

NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN's)
Institutional Memory and Knowledge
Management

*Chronicle of Civic Leadership, Solidarity, and
Transformation (1991-Present)*

A Synopsis



NGO Federation of Nepal
December 2025

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Abbreviations and Acronyms	ii
CHAPTER I.....	1
Background	1
From Informal Networks to a National Federation of NGOs.....	2
Purpose	3
Approach and Methodology	3
Approach	3
Methodology.....	3
CHAPTER II.....	5
Organizational Structure and Leadership of the NGO Federation of Nepal.....	5
Organizational Structure	5
Leadership	6
Legacy of Leadership of the NGO Federation Nepal in Chronological Order	11
CHAPTER III	12
Organizational Achievements and the Contributions of the NGO Federation Nepal to Nepal’s Social, Economic, and Political Landscape	12
CHAPTER IV	18
Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Way Forward.....	18
Challenges	18
Lesson Learned	19
Way Forward.....	19
CHAPTER V	20
Conclusion	20
REFERENCES	21

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A.D.	Anno Domini (Common Era/Christian Era)
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AI	Artificial Intelligence
B.S.	Bikram Sambat (Nepali Calendar)
CA	Constituent Assembly
CBO	Community-based Organization
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSPC	Civil Society Peace Campaign
EC	Executive Committee
GC	General Convention
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
INGO	International Non-government Organization
NFN	NGO Federation of Nepal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SPA	Seven-party alliance
SWC	Social Welfare Council
VAT	Value Added Tax
WSF	World Social Forum

CHAPTER I

Background

Nepal has a long history of civic space and civil society engagement in society and politics. Historically and culturally, civil society in Nepal has played a significant role in social welfare, governance, and political accountability, and supported mediation and conflict resolution among different ethnic communities (British Council, 2029, p. 17). However, the modern form of organized civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs) is a relatively recent development, as CSOs and NGOs in their contemporary form began to emerge only after the first half of the 20th century (Gautam, 2024, p. 33). In a more concrete sense, the widespread growth of CSOs and NGOs in Nepal occurred after the restoration of democracy in the 1990s. In the years that followed, these organizations assumed an increasingly active role in social welfare, community development, democratization, rights-based activism, and social movements.

Before 1990, the political and civic environment was dominated by the Panchayat system, an autocratic, party-less regime established in 1960. During this period, the state exercised significant control over public participation. The autocratic regime had policies that discouraged registering organizations and did not protect the freedom of speech and association. The Panchayat system ‘both facilitated and controlled the nature of public participation by managing civic associations and social welfare initiatives under the patronage of the royal family’ (British Council, 2019, p. 17). The space for independent collective action or advocacy was severely constrained. All forms of civil association were subject to state management and were permitted only within a framework that did not challenge the regime’s authority and ideology.

Nevertheless, despite the controlled and scrutinized environment, an early form of civil engagement persisted in one way or another. These include informal community-based organizations such as *Guthi*, *Bihar*, *Dhikur*, and *Parma* (Bhatta, 2012, p. 189). These indigenous associations, characterized by voluntarism, mutual support, and social contribution, were the organic forms of civil society that preceded modern non-governmental organizations, although their scope was limited to social-cultural and social welfare activities at the local level, due to the restrictions created for such organizations by the regime. The legal framework during the era also reflects this controlled space. For instance, the first ever elected government in 1959 introduced the Association Registration Act 2016 (1959), promising a more civil sphere

and greater citizen involvement. However, the promise was short-lived because of the establishment of the Panchayat system as the regime maintained tightened control.

All in all, the period was characterized by latent demand for change and social justice, with grievances related to ethnic, language, region, class, gender, etc., pressing beneath the surface, but without a public forum for expression.

From Informal Networks to a National Federation of NGOs

The 1990 People's Movement (*Jana Andolan*), which restored multi-party democracy, opened a new avenue for CSOs and NGOs in the country. This political change fundamentally transformed the civil landscape and the operation of CSOs and NGOs within national politics. Fueled by the post-1990 democratic transition, especially with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech, assembly, and association, the number of CSOs began to grow steadily. This 'opened up greater possibilities of organizing outside the state' (British Council, 2019, p. 18). Aftermath of the 1990s, a liberal policy was implemented, which enabled the opening of organizations, especially NGOs, which laid the foundation for the civil society movement in Nepal (Gautam, 2023, p. 33). The country also acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1991 and the new Social Welfare Act of 1992, facilitating the entry of International Non-government Organizations (INGOs), which in turn fueled an explosive growth in the local NGO sector.

