

Guidance Note on BOGS Public Meetings.

What is a BOGs Meeting?

A BOGs meeting is essentially a 'development audit'. It is also an active part of our commitment to be transparent and accountable. It is an opportunity for us, the Donors, to gain a greater understanding of the context in which our partners work, the challenges they face and learn about any problems that there might be in the work. Also, it is an important opportunity to demonstrate to Stakeholders our solidarity with our partners, explain the principles by which we work and address any issues that might arise. Although the meeting is themed around BOGs, there are often many questions relating to practical aspects of programs, rather than the BOGs themselves, and the meetings often become 'development audits'.

Structure:

1) Pre-meetings

a) Development Partners

Before each 'Town Hall' meeting, it is important to hold pre-meetings with local development partners to discuss local development challenges and issues which might emerge in the main town hall meeting and how partners want them to be dealt with; it also gives us, the Donors, the chance to express our solidarity with our development partners. This meeting is usually held in the same place as the main meeting, generally we ask the partners to arrive an hour before the main meeting.

b) Local Administration

Bearing in mind that the BOGs Group has to work in coordination with and support of local government, it is important to meet with the Local Development Officer and Chief District Officer before the main meeting to express this support and to explain to them the aims of the meeting (see below).

Town Hall Meeting

As much as possible, BOGs meetings should be kept informal – no-one should be 'Chief Guest', although respect should be paid to all those attending. Making the meeting an informal discussion means that it is possible people to express themselves properly; by making the meeting a discussion, rather than a confrontation, we also minimize tensions and keep the atmosphere constructive.

BOGs Meetings can be very challenging, many difficult issues can be raised – in the Nepali context, it is extremely important that the person providing answers is considered 'Senior' enough for their words to have impact.

The meeting begins with introductions, followed by a brief speech from the facilitator about the aims of the meeting, the purpose of the BOGS and their fundamental principles. Then, there will be a reading aloud of the BOGs by the Signatories. This is too symbolically renew the commitment of development partners to the BOGs, but it also means that the stakeholders present will hear the BOGs and cannot later claim that they are not aware of them.

After that, the floor is open for questions. The meeting is usually concluded by asking the CDO or LDO to sum up.

There should also be a senior representative from a BOGs Donor Agency working in the district – this adds a great deal of weight to the ‘BOGs Message’.

Participation:

To demonstrate solidarity with our partners and to create a sense of ‘Family’ or ‘Mutual Accountability’ it is important to have representation from *all of the BOGs members, INGOs and partners working in the district*. This also encourages them to be more transparent themselves.

There is a wide range of stakeholders in a district and this is where there is a challenge to our claim to be ‘inclusive’. Stakeholders should include ALL political parties, no matter how small or marginalized. There should be representation from *all sections of the society* in which we work – Dalits, Women, Janajatis, Religious Minorities are often forgotten – they should not be.

It is also important to make sure that there are *representatives from the business community* (i.e. the Chamber of Commerce), as many BOGs signatories work through sub-contractors or the private sector.

Likewise, *journalists should be invited* – if journalists record a commitment by Stakeholders to respect the BOGs, this is an important tool should problems arise later.

Where should the meeting be held?

BOGs meetings are usually held in the DDC Hall, or, if that is not available, in the Staff Meeting Centre in the CDO office. This emphasizes that BOGs Signatories are working to support the Government of Nepal and is cheaper than a hotel.

Holding the meeting in a Hotel and providing expensive food sends the wrong message to Stakeholders – Donor must show that they are serious about accountability and do not waste money on banquets. Usually, tea and very basic snacks are provided, out of courtesy.

There is the practice in Nepal of providing a ‘daily allowance’ to participants in a program. This should never be provided to make people come to a BOGs meeting. Again, not giving an allowance re-enforces the message that Donors are serious about accountability.

There are three main purposes to a BOGs meeting:

- 1) To defend the operational space of ourselves and our implementing partners by making sure that all parties that might interfere with our work are aware of the principles and that we will not tolerate interference. ***During the meeting, the Stakeholder should be asked to publicly commit to respecting the BOGs.*** We, the Donors, must demonstrate solidarity with our implementing partners and re-enforce their confidence to meet challenges.
- 2) To make a public commitment to the principles explained in the BOGs, which puts an obligation on ourselves and our partners to respect the BOGs principles
- 3) In line with our commitments to be transparent and accountable to our stakeholders, a BOGs meeting is also an important opportunity for the Stakeholders to express their opinions on our work, to discuss issues in a constructive atmosphere and also for the Donors to gain a greater understanding of the context in which their implementing partners are working.

Themes of the meeting:

There are four themes to be which should be emphasized during a BOGs meeting:

- 1) Transparency
- 2) Accountability
- 3) Impartiality
- 4) Inclusiveness.

Secondary themes:

There are a number of secondary, practical ideas which should be emphasized during the meeting:

- 1) Interference with an implementing partner is an attack on the Donor also.
- 2) The BOGs have not been invented by the Implementing Partners – they are respected by the entire BOGs Group and the Donors insist that the Partners recognize them.
- 3) Contributions to political parties or other groups cannot be made beyond that which is already defined in program budgets. These funds have been given by Donors for a specific purpose – to help the poor people of Nepal; asking for funds is taking away from the Poor.
- 4) Donors assist political parties in other ways – capacity building, training etc. We are not anti-political parties, but we will assist in our own way.

- 5) Other kinds of interference, such as forcing projects to hire people from any group, on the basis of their group identity, will have a negative impact on the quality of the work – it will reduce the level of help to the people of Nepal.

- 6) We are in Nepal to do development work and have no political agenda or affiliation – hiring people from groups compromises our impartiality and makes it harder to help the poor.

- 7) We are in Nepal to help the poor and marginalized people of Nepal WHILE supporting the work of the Nepal Government. We do not substitute for the Government or dictate to the Nepal Government what they should do. However, *each organization has its own mandate and principles and can only work in accordance with them.* We respect the laws of the land and commit ourselves to coordinating our work with the Nepal Government, but we will not work where we are asked to compromise our own organizational values.