

# BRANNGO BRIEFING



## THE CURRENT POLITICAL CHANGES IN NEPAL AND THE EMERGING IMPLICATIONS FOR UK BASED NGOs

March 2018

The British and Nepal NGO network (BRANNGO), is an informal network of individuals and UK charities with a shared commitment to working in partnership in Nepal. We do this through:

- *Exchanging information*
- *Facilitating dialogue and*
- *Encouraging collaboration*

Through these activities, we believe we can promote best practice, avoid duplication and ultimately better serve, work with, and learn from the people of Nepal.

One of the ways we share information is through our *BRANNGO BRIEFINGS* a bi-monthly paper in which a volunteer guest writer, shares insights on a particular issue affecting NGOs in Nepal. Where better to start for this first briefing, than on the recent political changes in Nepal and to explore some of the ways these changes may affect the work of international and national NGOs.

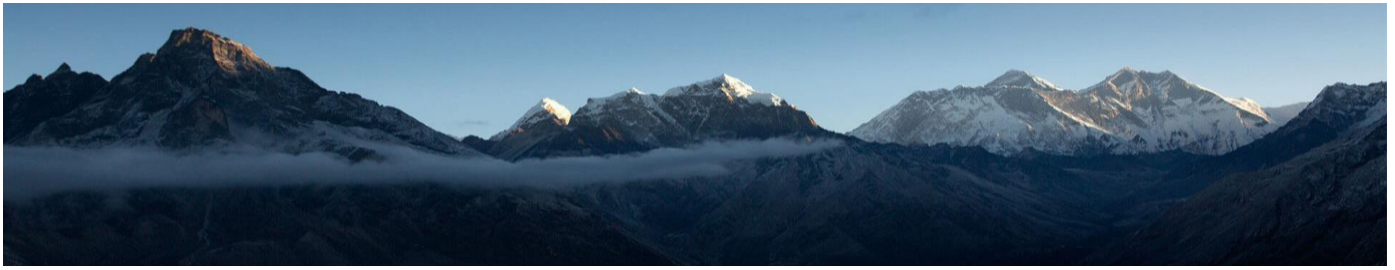
We recognise that given the historic political change and transformation in Nepal, no briefing can ever be truly comprehensive. However, an important part of BRANNGO's work is to 'signpost' members to wider authoritative articles and insights.

**Please note:** The views expressed in this and other briefings are personal to the guest author and do not necessarily reflect the collective view of BRANNGO. We appreciate that some members may disagree or have contrary views and we are keen to provoke debate and stimulate discussion. To do this we also include links and suggestions for further study at the end of each briefing.

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a fast-moving, often unpredictable world and all NGO teams know that to be effective they need to be able to respond quickly to changes in the wider political, social and economic environment. Too often, those of us who are submerged in responding to immediate needs and co-designing programmes which affect people or communities, don't always take the time we need to really analyze the long-term impact of political changes taking place at the local and national level.

This is particularly true for NGOs working in Nepal, a country which has undergone historical political development after the pronouncement of declaring Nepal a federal democratic republic. Taking aside the devastation earthquakes of 2015, the last 20 years of political instability, and the recent elections to form three tiers of government (local, provincial and Federal) held in May, November and December of 2017, will impact on the work that INGOs and local NGOs do in Nepal now and in the distant future.



## RECENT POLITICAL CHANGES IN NEPAL

Since the transition from Monarchy to a Republic, Nepal has continued to develop a new government model through federalization, believing that a unitary and centralized government is a major obstacle in the country's development process. This aspiration was encapsulated in the new constitution <sup>1</sup> that was promulgated in September of 2015. The constitution of Nepal has been regarded as a rights-based, democratic and inclusive one.

No government has completed a full term since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, and most have lasted less than 12 months, due to political instability marked by shaky coalitions. However, the vision of those who developed the constitution was enacted with elections for the local government, provincial government and the federal government all having taken place. The latter two were held very recently in November and December 2017.

Following the round of voting which saw an average 70% turn out, the Communist Party Nepal–Unified Marxist- Leninist (CPN-UML), Nepali Congress, and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) emerged as the first, second, and third party, respectively<sup>2</sup>. There has been formed a federal government under the chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. Mr. K.P.Sharma Oli on the 15th February 2018 with the comfortable majority of more than two thirds of vote in the House of Representatives. The formation of the federal government, the seven provincial government and 753 local governments marked the full-fledged implementation of the constitution of Nepal of 2015.

An article written just before the last election in December gives a helpful overview of the process and it is particularly important to note that this writer argues that ***“This is probably the first election in Nepal after the restoration of democracy in 1990 to be largely dominated by social, economic, and development issues instead of political issues.”*** Given that NGOs are primarily working in these spheres these elections will impact on our work.