The explosion and uncoordinated growth of NGOs created a practical and political vacuum, though. Thousands in number and vibrant in nature, the new organizations lacked a unified platform. There was a clear need to provide a direction and a collective voice for NGOs to engage effectively with the new democratic government and international agencies. A unifying body was the need of the hour, which could establish standards and self-regulate within the rapidly expanding sector, and channelize grassroots energy into structured advocacy and development, complementing state efforts. Into this vacuum stepped the NGO Federation of Nepal (NFN), formed in 1991. The formation of NFN was conceived by the understanding that the NGO Federation would function not as an adversary, but as a collaborative partner to the state, aiming to promote and protect social justice and human rights, while also acting to complement government actions. Hence, the civil society sector and non-government organizations organized around the NGO Federation of Nepal, and the Federation was set up as an umbrella organization representing the interests of NGOS in the country through a governance structure and district chapters.

Today, NFN is a national umbrella organization of NGOs, established to promote social justice, human rights, and fair development. It is an autonomous and politically nonpartisan

organization run by NGO representatives. With over 6000 member organizations working in various fields of social welfare and development in the country, the Federation has a considerable amount of influence on government policy-making, especially in CSO-related provisions.

In summary, the NFN was born from a specific historical juncture of Nepal's democratic opening. It emerged as an institutional solution to organize the explosive growth of civic organizations, after the fall of the Panchayat, providing civil society organizations with a unified voice and a formal mechanism to engage in the nation's development and democratic consolidation. Undoubtedly, the NFN has played a significant role in the country's political and economic transformation during the past three decades.

Purpose

The purpose of this synopsis report is to research, compile, and systematically document NFN's historical trajectory, organizational evolution, leadership legacy, and civic contribution from its establishment in 1991 through 2025. By chronicling institutional history, milestones, leadership, and key organizational achievements, as well as the major contributions, the synopsis aims to capture key political, social, and operational milestones alongside reflections from past to present leaders.

Approach and Methodology

Approach

The approach of this report is participatory, evidence-based, and reflective. The process of gathering information has combined factual review of documents with personal narratives and institutional reflections, ensuring that NFN's story is captured both as an organizational record and a collective experience.

Methodology

The synopsis report follows a three-phase process: i) desk review and mapping, ii) consultation and information collection, and iii) synthesis, validation, and repository development.

To ensure the depth and reliability of the documentation, an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted. For that, a systematic examination of NFN history, internal reports, strategic plans, newsletters, and event documents was conducted. At least five semi-structured interviews were conducted with NFN founders, past leaders, and long-serving staff, focusing on leadership reflections, organizational turning points, and lessons learned.

The assignment was carried out adhering to ethical standards. While developing the synopsis report, informed consent from all interviewees, confidentiality of sensitive information, respectful representation of interviewees and institutions, and transparency in interpretation and presentation of information were considered.

CHAPTER II

Organizational Structure and Leadership of the NGO Federation of Nepal

The NGO Federation of Nepal is an independent, autonomous, apolitical, voluntary, and not-for-profit member-based organization governed by its own constitution. The Federation was established as a national platform and an umbrella organization of NGOs in 1991, following the restoration of democracy in 1990. Historically, the Federation was established because the member organizations needed a unified platform for rapidly growing NGOs in a new political landscape. The Federation aimed to coordinate these organizations, advocate for their collective interests, and ensure they operated accountably. The same founding purpose established a core institutional need for clear governance and representative leadership.

Organizational Structure

To ensure and continue this leadership legacy and culture, the Federation has a structured, multi-tiered, and democratic internal system. The highest decision-making authority is the National Convention, which is held every three years with representatives from all 77 districts. This convention elects the executive committee (EC), and can make changes to the NFN Constitutions (NGO Federation of Nepal, 20205a). Likewise, the Federation holds an annual general meeting (AGM) each year. The AGM sets direction for the coming year and also has the authority to approve annual and audit reports of the central executive committee. The Federation's activities for the coming year are also endorsed by the AGM. The Federation is governed by a Central Executive Committee (CEC), which serves as the organization's main decision-making

Central Executive Committee

(केन्द्रीय कार्य समिति)

The Central Executive Committee is formed from 51 Central Members elected at the General Assembly (महाधिवेशन). The office bearers are then selected from among these 51 members in the first meeting. The composition is detailed as:

Elected Central Members (51 persons)

