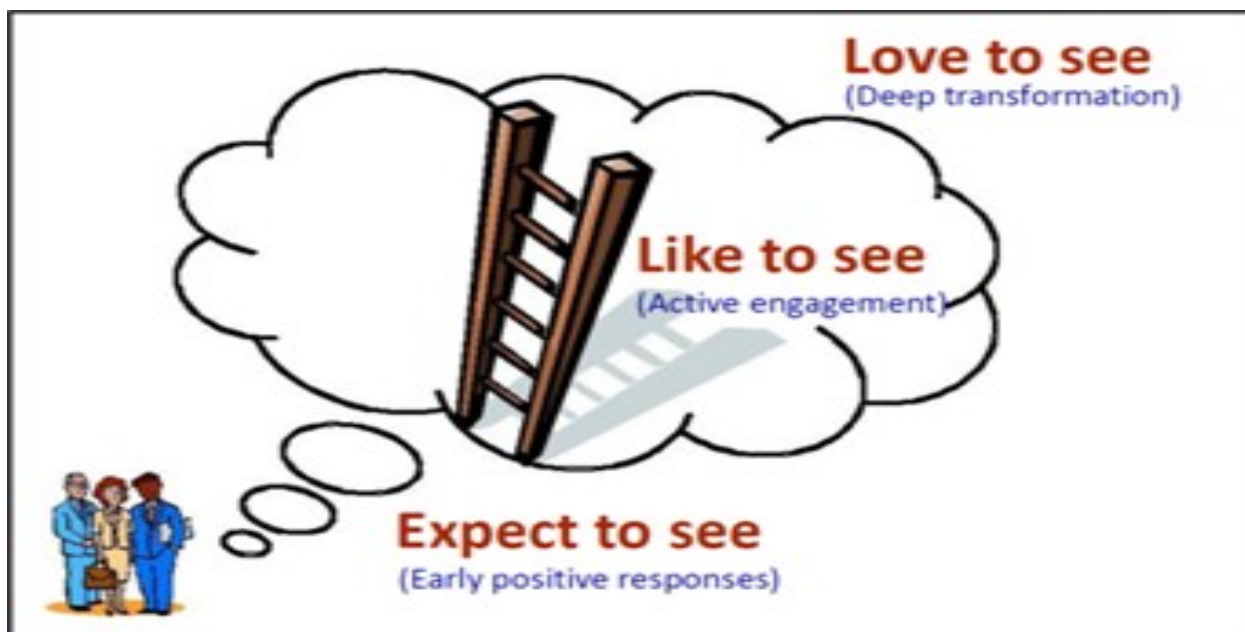# Improving Civil Society Governance through Dialogue sessions (RILTAS Tool)

An Introduction of RILTAS Tool and the Reflections

care®

Love to see
(Deep transformation)

Like to see
(Active engagement)

Expect to see
(Early positive responses)

1. Introduction

CARE Nepal has been implementing a Civil Society Support Project on Right to Food. This project's scope is more on the institutional capacity building of the Nepali civil society organizations to make them able to raise their voices for right to food and make government more accountable to the agenda of right to food. In this regards, most of the supports have been targeted to enhance the institutional capacity focused on on the governance of the partner organizations. Basically, the project has been providing its strategic partnership support to two national level civil society organizations working on land and farmers rights that are Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC) and National Farmers Group Federation (NFGF) respectively.

There are three domains of this project and this support to partner contributes to the Domain-2, which is *CSOs representing the impact groups are representative, inclusive, well governed and technically capable of influencing policy formulation, implementation and monitoring*. Ultimately, these all kind of tools and practices adapted by the project and its partners contribute to the Livelihoods, Food Security, Climate Change Adaptation and Natural Resources theme of CARE Nepal.

To carry out the capacity building of the partner organizations, the project has been facilitating different kind of participatory assessment tools like **Participatory Capacity Assessment (PCA)** and **Dialogue Sessions with partners (Dialogue tool).** From these sessions, "strong areas" and the "improvement areas" are identified jointly with partners. Then, both parties (CARE and partners) agree to prepare a comprehensive capacity development plan. Based on the development plan, the RtF project has been providing financial and technical support to execute identified gaps. For example, in 2014, NFGF identified that they don't have GESI policy and need to review their strategic plan so the project helped them to develop GESI policy and to revise the strategic plan. Similarly, CSRC identified need to conduct GESI audit and the project supported. The project incorporates the identified institutional development activities from PCA and Dialogues tool in its annual work plan which has enabled to mainstream the governance and institutional development issues.