These elections are all part of a paradigm shift in the way the state machinery functions and as such it is expected that over time the power will devolve from the traditional unitary system to the federal system in which there will be several state governments and hundreds of local governments. Feedback from local Nepalese indicates that this all feels very new, but also very untested.

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution\\_of\\_Nepal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Nepal) for good overview of the process of approving this constitution

<sup>2</sup> This was the case for the federal government although now the two communist parties (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>) have merged to become one very powerful party holding almost two third majority in the parliament. The two parties had pre-election alliance, thus causing the Congress party (supposedly a democratic party) to face humiliating defeat. In the state level elections, the results were mixed but with clear majority for the communist alliances

## IMPACT ON UK NGOs WORKING IN NEPAL

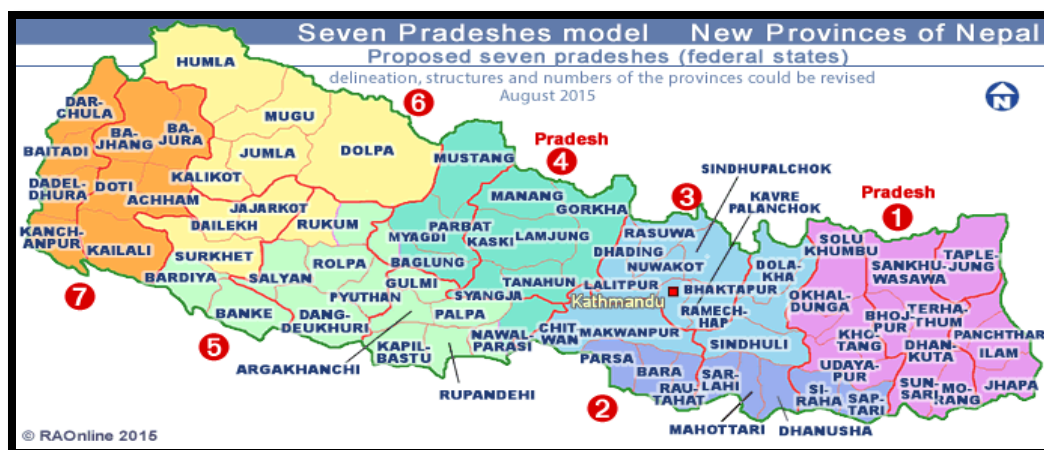
It is at hard to know at this stage what the impact of these political changes will be (both positive and challenging) on the many UK NGOs working in Nepal. Those who have deep roots and work at the local government level will potentially be better placed. For some NGOs needing to establish excellent relationships and partners in more than one local area (with the shift to greater local autonomy and decision making), may be hard. However, this should become easier once greater clarity of how the policies set in these different levels of newly formed government centres will connect.

The constitution spells out that local units (the local government) have the most amount of power in areas such as education, health, road, electricity and agriculture. These are amongst the 22 areas the power has been decentralized according to the new constitution. However, because there has been some lack of clarity and solid formation of the local government, there has been some anecdotal reports that some Rural Municipality Chairs have indicated that they will not allow any NGOs to work within their region unless they are approved, and their work complies with the priorities of the Chair (not necessarily the local government's priority) or unless the funds are passed through their office.

The emerging picture is varied, some Chairs can be suspicious of the work of NGOs because some see them as creating dependency. Others may perceive that NGOs activities are more visible, better funded and influential than those run through the local government office. This in turn could affect the political careers of these new representatives.

Important to note that in the past, the left-wing parties have displayed lenient policies towards NGOs, but they could have a different opinion under the current scenario. The challenge will be to deal with the Local Government units/ Rural Municipalities, which may take a view different from the Federal and Provincial levels of government. Indeed, some Local Governments' elected reps are from parties different to those in the state and federal, which are now communists in the center and at least 6 of the state governments. If the policies towards NGOs change, it will not be a surprise and the government may well be rethinking its future relationship with INGOs.<sup>3</sup>

It's important to recognise that within each Rural Municipality there can be anywhere between 5 to 13 Village Development Councils. So, where the NGO seeks to work is now dependent upon where the needs are felt high by the local government and there needs to be very strong links with the local wards<sup>4</sup> and the communities.



<sup>3</sup> See <http://mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/20171231154550.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Useful to note is that each ward, which were previously VDCs only 5 members are elected committee members whereas in the past there would be at least 45 elected reps.

## ISSUES THAT UK NGOs SHOULD START THINKING ABOUT

There are currently 39,759 organisations registered in Nepal under Social Welfare Council that have some type of NGO status. This includes local ones such as youth clubs, mothers' groups, monastery and other community based organisations that receive no direct funding from abroad. There are also many thousands of NGOs which are dormant but remain on the register. It may be that the SWC will be decentralized to the municipalities in support of the localization process.