- From 7 Provinces: 2 members each (including at least 1 woman) = 14 persons
- Elected Women at Central Level: 9 persons (*Madhesi*: 1; *Janajati*: 1; Dalit: 1; Open: 6)
- Elected Open at Central Level: 24 persons (*Madhesi*: 2, *Janajati*: 2, Dalit: 1, *Apangata* (Persons with Disabilities): 1, Open: 18)
- Outgoing President (if not re-elected, otherwise nominated): 1 person
- Nominated by Central Executive Committee: 3 persons

Total Central Members: 14 + 9 + 24 + 1 + 3 = 51 persons

body. The committee has a total of 51 members and is designed to reflect regional, social, and gender diversity from across the country (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025d).

The Federation also has seven provincial committees, one in each province. From each of Nepal's seven provinces, two members are elected, and at least one of them must be a woman. This brings 14 representatives from the provinces. At the national level, nine women are elected from different social groups, including Madhesi, Janajati, Dalit, and open categories. In addition, 24 members are elected in the open category, with reserved places for Madhesi, Janajati, Dalit, and persons with disabilities. The immediate past president automatically becomes a member of the committee, and the committee may also nominate three additional members. Together, these members form the full Central Executive Committee.

Once the committee is formed, the members select their office bearers in the first meeting. These include a President, a Senior Vice-President, two Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, two Deputy General Secretaries, seven Secretaries, and a Treasurer. The committee serves for a three-year term.

At the provincial level, NFN forms a Provincial Committee to manage activities within each province. This committee has 11 elected members, and at least two of them must be women.

Across the county, NFN has district chapters in all 77 districts. At the district level, District Committees are formed to coordinate the work of member organizations. The size of these committees depends on the number of NGOs in the district and usually ranges from 11 to 17 members. At least one-third of the members must be women.

In districts where the number of member organizations is very small, NFN allows the formation of a temporary Contact Center instead of a full District Committee. This center supports coordination and communication until membership grows enough to establish a regular committee.

Leadership

Since its historical establishment in 1991, the Federation has served as a unified voice to defend its member organizations and advocate for their shared goals. In the dynamic and complex political environment under which the Federation was established, its leadership has always carried a distinct responsibility. From navigating internal challenges of unifying voices, coordinating and managing thousands of diverse member organizations, to representing the sector to government and international partners, the leadership of the Federation necessitated balancing advocacy, accountability, and maintaining trust of both the public and its members. Truth being told, since its foundation in 1991, every president and senior leader has guided the

Federation through tough times and major social, political, and economic upheavals. Rather than just responding to the events as a bystander, the leadership has appropriated the changing civic landscape and steered the Federation's course.

The founding members, Mr. Jagdish Ghimire, Mr. Basudev Neupane, Mr. Shant Lall Mulmi, Ms. Rita Thapa, Mr. Anil Chitrakar, etc.,¹ felt the need for an organization that could unite, defend NGO's autonomy, and encourage coordination just after the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990. A unifying body was need of an hour, which could act as a non-partisan umbrella organization to protect and strengthen a newly opening civic space. Hence, the Federation was founded in 1991, under its first president, Mr. Jagdish Ghimire

Mr. Ghimire served as the president until 1995. This period marked a critical juncture in Nepal's history, as the post-1990 democratic opening expanded civic space. The county also witnessed a surge in foreign aid and a nationwide push for public participation. However, this was also the period of a scattered network of community efforts that were operating separately without a unified voice or clear structure. Mr. Ghimire, along with the then-founding members, including Basudev Neupane, Shanta Lall Mulmi, Rita Thapa, and Anil Chitrakar, felt a need for a conducive policy framework that helped NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to flourish and thrive. A common and shared platform for these organizations became a pressing need of the time. Hence, Mr. Ghimire's presidency established a dual role as both a moral voice and a structured institution for collective action. Its early work focused on advocating for the protection of civic space as well as the right of NGOs and CBOs to operate freely. This period saw the establishment of initial membership procedures and the opening of formal policy dialogue with the Social Welfare Council (SWC), positing the Federation as a representative body for civil society.

This foundational period established the groundwork for the Federation's evolution into a strong umbrella organization and a national platform of NGOs. The core values of the founding presidency- credibility, independence, and representation- have remained central to the Federation's identity and continue to inform its role in promoting civic space, accountability, and collective action.

