



Towards Better Collaboration Amongst the CSOs and with Govt

Societal Leadership Summit, Bhutan 2017 (SLS) held in Thimphu from May 2-4 discussed how the Bhutanese Civil Society Organisations (CSO) can improve coordination, collaboration and consolidation amongst themselves and with the government to be able to reach more effectively across Bhutan to serve various needs.

Societal Leadership is defined as leaders enabling people and organisations to lead within their sphere of influence to perform better to serve the needs of the society. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy organised the Summit that brought together government representatives and members of nearly 50 CSOs and mutual benefit organisations to share ideas, issues and challenges to enhance collaboration. The summit noted that this was important especially since many of the current societal problems require collaborative efforts from across society, and at a time when overseas philanthropic support are shriveling up.

Works and Human Settlement Minister Lyonpo Dorji Choden, gracing the opening session of the summit, said that the CSOs provide light to those in the dark and hope to the hopeless.

“CSOs are the government development partners,” Lyonpo Dorji Choden said.

One of the panelists, UN Resident Co-coordinator for Bhutan Gerald Daly also acknowledged CSOs as fundamentals and vital arm of a democratic institution.

Speaking in the summit, Loden Foundation President Dr Karma Phuntsho said that developing a culture of altruism, compassion and motivation and desire for higher ideals is a must to promote societal leadership. Dr Karma Phuntsho said that there is a need for more fluid cooperation and collaboration amongst CSOs, and with the government and private sector. He added that though modern organizations are as complex a system as human body, it should also try to function efficiently like the coordination of human body.

Samdrup Jongkhar Initiative Executive Director Dasho Neten Zangmo reiterated on the need to improve communication and to inculcate a culture of sharing resources like space, budget, information and annual plans by casting aside individual egos and differences. She said that the government must also change its perception of CSOs as competitor to its resources.

Gerald Daly, speaking on the sustainability suggested the CSOs to now focus on empowering their beneficiaries to following unsustainable conventional approach. “CSOs also must follow a rigorous recruitment process to select the most innovative and compassionate employees with ideas, which can translate to action and action to change,” the UN resident coordinator said.

Home and Cultural Affairs Minister Lyonpo Dawa Gyeltshen speaking in the summit announced that the government is working towards strengthening the CSOs and its roles. “We are in the process of reviewing the CSO Act for amendment,” Lyonpo Dawa Gyeltshen said, adding that the CSO Authority Secretariat would also be strengthened.

Amending the Act, Lyonpo said would not only strengthen the roles of the CSOs but also make both the government and the CSOs accountable. Civil Society Organisation Authority Chairman Sonam Dorji sought and requested the government to include the CSOs in the review of the Act to take stock of their feedback and concerns. The summit made a number of recommendations to improve collaboration, coordination and consolidation within the CSOs, with government and International Non-governmental Organisations,. In brief, they include the following:



To improve collaborations within CSOs will-

- Share amongst themselves their individual plans, proposal, consultants, experts and other resources through the website or facebook. This will be done tentatively through www.civilsocietynetwork.bt and managed by BCMD.
- Continue current quarterly and annual CSO meetings and retreats in order to know each other, share ideas and plans, and to develop more substantive proposal and joint projects.
- Send invitation to all the CSOs for any educational, cultural and social events.

To improve collaboration with Government will-

- Contribute to the amendment of the Act by sending concerns and feedback at the earliest.
- Take active part, whether proactively solicited by the government or not, in meetings such as Round Table Meeting or any such forums relevant to CSOs in order to make the CSOs and their voices heard by the government.
- Arrange exchange and immersion programmes for government employees to learn about and work with CSOs.
- Organize and also take part in thematic discussions or workshops such as gender or poverty issues including stakeholders from both CSO and Government agencies.

To improve collaboration with INGOs, donors and beneficiaries, the CSOs will-

- Focus on empowering beneficiaries to conventional mode of helping the communities carry out the social work
- Follow rigorous recruitment process in order to employ those compassionate candidates with entrepreneurial skills and ideas
- Invest in educating and empowering youth
- Use local resources as far as possible
- Enhance collaboration and partnership through the use of virtual space as much as physical space
- Accept and engage volunteer staffs from the UN

The Societal Leadership Summit was organised by BCMD in consultation with CSOs and in partnership with the Institute for Societal Leadership, Singapore Management University. Helvetas Intercooperation supported the event.