In addition to this there are more than 189 larger International NGOs registered in Nepal such as Red Cross, Save the Children, Plan, Action Aid, Water Aid and CARITAS etc. The publication *NGOs, Foreign Aid, and Development in Nepal* by Rajendra Karkee and Jude Comfort, published in 2016<sup>5</sup> argues that despite thousands of NGOs and significant amounts of foreign aid, Nepal remains one of the poorest countries in South Asia and that aid and donor support alone are insufficient for sustained development.

Whatever the size of organisation it is important that NGOs prioritize strong reciprocal partnerships and work with local officials and communities to have clear short term and long-term objectives. Co-designing programmes and ensuring that what is started can be sustained is clearly vital and having the strong, commitment and engagement of local leaders will reduce potential conflict of interest between the NGOs and the local government. However, given that the impact of the elections and the new government structures is unknown here are some other important issues to think about now:

1. UK NGOs will have to improve the way they foster strong working relationships with the local governments, which also means elected politicians where they operate, and the government civil servants assigned to support them.
2. The flexibility which some UK NGOs enjoy may continue, but there may well be greater need for NGOs to work in closer partnership with others operating in another area of the country. There is therefore a real need to 'map' what different NGOs are doing thematically and geographically.
3. UK NGOs will also have to recognise that changes in local Rural Municipalities and Wards (especially chairpersons/mayors<sup>6</sup>) could impact on their work and could change very quickly. A bad reputation of one NGO could potentially impact on other NGOs working in an area and prompt faster local changes. So, it is advised that any partnership or consultative process includes seeking approval of the projects at the Social Welfare Council: <http://www.swc.org.np>
4. UK NGOs would be wise to consider how they can take a holistic approach in supporting a community's development from infrastructure to human resources. Some Rural Municipalities may be more favorable if they have a partnership with just one NGO which can work with them to meet a range of different needs.
5. UK NGOs will have to think very carefully about whether to channel some of their provision (including funds) through local organisations. This will have implications for the way they measure the impact of their funding, and how they approach transparency and accountability at the local level<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4995364/>

<sup>6</sup> The chairperson is the term for the person elected as the head of the Rural Municipality and the Mayors is the term for the person elected as the head of the "Municipality".

<sup>7</sup> It is a requirement under INGO/NGO act that no international organisation are allowed to implement their projects directly in Nepal thus they must partner with local NGO. Some INGO have set up a local NGO with same name but they still act as a separate legal local entity.

6. UK NGOs should be particularly careful in the way that they host volunteering opportunities. Some local wards/local government units may become more reluctant to let in volunteers who work for a short period in a school or with a local NGO programme within a district. The reputation of an NGO can be affected by the actions of well-meaning, but possibly naïve volunteers.
7. NGOs will have to really think hard about how they provide long-term support to their projects and how they will maintain quality evaluation and monitoring of projects, especially ensuring that these programmes are targeted at the most vulnerable group within the given community.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, the unfolding political picture could have a positive affect on NGOs mainly due to popularly elected governments at all levels. As there are opportunities, there are challenges also for example, if local government is happy with an NGO but the state government is not. Until all these areas are defined and sorted out, several NGOs will have to work carefully with uncertainties.

Those NGOs in the UK who have a strong partnership with a well-established and respected Nepal NGO can be expected to be in a good position. However, all of us will need to be diplomatic, astute and flexible in the way we respond to such a change in local government. It may seem unsettling at present but bringing governance closer to the people should be an opportunity for local leaders to better understand and fulfil the needs of their communities and be more accountable to those they represent. They may also contribute to a greater political stability and if there is one party or coalition governing for at least five years it could have a very positive impact on economic development and even – dare we hope – less dependency on NGOs from outside the country.

There is a plethora of materials available in Nepal about the Federal reforms across the country and how that relates to the operational space for INGOs. A quick literature review of materials put out by the Association of International NGOs (AIN) in Nepal ([ain.org.np](http://ain.org.np)) and also the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) office <http://un.org.np/thematicareas/bogs> will give further detailed information.

See also <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-01-24/new-responsibilities.html> for an up-to-date view on the changes for education in Nepal.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This edition of BRANNGO Bulletin has been written by Stephen Carrick-Davies, the CEO of [Mondo Foundation](http://Mondo Foundation) see which works in Nepal through HELP; the Helambu Education and Livelihoods Partnership see [www.help-nepal.org](http://www.help-nepal.org). Since the earthquake in 2015, Mondo has raised funds and worked with HELP to build 12 new earth-quake resilient government schools in the Sindhupalchok region. The programme works by training local villagers in building their own schools. See [www.mondofoundation.org](http://www.mondofoundation.org) for information about this and our Quality Education, Scholarship and Livelihoods work.

In compiling this briefing document Stephen has spoken to many other NGO leaders who work in Nepal or who have recently returned from Nepal. The views expressed in this article are personal of the author.

