relief group members of the burden of excess group related events

and activities. Also, the presence of strong local mechanism helps in transparency and accountability.

The other recommendation is to further investigate group-based federations and other organisations e.g. informal or formal networks, alliances, coalitions that are increasingly gaining popularity in Nepal. Such groups and federations are showing potential of giving group members stronger voice in policy and political arenas as well as enhancing social and economic opportunities.

A note of caution is that this process is dependent on how efficient the lead organisation is, be it government or the NGO. One door policy can lead to more political ploy from political parties as well as pressures from local elite and strongmen. This can push the interest and concerns of the poor even further away.

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