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The Rise and Fall of National Service in Nepal

A Critical Study of Service and Citizenship Building in Nepal

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Service in Nepal is not a new phenomenon. Traditional approaches to service based on voluntarism, however, have begun to fade as NGO-sponsored volunteer organizations and state-sponsored service programs have taken on a larger role in the country. State-sponsored service programs and NGOs, however, have not necessarily promoted citizenship. This paper explores the relationship between service and citizenship in Nepal with a mixed method study of participants in two national service programs: the National Development Service, established in the 1960s, and the National Development Volunteer Service, established in 2001.

Key words: *civic service, citizenship, national service, voluntarism*

Background

Service in Nepal is not a new phenomenon. Traditional Nepali service programs include mutual and self-help groups, philanthropic service groups, campaign advocacy groups, and participatory self-governance groups (Yadama & Messerschmidt, 2002). These service activities are driven by a sense of community and interdependence, by cultural, social, and religious ties. Remnants of these are still quite visible and prevalent in rural areas.

Traditional approaches to service based on voluntarism, however, have been influenced by the increased presence of NGO-sponsored volunteer organizations since the 1970s. Although these organizations have helped to promote service, they have not necessarily promoted citizenship. Nepal's government-sponsored service programs, for their part, have tended to serve the interests of political elites. Furthermore, the government has failed to develop any other method of integrating youth into the national political mainstream and mobilizing them for civic purposes. While traditional service programs are fading away, state-sponsored service programs and NGOs have not been able to instill a sense of citizenship among youths to bridge the existing gap.

Traditions of Nepali voluntarism have been the subject of scholarly inquiry, but the systematic study of "service and its link with citizenship" is fairly new (Yadama & Messerschmidt, 2002) and has focused very little attention on traditional voluntary organizations. This research adds a new perspective to the study of service, citizenship, and youth policies in Nepal. In Nepal, the development of youth service as a tool for citizenship has been largely overlooked, despite the fact that the role of youth and service has become central to citizenship building. The imperative for democratic resurgence in the post 1990s political environment makes this question all the more urgent.

This study will advance the theoretical literature by elucidating the challenges of citizenship in Nepal from the perspective of national service. For instance, the pertinent question may be asked: to what extent has (youth) service contributed to the search for the Aristotelian citizen in Nepal? While a

greater theoretical objective might be to consider how service impacts citizenship, we will instead be interested in the specific effects of youth service on citizenship and citizen development in Nepal.

The history of voluntarism in Nepal

Traditionally, voluntary services were conducted by community-based volunteer organizations such as *Gunthi, Badhgar,* and *parma.[1]* Such organizations supported cultural and religious activities and generated community services, playing a crucial role in the sustainable management of social development initiatives. In fact, some of the practices common to these traditional organizations were institutionalized to mobilize resources with the active involvement of all stakeholders (Nepuane, 2002, p. 2). In fact, Nepal relied heavily on voluntarism for governance, resource mobilization, and development of cooperatives. As an ordinary daily activity, it helped to fulfil the needs of the community and promote self-reliance (Bhattachan, 2002, p. 27).

With the introduction of *Charkha Pracharak Mahaguthi*—the organization that promoted the Gandihan philosophy of development—in the 1950s, volunteer activities became more institutionalized. This institutionalized form also promoted notions of self-help, sustainability, and collaboration, and adopted many pragmatic concepts of the *Guthies* to safeguard the traditional concept of being and working together in determining one's own fate. Even as voluntarism was institutionalized, however, it continued to promote the welfare approach and helped communities to cope with natural disasters and epidemics, and also helped to implement short-term projects and build infrastructures. Institutions like *Paropakar,[2]* established in 1948, were highly successful in mobilizing young volunteers during periods of crisis.

Beginning in 1951, traditional concepts of service and voluntarism were challenged by political upheaval. During this period, few independent voluntary institutions were promoted, formed, or strengthened, and developmental NGOs were only allowed to operate under government supervision. However, voluntary institutions staffed by supporters of the new political system were promoted and supported during this period. Most of these were youth clubs or professional organizations and their activities were set by the state itself. By and large, this phase of volunteerism in Nepal was politically driven.

The NDS. In addition to supervising independent programs, the Nepali state also developed its own volunteer programs and mobilized volunteers in different fields such as health, education, environment, and infrastructure development. Under the leadership of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah (then Crown Prince) in the 1960s, Nepal began to develop its first national service program, the National Development Service (NDS). The NDS was based on a smaller program, Nepal Darshan, initiated in 1964-65 by the Ministry of Education. This program exposed college students to the rural life of Nepal to help them appreciate the intensity of rural problems (Pradhan, 1978). The students would go to a village in groups of ten to twenty and do a survey of village needs, staying there for about a month. In 1971, the program was instituted as a required one-year program

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[1]*Guthi,* a classical example of the traditional voluntarism, was a community of formed by the people for social and cultural consciousness and collective action. *Badghara*, another traditional institution, offered guests a place to be entertained, take rest, and, occasionally, to settle disputes. *Parma* was a sort of cooperative, involving exchange of labor among rural hill people.
[2] This term translates as "welfare for others."

in all colleges by the New Education System Plan.[3] Tribhuvan University, the only university in Nepal, implemented the program as a requirement for all Master's level students in 1974. The required program comprised a two month orientation program followed by ten months of service in a village (Pradhan, 1978).