Mr. Bashudev Neupane succeeded as the president of NFN, serving from 1995 to 1999. Like his predecessor, his tenure also saw the continuation of a significant increase in NGOs across the country, many of which sought a unified platform for collective action. In response, the Federation expanded its membership rapidly and began to establish formal district and regional

¹ Personal communication with Mr. Shanta Lall Mulim regarding the names of founding members.

structures. During his presidency, Mr. Neupane prioritized the internal institutional development of the Federation. A major milestone of his presidency was the drafting of the Federation's first Federal Charter, which provided essential clarity on governance, including procedures for membership, elections, and organizational accountability. His presidency emphasized a balanced approach- combining principled advocacy with constructive dialogue. This approach enabled the Federation to build and sustain relationships with government agencies and development partners, laying the groundwork for its continued role in promoting public participation, accountability, and institutional development.

The period from 1999 to 2012 in the Federation's history can be defined as one of the most significant institutional developments for the Federation against a backdrop of national political turbulence. Between 1999 and 2012, the country experienced unprecedented and profound instability, including the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), the royal massacre (2001), and the end of the monarchy in 2008. Mr. Gauri Pradhan (1999-2002), Dr. Arjun Karki (2002-2009), and Dr. Netra Prasad Timsina (2009-2012) were the three key personnel who led the Federation during its

“Leading the NGO Federation of Nepal came from a conviction that civil society should stand independent, accountable, and inclusive to all. My legacy helped civil society grow more self-assured and freer in Nepal’s democracy. Not just shaping ideas at the start, but standing firm when space for activism shrank. While chaos hit or power shifted, I stayed focused on keeping things moving forward. When few dared to reach out, I made room for talks that led to peace.”

Mr. Gauri Pradhan

most uncertain time. Against all odds, the three presidents led the Federation with conviction, purpose, and passion. Mr. Pradhan emphasized the independent, accountable, and inclusive civil society, whereas Dr. Karki's tenure, which coincided with the peak of Nepal's armed conflict, adopted a pronounced protective role for its members, upholding strict neutrality and humanitarian principles to safeguard civic freedoms. Mr. Timsina's term, which saw an unprecedented transition of Nepal to a federal structure focused on restoring civic space, strengthening provincial networks, and fostering internal debates on critical issues such as decentralization, membership diversity, and improved coordination, set the strategic direction for the Federation's next phase.

The period between 2012 and 2021 witnessed Nepal's transition into a Federal Democratic Republic, following the promulgation of its new constitution in 2015; the Federation too entered its critical phase of institutional restructuring and strategic repositioning. During the period, three presidents, Ms. Sharmila Karki (2012-2015), Mr. Gopal Lamsal (2015-2018), and Mr. Jitram Lama (2018-2021) held the reign of the Federation that guided it through

constitutional transformation. The period also witnessed massive natural disasters like the 2015 earthquake, medical emergencies of COVID-19, and the evolving policy landscape, which it had to maneuver tactfully.

Ms. Karki's presidency was marked by efforts to unify a diverse and often fragmented civil society into a coherent, independent force capable of influencing national discourse and safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities. Her presidency prioritized participatory leadership. Key highlights of her tenure include: mediation in the peace process, expanding provincial capacities, crisis responses, and embedding accountability and rights-based approaches into the Federation's work. Her tenure's central focus was empowering women, youth, and grassroots organizations to actively engage in Nepal's democratic and social progress.

"I would describe my tenure as a journey of uniting fragmented voices into a strong, independent civil society capable of influencing national policy and protecting marginalized communities. I focused on building participatory leadership, professionalizing NGOs, and defending civic space, especially during times of conflict and political turbulence. I helped NFN mediate peace, expand provincial capacities, respond swiftly to crises, and embed accountability and rights-based development into our work. Above all, my most important contribution was empowering others- women, youth, and grassroots organizations- to claim their voice and shape Nepal's democratic and social progress."

Ms. Sharmila Karki

Likewise, Mr. Gopal Lamsal's tenure, who succeeded Ms. Karki, led the Federation during a period defined by post-earthquake

recovery and the early implementation of federal structures. His term focused on strengthening the Federation's internal management system and improving coordination with emerging local governments as the federal structure was being implemented.

Mr. Lama's tenures can be marked by a strategic focus on defining the Federation's role within the new federal governance structure and framework. His tenure emphasized the evidence-based advocacy that led to the Federation's visibility and influence in national policy discourse concerning accountability, transparency, and civic rights.

The leaders during this period collectively steered the Federation through a complex period of state restructuring, ensuring its continued relevance as a principled, adaptive, and representative voice for civil society in Nepal's evolving democratic landscape.