2. Dialogue tool

The project introduced a dialogue tool to improve governance capacities of Nepalese CSOs in the areas of **Representation and Inclusion, Legitimacy, Transparency and Synergy** (RILTAS). The dialogue tool is one of the tools of outcome mapping methodology, which tracks changes in the behavior of the actors (partners). CARE Nepal and CSO partners agreed upon a set of indicators in above mentioned areas on which CARE Nepal and CSO partners were interested to see the changes. These indicators are known as progress markers in the outcome mapping system which are qualitative in nature and set in the form of progressive steps as expect to see, like to see and love to see. Expect to see is focused more on early positive response where as like to see is active engagement and love to see is the deeper transformation towards the ideal behaviour of an actor. The progress markers were set in a way that it promotes the multilayered i.e upward accountability to the donors and vertical accountability to the impact groups and stakeholders. Based on the set progress markers in each domain, the dialogue session are attended by senior staffs of CARE Nepal and the partners and board representatives of the partners. The results thus obtained were jointly analyzed and discussed between CARE Nepal and its partners. After the dialogue session, a joint capacity development plan is prepared.

3. Results and discussions (Domain wise)

3.1 Representation and inclusion: CARE Nepal partners had shown remarkable progress on representation and inclusion. A gradual change was observed in CSRC. The number of female and marginalized people had increased in the staff structure including senior level positions. CSRC's main working theme is land and agrarian rights for the landless and tenants. CSRC has given specific priority to women's access and control over land as an important agenda in the land and agrarian rights movement. This is a result of meaningful representation of *dalit* (the so-called untouchables) and females in the executive committee of CSRC. These groups, which are traditionally marginalized and excluded hold senior level positions and are influential in decision making processes.


Governance spider of NFGF
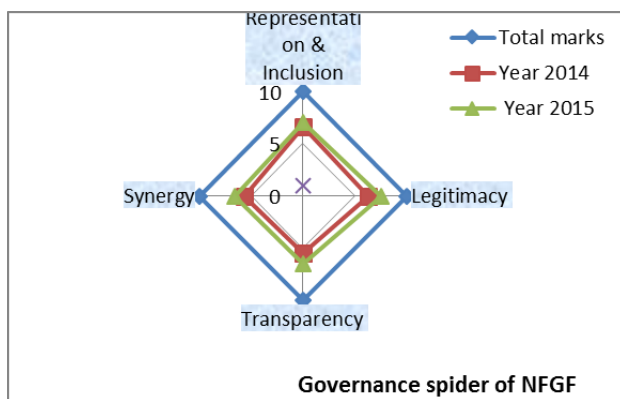
With the support from CARE Nepal, NFGF had formulated human resource mobilization guideline, gender equality and social inclusion policy, zero tolerance policy and federation mobilization guidelines. These policies are explicitly focused on mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion at all levels of the federation. With the execution of gender equality and social inclusion policy on board, the inclusion of women and socially excluded communities has been significantly increased. Currently, women constitute 31% at central committee of NFGF and 45% in the staff's structure with some key positions.

3.2 Legitimacy: Among others, legitimacy includes acceptance of entity by the stakeholders. The partners had shown remarkable progress on legitimacy. CSRC's acceptance by government and other stakeholders as a resource organization on land rights and non-violent movement is widely established. The government has sought inputs and suggestions from partner CSOs on different policies and acts. CSRC is deeply rooted at the grass root to be a legitimate facilitator for the rights of landless and tenants over productive resources. Despite in the forming stage, NFGF's acceptance as a "true" farmer's federation has been increasing. However, there are challenges on legitimacy from political party's farmer's wings and development-NGOs supported farmer's groups.

3.3 Transparency: There are observable changes in the transparency level of the partners. Partners have established a formal feedback and complain handling mechanism to promote transparency. Both CSO partners are organizing social audit at different levels to ensure transparency and accountability in their works. Both partners are strived to become more transparent and accountable by institutionalizing public audit practices.

3.4 Synergy: CSRC was proactively engaged with the Constituent Assembly members during the constitution making process to advocate on the land and agrarian agenda and worked closely with the Government of Nepal during the preparation of national land policy. It is affiliated in different national and internal network. It was consulted by the government and non government organizations as resource organization on land. NFGF had also collaborated with other national and international organizations including the Government of Nepal. It continuously engaged with the government and other likeminded organizations to advocate on farmers agenda and also to collaborate. NFGF had jointly prepared the advocacy plan with other CSOs and played a lead role in its execution. **NFGF** had mobilized the government resource in different agriculture activities at the district and VDC level.

Governance spider of CSRC
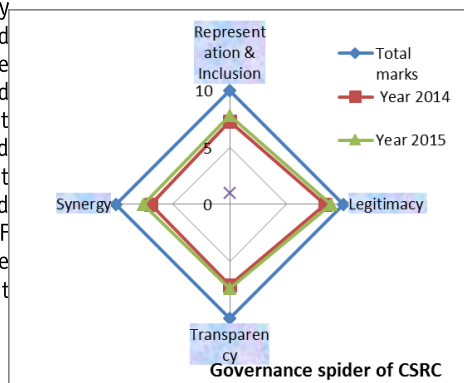
4. How dialogue tool (RILTAS) looks like and how does it work?