The objectives of the NDS program, according to the National Education Plan for 1971-1976, were to insure that higher education was not equated with theoretical knowledge alone, and to provide students with scope for service in national development while engaged in studies (Vaidya, 1992, p. 123). The program appears to have had a very positive impact on rural life. As generalists, the students were successful in many aspects of village development. Moreover, the program appeared to be a win-win for both participants and rural beneficiaries: the rural population benefited from interaction with highly educated youth while urban-based youths benefited from exposure to the richness and hardship of rural life (Vaidhya, 2002, pp. 42-43).

One of the features vital to the success of the NDS program was its introduction through Tribhuvan University, thus involving students at the grassroots level. In addition, the program, devised to suit the needs of Nepal, played a vital role in development activities and helped to create a sense of civic belonging among youth. NDS integrated and guided youths in nation-building through good citizenship; one of its primary objectives was to ". . . provide students for service in national development while engaged in studies" (Vaidya, 2002, p. 36).

The program identified students as agents of change in society, and this played a crucial role in developing notions of service and loyalty towards the state among youths. These notions, in turn, promoted the concept of civic nationalism or civic citizenship. The program ran from 1974 until 1979 when it was abruptly aborted by the government, which cited financial constraints.

The NDVS. Following the reinstallation of democracy in 1990, the state sought to revive Nepal's service programs and launched the National Development Volunteer Service (NDVS) in 2001. The program, specifically tailored to meet the growing demand for technical manpower, selected a limited number of volunteers through open competition. Unlike the NDS, the NDVS is open to retirees and professionals, in addition to students, and requires no academic qualifications. Participants are compensated monetarily like NDS. Despite its differences from NDS, expectations were high that NDVS might be a useful means of fostering civic engagement.

The Role of NGOs. The notion of service promoted by NDS and NDVS has been complicated by the emergence of NGOs that have provided essential services in areas such as health, education, and institution-building in rural communities. NGOs took root in Nepal in the mid 70s, when money flooded into Third World countries. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, NGOs mushroomed dramatically in Nepal.[4] The organised volunteerism promoted by the NGOs has helped harness the concept of mobilizing young people from outside the community to deliver services. In addition, NGOs have developed professionalism in volunteerism and service delivery by

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[3] The main objective of the New Education system plan as visualized with the following aims: (a) to make available at least minimum education opportunities to all, (b) to shift the emphasis from liberal education to technical vocational education, and (c) to tie up the education system with the economic needs of the country.

[4] The total number of NGOs registered with Social Welfare Council were only 219 in 1990s whereas the figure had gone up to 10,475 by March 26, 2000.

increasing the capacities of the volunteers. Unfortunately, however, in promoting a new kind of voluntarism, the NGOs have inadvertently commercialized the notion of volunteerism. As a result, voluntarism began to lose its associations with self-help, sustainability, and promotion of a participatory approach (Neupane, 2002, p. 3). In some communities, NGOs were also blamed for damaging the local culture because of the alien lifestyles, food habits, clothing styles, and languages introduced by their foreign volunteers. Neupane (2002) has suggested that the influence of foreign volunteers has encouraged the development of dependency in local communities (p. 11). Therefore, although NGOs have promoted the notion of service, they have not necessarily promoted its spirit.

Increasingly, however, the western concept of "offering oneself for any service" replaced the more traditional participatory welfare approach to service. This new concept promoted an understanding of voluntarism as a leisure time activity that people with surplus wealth and time perform on behalf of the needy. As a result, the traditional voluntary spirit of self-sufficiency began to be replaced by increasing dependency.

The problem

The erosion of traditional people-based volunteerism (ADB Report 1999, p. 1) and the advent of modern volunteerism, which has introduced external volunteers and the welfare approach in a community, threaten the development of a functional national civic service program. In addition, political instability in the country has resulted in the estrangement of young people with concomitant social problems. Such situations have driven youths to anti-social movements with no sense of civic citizenship. Most of the youths from the remote areas have been involved in the Maoist insurgency.[5] Student groups often act as the catalysts of political change *whether it is desirable or not* (Baral, 1993, italics added). The challenges that Nepal faces today is how national service programs can be kept alive and generate a sense of civic engagement among youths.

The key questions that we attempt to answer in this study are: What is the actual nature of the relationship (if any) between service and citizenship in Nepal? Has the NDVS program enhanced civic engagement in Nepal? This study's approach to these questions is guided by the assumption that there is a necessary relationship between service and citizenship building.