The period from 2021 to 2025, which saw a groundbreaking discovery of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on top of already existing social networks, induced the Federation to modernize its operation. Undoubtedly, the Federation entered a phase of modernization under its most recent

presidents: Mr. Ram Prasad Subedi (2021-2024) and the current president, Mr. Arjun Kumar Bhattarai, who assumed the presidency in 2025.

Mr. Subedi's term coincided with the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, which required ingenuity in coordination and reach within members and stakeholders. Hence, to serve the purpose, his leadership initiated the development of the Federation's digital system to support member engagement and operations. His tenure also paved the way to strengthen partnerships with global civil society networks to share knowledge and strengthen solidarity during this period. One of the highlights of his tenure was NFN's secretariat role in the World Social Forum (WSF 2024) that was held in Kathmandu from February 15-19 under the banner "Another World is Possible". Along with a secretariat role, NFN organized three major thematic assemblies: on democracy and civic space, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Bhattarai, an incumbent president, assumed leadership in 2025. Following his tenure as the Secretary General of the Federation to the elected president from the 11th General Convention (GC) in March 2025, Mr. Bhattarai had emphasized a continued dialogue during the periods of tension, coordinated relief efforts during crises, including the devastating earthquake and the deadly pandemic, and advocated for the constitutional and legal recognition of civil society's role. Also, following the footsteps of his immediate past president regarding a modern and digitized Federation, his term is focused on modernizing internal

"... as strengthening NFN into a truly national and democratic platform for civil society. From my early days in Ilam to leading at the central level, I focused on uniting fragmented NGOs, defending civic space, and ensuring inclusive, participatory leadership across districts, provinces, and the center. We guided dialogue during conflict, coordinated relief during crises like earthquakes and COVID, and pushed for constitutional and legal recognition of civil society. My team works to modernize governance, digitize operations, and build sustainable resources, while keeping NFN neutral, accountable, and people-focused. The most important part of my work has been keeping civil society visible, credible, and capable of leading on rights, inclusion, and development across Nepal."

Mr. Arjun K. Bhattarai

governance, digitizing operations, and building sustainable resources, while upholding the Federation's principles of neutrality, accountability, and people-centered action.

More than three decades of NGO Federation leadership have guided the organization through periods of political transitions, national crises, and internal reform. There is no doubt that the persistent legacy, built on a shared conviction and commitment, has established the Federation as the national platform it is today. This foundational belief that a strong and unified civil space, and a purpose-driven advocacy are essential to democratic life has remained central and

provides both inspiration and direction for future civil society actors, who intend to carry forward this very tradition of public commitment, social responsibility, and principled action.

Legacy of Leadership of the NGO Federation Nepal in Chronological Order

1. Mr. Jagdish Ghimire, Term: 2048 B.S. - 2052 B.S. (1991 A.D. - 1995 A.D.)
2. Mr. Bashudev Neupane, Term: 2052 B.S. - 2056 B.S. (1995 A.D. - 1999 A.D.)
3. Mr. Gauri Pradhan, Term: 2056 B.S. - 2059 B.S. (1999 A.D. - 2002 A.D.)
4. Dr. Arjun Karki, Term: 2059 B.S. - 2066 B.S. (2002 A.D. - 2009 A.D.)
5. Dr. Netra Prasad Timsina, Term: 2066 B.S. - 2069 B.S. (2009 A.D. - 2012 A.D.)
6. Ms. Sharmila Karki, Term: 2069 B.S. - 2072 B.S. (2012 A.D. - 2015 A.D.)
7. Mr. Gopal Lamsal, Term: 2072 B.S. - 2075 B.S. (2015 A.D. - 2018 A.D.)
8. Mr. Jitram Lama, Term: 2075 B.S. - 2078 B.S. (2018 A.D. - 2021 A.D.)
9. Mr. Ram Prasad Subedi, Term: 2078 B.S. - 2081 B.S. (2021 A.D. - 2024 A.D.)
10. Mr. Arjun Kumar Bhattarai, Term: 2082 B.S. - Present (2025 A.D. - Present).