**Please let the BRANNGO coordinator know if you would like to contribute to the next Briefing.**



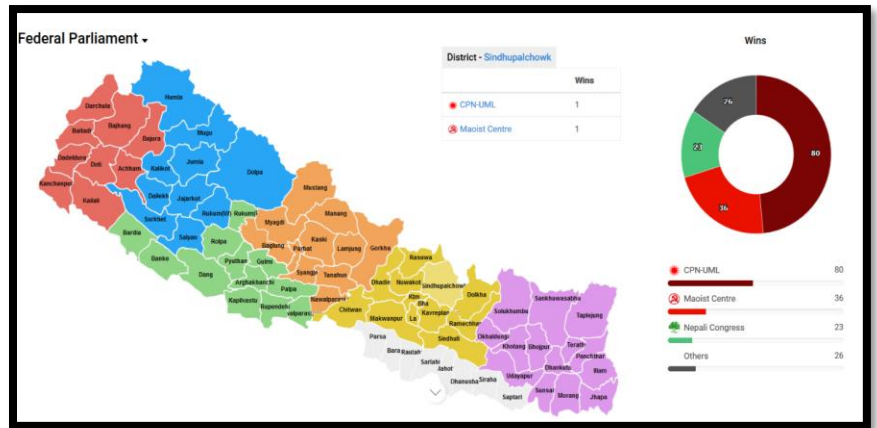


## APPENDIX - EIGHT ARTICLES/RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INSIGHT

Click on the Links below to review updated authoritative articles. Bookmark them in your browser and subscribe to news updates or Google alerts to stay informed.

1) [Excellent interactive map showing results from all constituencies and House of Representatives](#)

Click on an individual district to see the breakdown of the vote and the choice of 275-member parliament



2) [Voice of America article written in November on the elections.](#)

"There is hope that this election will institutionalize democracy and bring political stability because we have had nine prime ministers in the last 10 years," according to the director for the Center for South Asian Studies in Kathmandu, Nishchal Nath Pandey. "People hope that finally these elections will give a majority to a single political force so that the government can survive for five years."

### After Turbulent Change to Democracy, Nepal Hopes Elections Will Bring Political Stability



FILE - Nepalese stand in line to vote at a polling station in Bhatapur, Nepal, May 14, 2017. Nepalese lined up to vote for representatives in municipality and village council positions held in the Himalayan nation for the first time in two decades.

3) [BBC Political Time Line](#)

Excellent timeline up to June 2018

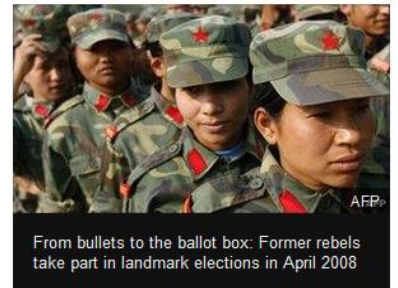
### End of monarchy

**2007** December - Parliament approves the abolition of monarchy as part of peace deal with Maoists, who agree to rejoin government.

**2008** January - A series of bomb blasts kill and injure dozens in the southern Terai plains, where activists have been demanding regional autonomy.

**2008** April - Former Maoist rebels win the largest bloc of seats in elections to the new Constituent Assembly (CA), but fail to achieve an outright majority.

**2008** May - Nepal becomes a republic.



4) [A guide to Government in Nepal produced by Asia Foundation](#)

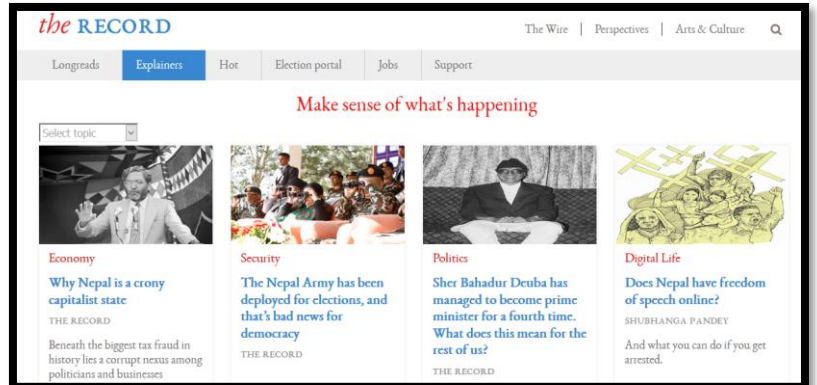
Very lengthy overview (hard to see when it was written)



5) [Political bloggers in Nepal](#)

6) [KATHMANDU POST REVIEW OF ELECTIONS](#)

7) [Human Rights watch focus on Nepal](#)



8) [Guardian article on the Election and gender equality](#)

Of the 317 parliamentary candidates fielded by the three largest parties, only three were Dalits and 18 were women

