

Forum of Federations for Federalism



■ *TC Correspondent*

Recently, Forum of Federations launched a book entitled “Federalism and the Constitution of Nepal: 30 Questions & Answers.” With this publication, the organisation hopes to contribute in constitution-making and federalism by providing easily accessible, credible and politically neutral comparative information. It is aimed at providing the information to the Constituent Assembly members, political parties and representatives of other stakeholder organizations and institutions engaged in or supporting in the constitution making process.

Forum of Federations is an international governance organization founded by the Government of Canada in 1999. It is supported by nine partner governments; Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Mexico, Nigeria and Switzerland. It is an international network of federal countries, elected officials, civil servants and scholars. The Forum is concerned with the contribution of federal and devolved forms of governance for the maintenance and construction of democratic societies and governments. At present, it is active in about 20 countries around the globe.

The Forum began its operation in Nepal in 2008. It started to work with local partners to organize learning events ranging from co-operative constitution making to ethnic federalism. “The focus of Nepal programme so far has been to educate stakeholders on basic issues of federalism. We help them understand how other countries have built their federal system and how they manage the federal structure,” said Rupak Chattopadhyay, President and CEO of the Forum. He travelled to Nepal to discuss about the upcoming programmes of the Forum for Nepal.

In 2008, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) provided financial support of USD 750,000 for a three-year (2008-2011) programme entitled “Federalism in Nepal: Supporting Nepal’s Constitutional Transition”. The programme aims to build the capacity of the country to develop and implement a federal democratic system. In addition to building the capacity of the Constituent Assembly members to draft a federal constitution, the Forum was mandated to increase understanding of federal systems among political party leaders and the civil society. Its objective was to enhance the knowledge and

understanding about federalism in Nepal's educational institutions. The programme ended in May 2011. The budget for Nepal programme from Jan 2010 to May 2011 was CAD 143,125 (Nrs 10,466,300). "We are designing new programme entitled "Federalism in Nepal: Supporting the Development and Implementation of Nepal's New Federal Constitution" for another 3 years (2011 – 2014)," said Vickal Deep Khadka, Nepal Programme Manager of the Forum.

The roundtable titled 'Key Elements of a New Fiscal Regime in Federal Nepal: Some Perspectives' was held on 24 February 2011 in collaboration with the Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD), UNDP. Altogether, 45 participants took part in the roundtable including political leaders, secretaries and joint secretaries from various ministries, university professors, national experts, civil society members and academics. This roundtable was part of the Forum's three-year programme.

The Forum has partnerships with International IDEA, Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD),

National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Nepal Constitution Foundation (NCF) for joint programme activities. "I hope in the due course Nepal will also become a partner country of the Forum," said Chattopadhyay. The Forum is a permanent member of the sub-group consisting of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), GIZ and International IDEA that are active in supporting federalism and state restructuring process. The sub-group allows the representatives of donor organizations and local NGOs to discuss their programmes to support in state restructuring, including federalism, ensure information sharing and coordination and, identify opportunities for collaboration.

“Once Nepal has its constitution in place; our involvement will be focussed more on operational aspects of the federalism here in Nepal,” said Chattopadhyay. The continuous effort of the Forum has been made to encourage networking and partnerships with local and international NGOs working on federalism.



Rupak Chattopadhyay
President and CEO
Forum of Federations

How would you relate the governance with development?

I think governance is a fundamental foundation for development. Without it, we have a situation of flux and instability which does not create favourable environment to take ahead development efforts. Lack of proper governance would preclude either investment or foils the attempts to build sectors like health, education, etc. Therefore, the aspect of governance is very important for growth and development.

Forum of Federations has a host of partners. How the resource and tasks are coordinated in the context that many of your partners also provide bilateral support to the developing countries?

Forum of Federations is not like other organisations. It works in a very specific area of governance and federalism. And, we are the only organisation in the world which provides access to comparative knowledge on federalism and governance in general. Forum of Federation is an international organisation which is supported by nine partner countries. Because of the depth of working relationships with these partners, we are able to draw resources both in terms of people and experiences.

Share some of the experiences of the outstanding results your organization has achieved in Nepal and other parts of the world?

In context of Nepal, I think we have come a long way in terms of getting stakeholders understand the basics of federalism. We have also made them understand the models of federalism adopted by several other countries whose experiences are very close to that of Nepal and from whom Nepal can learn. In terms of our success in other parts of the world, I would like to cite an example of Ethiopia. Ethiopia like Nepal is an emerging federation. It was an autocratic monarchy, then it went through period of communism and it became a democratic federal state. We helped the government of Ethiopia in capacity building of federating members, leaders and judges by providing trainings on federalism to make them understand the issues of federalism. In other post conflict situations, our organisation was involved in Iraq in building capacity of the university professors so that it could help them teach about federalism to the young students.

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