CHAPTER III

Organizational Achievements and the Contributions of the NGO Federation Nepal to Nepal's Social, Economic, and Political Landscape

The recognition of CSOs and NGOs in the 14th National Plan, as essential development partners, prioritizes the need for participatory planning, inclusion, and good governance, giving scope for active collaboration of these organizations to achieve the government's goal of socio-economic transformation. The identification of these organizations as key actors to promote collaborative and good governance practices by engaging with the local governments in the Local Self Government Act 2017, along with constitutional guarantees of peaceful assembly, right to unions and associations, right to information, etc., highlights the collaborative and watchdog role of these organizations. Hence, civil society stakeholders, like NFN, have significant influence in the socioeconomic and political landscape of the country.

From meaningfully contributing to the democratization and a purpose-driven and evidence-based advocacy, to social welfarism to community development and promoting awareness, and to human rights, environment, health, education, and peace-building, and engaging with the state, particularly, the SWC, to advocate for a supportive regulatory environment, the NGO Federation in the post-1990 period has played a leading role across a range of thematic areas central to democratic governance and inclusive development, with the likes of good governance, democracy and civic space, social justice, human rights and inclusion, local governance and federalism, sustainable development efforts, disaster response, and climate resilience, and knowledge generation and research. For instance, NFN involvement in the Peace and Democracy Campaign (2003-2006), campaigning Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2006) and coordinating Seven Party Alliance (2006), involvement in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Mainstreaming Project (2012-2016), implementing Strengthening Accountability and Governance of NGOs in Nepal (SAGON) (2015-2018), forming Human Rights Defenders Network (2017-2021), involvement in Civic Space and Democracy Dialogue (2017-2023), engaging and implementing SDG Localization Project (2018-2023), participating in Development Cooperation Monitoring Program (2020-2024), coordinating COVID-19 Response Coordination Mechanism (2020-2021), preparing Nepal's Voluntary National Review (2020 & 2023), publishing Annual Civil Space Report (2021-2024), advocating Climate Action and Resilience Program (2022-present), contributing to Civil Society Enabling Policy Framework (2022), engagement in World Social Forum (2024), preparing Child Rights and Protection Report (2024) and Nepal Country Inequality Report (2025) represent some of

the key and notable contribution of NFN in advancing democracy, civil space, governance, inclusive development and knowledge generation.

The following table highlights NFN's major contributions to Nepal's Social, Economic, and Political Landscape.

Table 1: NFN Major Contributions to Nepal’s Social, Economic, and Political Landscape

Period	Political Developments	Socio-economic Development	NGO Federation Role and Contribution
1990-1996 Democratic opening. SWC, and on the deluge of NGO registration and social movements.	1990: The People’s movement ends the Panchayat system. 1991: First multi-party election	The new constitution (1990) guarantees fundamental rights, and economic liberalization begins	Role: Supported the democratic transition by promoting inclusive constitution-making and civil society participation. Evidence: NFN played a significant role in service delivery and policy dialogue. Contribution: Provided institutional voice to the NGOs at a time when civil society was fragmented and lacked collective representation.
1996-2006 Civil war and turmoil. Civil society role and social milestone.	1996: Maoist insurgency starts. 2001: Royal massacre 2005: Kin seizes direct power 2006: Seven-party alliance (SPA)	Conflict causes- 17000 deaths, widespread displacement, and human rights abuses. The economy and development were severely disrupted.	Role: Maintained a neutral role during the Maoist insurgency, facilitating humanitarian access and promoting dialogue. NFN co- led Civil Society Peace Campaign (CSPC). NFN also coordinated with the SPA, in its present building, to ensure the breakthrough between the then ruler and the SPA. Women for Human Rights (WHR), in coordination with NFN, led the Red Sari Campaign, challenging the forced widowhood practice. Evidence: NFN was among the few national platforms that consistently called for peaceful resolution and protected civic actors from politicization.

			<p>NFN, alongside other human rights groups, monitored conflict-related abuses and advocated for civilian protection.</p> <p>Advocates of the Red Sari Campaign wore red saris to symbolize life, dignity, and equality.</p> <p>Contribution: NFN helped preserve civic space during conflict and amplified citizen concerns in peace processes- without aligning with armed or state actors.</p>
<p>2006-2015 Peace and Republic</p>	<p>2006: People's movement II, Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ends the war.</p> <p>2008: Constituent Assembly (CA) declares Nepal a republic.</p>	<p>Post-war reconciliation, work on an inclusive constitution begins.</p> <p>High emigration for work, remittance becomes an economic cornerstone.</p>	<p>Role: Abolition of the monarch. Start of the difficult constitutional drafting process.</p> <p>Evidence: NFN organized provincial consultations and submitted policy inputs to the CA Secretariat, emphasizing inclusion of marginalized groups.</p> <p>Contribution: NFN bridged grassroots voices to constitutional debates, reinforcing norms of participatory democracy.</p>
<p>2015-2020 New Constitution and federalism</p>	<p>2015: New constitution promulgated, establishing a federal democratic republic.</p>	<p>Constitution hailed for inclusion but sparks protest over representation in the Terai.</p>	<p>Role: Proactively decentralized its own structure in anticipation of federalism, establishing provincial coordination committees.</p> <p>Evidence: NFN's early investment in provincial offices enabled NGOs to engage with newly formed local governments- this is a rare example of civil society institutional adaptation to federalism.</p>