4.1 What is it?

CARE Nepal/RtF project has been using this dialogue tool for last 3 years to its strategic partners. In each year, as shown in the matrix presented, formal and informal dialogue sessions are conducted with partners to track the observed changes against particular progress markers. Realization of the changes to be made in policy and practice level is the primary phenomenon of the dialogue tool and partners with this process set follow up actions which lead them to build on the changes gradually. Thus, this whole process has motivated CSOs to review and reflect on their policies and practices which has resulted them to be more accountable, inclusive and true representative of their impact groups.

4.3 How is this unique?

This dialogue tool and the discussion on it is a "partner led" process as they have been engaged from the beginning i.e. identifying areas, developing progress markers, participating in an open discussion and also in identifying the follow up actions. So, it is full participatory self assessment of the partners. Next to that, this process ensures multilayered accountability of the NGOs by reviewing and redesigning their policies and programs to integrate the accountability, inclusion and representation issues into those.

4.3 Process (Developing the RITLAS Tool and conducting dialogue sessions)

Step 1: Meeting with the boundary partner. Conduct a short workshop with the partners to agree on the major areas. Based on the needs/requirements, these RILTAS areas can be added with some other areas.

Step 2: After finalization of the areas, develop progress markers jointly with the partners (partners led).

Step 3: Set a standard timeline for the periodic review of the tool. These periodic review meetings are known as 'Dialogue sessions'.

Step 4: Conduct dialogue sessions periodically. Make sure the updates are systematically documented.

Step 5: Based on the areas of improvement identified, develop an improvement plan for the respective boundary partner.

Step 6: Before starting the dialogue session, have a quick review of the previous one.

Step 7: The qualitative statements can jointly be transformed into quantitative figures and the results can be presented in spider diagrams or in any other forms.

5. How to convert qualitative statement to quantitative figures? This is a participatory scoring and all must agree on the scores. Provide the marking to each update statement of progress marker assuming 100 as full marks. (This can be done in other forms also). In this way, we receive the total marking at end. For example, when there are 10 progress markers and we provide 50 marks to each judging that the achievement is fifty percent, the total marks for 10 progress markers becomes 500 and the average mark is (500/10)=50.

After we receive the average marks, put them in the values. An example of the value and category is

value	Categories
Less than 50%	Low
51-69%	Medium
70-79	high
More than 80%	Very high

6. How the tool looks like?

Area and progress markers	Ob-served changes (2014)	Follow up ac-tions	Ob-served changes (2015)	Follow up ac-tions
Representation and Inclusion Progress markers **Expect to See (early sign of progress)** Increased inclusion of women and marginalized groups at all levels of organization and federation Women and marginalized groups are regularly attending meetings (in groups, fora, federations, including net-work meetings) One focal person (board member) designated for moni-toring the inclusion aspect Policy endorsed for 50% women and proportionate rep-resentation of marginalized groups in the member-ship of General Assembly **Like to See** More women in key/decision-making positions (secretary, chairperson, treasurer) in the organiza-tion at central level Women and marginalized group members are increas-ingly getting opportunities to participate in leader-ship development training, exposure and such events which build capacity and leadership potential Women and marginalized representatives are active in meetings and make their points heard and other are listening actively **Love to See (deep transformation)** XXX is increasingly sending women representatives to participate in strategic meetings (e.g. meetings with politicians, potential donors, Ministerial stake-holders) Proportionate representation of women and marginal-ized groups in board, staff and general assembly				

Transparency Progress markers ***Expect to See*** Feedback mechanism is set up and feedback is coming in and being responded to *XXXX is disseminating information to the constituencies/ impact groups through appropriate channels like public hearing, local media/FM, meetings, social audit* ***Like to See*** Central committee members actively engaged in monitoring and issue collection/discussion at district and local level (raising issues at the national level)-- Regular practice of organizational self-assessment and reflection on progress and strategies from group level to national level Feedback being systematically used for learning ***Love to See*** Feedbacks used to amend strategies of the organization				
Legitimacy Progress markers ***Expect to See*** *XXXX starts to receive more and more invitations from government and other civil society organisations to workshops, meetings and policy formulation* *XXXX regularly organize social audits with participation of impact groups* ***Like to See*** *Increased membership of XXXX* *Positive media attention about XXXX and their work* *More and more examples of requests and issues from farmers' groups being raised by the district and national level XXXX* ***Love to See*** *Increase in membership*				
Synergy Progress markers ***Expect to See*** XXXX organize meetings with like minded agencies to develop common advocacy agendas and share evidences Research funded by small grant mechanism is being used by partner organizations for advocacy XXXX participate in RtFN meetings Increased affiliation of NFGF with other networks ***Like to See*** Joint advocacy events Joint positions/publications submitted to policy makers ***Love to See*** -XXXX's strategic engagement with government and like minded organizations for advocacy				