	2017-18: First election under new structure.	Implementation of federalism faces financial and administrative challenges.	Contribution: Facilitated NGO engagement with local governance, supporting implementation of federalism from below.
2017-2020 CSO Bill. SDG localization.	The Civil Society Organization Bill was introduced in 2017 and later revised in 2020.		<p>Role: Led coalition efforts to oppose restrictive clauses in the draft CSO Bill.</p> <p>Engaged in the CSO partnership for development effectiveness and the SDG localization project (2018-2023).</p> <p>Evidence: In alliance with the Alliance for Social Dialogue and other platforms, NFN successfully mobilized domestic and international pressure against provisions that would criminalize advocacy and foreign funding.</p> <p>Coordinating the SDG Forum, the Federation worked to mobilize civil society, build capacities, and coordinate the Nepal SDGs Forum.</p> <p>Contribution: Protected operational autonomy for the NGOs through evidence-based advocacy and coalition building.</p> <p>Empowered actors involved in SDG implementation advocated for strong accountability and fostered collaboration among CSOs, government bodies, and the private sector.</p>

<p>2020-Present</p> <p>Pandemic and new challenges</p>	<p>2020-21: COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide lockdown.</p> <p>2022: Elections produce a fragile coalition government.</p> <p>2024: Role of a secretariat in World Social Forum (WSF)</p> <p>2025: Draft NGO Bill raises concerns over civic space.</p> <p>2025: NFN's role in Gen Z protest.</p>	<p>Pandemic strains already fragile health system, halts tourism, impacts remittance.</p> <p>Rising debates on citizenship, inclusion, and civil liberties.</p>	<p>Role: NFN coordinated member NGOs in large-scale humanitarian responses. Acted as a secretariat in WSF 2024.</p> <p>Played a supportive, policy-focused role during the Gen Z protest.</p> <p>Evidence: Activated its district networks within 72 hours of the 2015 earthquake, channeling aid to 42 affected districts and reducing duplication.</p> <p>During COVID-19, NFN's digital coordination platform supported food and hygiene kit distribution to more than two hundred thousand households.</p> <p>NFN played a central role as secretariat in WSF 2024.</p> <p>Issuance of an appeal and calling for respect for the rights of assembly and free speech.</p> <p>Contribution: Demonstrated operational capacity and trust in emergency contexts and large-scale social events, not competing but by complementing state efforts.</p> <p>NFN used the civil society mandate to advocate for fundamental rights.</p>
--	---	---	--

CHAPTER IV

Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Way Forward

After the change in political regime in 1990, the proliferation of NGOs led to the establishment of the NGO Federation of Nepal in 1991, which has since then shouldered the responsibility of unifying NGO voices across the country and is actively working to unite, organize, capacitate, and mobilize civil society to create a peaceful, democratic, and just Nepal. In this regard, the NGO Federation of Nepal has a decade-long history of supporting the people in need, and this has enabled the NGO Federation to emerge as one of the key actors for institutionalizing democratic practices. Nevertheless, while the Federation has made steady contributions, its journey has been marked by various challenges that influence its institutional development.

Challenges

Notwithstanding the critical role played by NFN in promoting inclusive governance, protecting human rights, and fostering just development, it faces a number of challenges, such as restrictive, administrative, i.e., legal and policy hurdles. Along with its institutional challenge of sustaining financial independence, managing and preserving its historical legacy (archiving and digital repository), generational transition (traditional activist worldviews vs. new digitally literate youths), the NFN also faces legislative and regulatory shrinking and politicization, and polarization issues.

Despite constitutional provisions of the right to association and right to freedom of expression, the legal and policy frameworks regulating NGOs and CSOs have become increasingly complex, inconsistent, and centralized, especially in areas such as registration and renewal processes, foreign aid governance, and recognition of grassroots organizations. These restrictive local ordinances and administrative barriers, politicized scrutiny, and heightened renewal hurdles have posed a serious threat to the civic space and to the likes of the NGO Federation. Along with shrinking civic space, a discussion conducted by the NGO Federation regarding the challenges and future direction in civil space highlighted negative views about NGOs as one of the primary challenges (NGO Federation Nepal, 2025b). Likewise, issues regarding taxation, Value Added Tax (VAT) complications, and legal impediments, as well as the policy hurdles, were recognized as one of the prevalent challenges faced by CSOs and NGOs, including the NGO Federation, in one of the comprehensive discussion programs conducted by NFN (NGO Federation Nepal, 2025c).

Lesson Learned

With more than three decades of its institutional journey, NFN has learnt several key lessons that have shaped the Federation's character and operational approach. These are practical lessons, drawn from experiences rather than theory, and they continue to guide and inform the organization's function to date. The historical mandate of uniting and coordinating NGOs across the country has made NFN learn that building a steady and robust organization depends less on financial resources but more on a sound system, an enabling culture, and committed people. Likewise, keeping accurate and accessible data for NFN's credibility, diversity in gender, geography, and perspective for resilience; adaptability to changing context to remain relevant and effective; and shared leadership and collective action fostering ownership and empowerment to participate meaningfully are some of the key lessons learnt that continue to guide NFN's journey.

Way Forward

The NGO Federation is entering a phase defined by modernization, knowledge leadership, and deeper civic influence as it moves forward. These are practical directions grounded in lessons from its own history, and not an abstract goal. Embedding digital repositories and systematic knowledge management to ensure continuity and institutional memory; strengthening research and policy analysis capacity to move beyond reactive advocacy toward evidence-based influence; diversifying funding for financial sustainability; strengthening provincial chapters and nurturing intergenerational leadership to ensure their active participation and youth voices; and evidence-based and purpose driven activism for collective action, social justice, and inclusive development, etc., are some of the action that would drive the Federation for meaningful change.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The formation of the NGO Federation of Nepal was a critical institutional response to Nepal's democratic opening in 1990. The Federation was established to unify a scattered and fragmented civil society and NGOs. This synopsis documents NFN's navigation of political upheavals, social transformation, and its institutional growth of more than three decades, not only as a record of events but as a repository of lessons, values, and collective experiences that have shaped NFN's identity and operational ethos.

Several insights emerge from this account. First, NFN's role since its establishment has been inherently adaptive, evolving from providing a unified voice of NGOs to mediating in conflict, supporting federal transition, and coordinating emergency responses. Second, leadership transitions emerge as a central thread, with each phase reflecting a strategic response to national circumstances, from foundational institution building to modernizing operations for a digital era. Third, the Federation also faces several challenges, such as restrictive legal environments, financial sustainability, administrative burdens, and an increasingly complex regulatory environment, and shrinking space to name a few, that limit NFN's capacity to function to its fullest.

Lastly, the insights that can be drawn from this institutional memory and knowledge management document are that the process of document memory and knowledge for NFN is an ongoing process rather than a completed task; hence, maintaining and updating its institutional memory remains essential for learning, adaptation, and responsible leadership.

REFERENCES

- Bhatta, C. D. (2012). Unveiling Nepal's Civil Society. *Journal of Civil Society*, 8(2), 185-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2012.732429>
- British Council. (2019). *Civil society in a federal Nepal: A landscape study* (Final Report). British Council.
https://www.britishcouncil.org.np/sites/default/files/nepal_cso_landscape_study_final_report.pdf
- Gautam, S. (2024). The changing role of civil society in Nepal. *Political Science Journal*, 2(1), 32-37.
- NGO Federation of Nepal. (2025a). *Organizational structure*. Retrieved from <https://www.ngofederation.org/categories/2/Organizational-Structure>
- NGO Federation of Nepal. (2025b). *NGO Federation of Nepal discusses challenges and future directions in civic space*. Retrieved from <https://www.ngofederation.org/content/571>
- NGO Federation of Nepal. (2025c). *Discussion program on 'Issues and Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organizations' conducted in Pokhara*. Retrieved from <https://www.ngofederation.org/content/529>
- NGO Federation of Nepal. (2025d). NFN statute. Rederived from <https://www.ngofederation.org/content/258>.
- Pandey, L. (2021). *Shrinking of civil space in federal Nepal* (Policy paper 18). Center for Media Research. <https://nepalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Discussion-Paper-Shrinking-of-Civic-Space-Federal.pdf>