Theoretical context

In the emerging literature on service as a distinct social practice and analytic category, Michael Sherraden's definition has become the touchstone. Sherraden (2001) describes service as "an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant" (p.4). Likewise, Patel (2003, p. 89) adds that service "is shaped by the history and service traditions of a society, its level of development, the way in which it governs itself, organizes its economy, and views the role of its citizens and its social institutions in meeting human needs and in promoting democracy." Historically service has been described as "helpful actions of individuals in relation to others" (Menon, Moore, & Sherraden, 2002). In these traditions, service was not just an expression of self-sacrifice, but rather an expression of loyalty to the state or a higher being (Menon

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[5] In the beginning, students were forced to join the Maoist insurgency but later many students voluntarily opted to join the insurgency influenced by political beliefs and by the rampant unemployment in the rural areas.

et al., 2002). Generally, service has come to be seen in terms of "societal systems of care and governance" rather than in terms of individual action (Menon et al, 2002, p. 9), while ways of enacting service have become increasingly formal, institutionalized, and cross-cultural. However, political, ideological, economic, social, and cultural beliefs held by different societies condition the way in which civic service is conceptualized (Patel, 2003, p. 92). While Sherraden's definition focuses mainly on formal means of service participation, this does not limit its utility in understanding national service of the kind that this work deals with.

The notion of citizenship is core to the contemporary idea of a democratic society (Heather, 1999, p. 1). Despite the complexities of characterizing citizenship, two conceptions have become virtually hegemonic in the literature: the liberal and the civic republican traditions (Obadare, 2005, p. 9). The liberal tradition emphasizes rights, and demands less of the individual; the civic republican tradition, however, accents duties and places high demands on the individual in his relationship with the community (Obadare, 2005). Here, we concentrate on the civic republican variant of citizenship that underwrites the idea of civic service.

The civic republican conception of citizenship goes back to the Greek city states of Sparta and Athens, whose citizens demonstrated a strong commitment to civic duties (Heather, 1999, p. 45). Citizenship, in turn, was linked to ethical considerations drawn from the Greco-Roman heritage of *civitas* and *polis,* where citizens were not only *entitled* to participate in civic affairs, but were *expected* to do so (Dagger, 2002, p. 149). In modern times, however, citizenship is a token matter of legal status that confers various privileges and immunities on the citizen. "Real" or "true" citizenship, on the other hand, requires commitment to the common good and active participation in public affairs. In short, it requires civic virtue (Dagger, 2002, p. 149). While the civic republican model does not deny the legal status of citizenship, it emphasizes the necessity of an ethical dimension to claims of "true" or "full" citizenship (Dagger, 2002, p. 149).

The standards that are built into the conception of citizenship—public spirit and civic involvement—are therefore regarded as a function of this ethical dimension and not of the legal condition (Obadare, 2005, p. 10). In this context, a "citizen" places the public interest above his personal interests and is committed to the public good through civic involvement (Obadare, 2005, p. 10, citing Dagger, 2002). Alexis de Tocqueville suggests that anyone whose citizenship manifests in the two basic ways above is also likely to become a better, more virtuous person in other respects.

The civic republican notion of citizenship, as advanced by Rousseau (cited in Heather, 1999), holds that private interests are set aside in favor of the interest of the individual as a member of the public. Perhaps also relevant is Machiavelli's concept of the citizen-soldier, which highlights the citizen's role "as member of the public" with concomitant obligations to integrate himself into the community *and help to integrate others through establishment of a civic bond* (Dagger, 2002, cited in Obadare, 2005, p. 11; Heather, 1999, pp. 50-60). Moreover, the civic republican notion of citizenship connects the individual with the state in a symbiotic relationship that creates a just and stable republican polity in which the individual enjoys freedom. The republic, in turn, exists through the support of its citizens. Freedom here, however, denotes "civil liberty as freedom through the merging of self-interest with duty" and not "natural liberty as freedom through the pursuit of interest" as in the liberal conception. The civic republican mode fundamentally emphasizes the necessity of state and

citizens to exist as a community—an "organic society"—and not merely as a collection of individuals (Obadare, 2005, p. 10).

There are many ways in which the republican mode is being re-enacted, re-articulated, and remade in its reappearance. One way that is significant for this work is the reappearance of the citizen-soldier model, as young people are mobilized through paramilitary or civilian structures to participate in communal and/or national service (Obadare, 2005, p. 12). The emphasis on duty typical of this model is consistent with the notion of citizenship advanced by the republican conception: even where it understates rights, it *actually emphasizes rights* in a roundabout way (Obadare, 2005, p. 12*)*. In fact, the imperative of participation in state and society necessarily implies a strong commitment occasioned by the *right of membership* (Obadare, 2005, p. 12), and the right of membership carries the rights de-emphasized by the rhetoric of the republican conception. Thus, the foundations of the whole rest on the right of membership, and this right of membership, is conditional on duties to the whole (Obadare, p. 12). Andrew Heywood (1994, p. 187) more or less supports this reading when he states that citizens are not merely bearers of rights, but that "they also have duties and obligations towards the state that has protected, nurtured and cared for them." Hence, it must be noted that this conception of citizenship underlines the importance of having some sort of compulsory, structured, and institutionalized service programs.

The Relationship between (civic) service and citizenship

Civic service is predicated on the assumption that service positively influences citizenship. Perry and Katula (2001, p. 336) point to Azaro's (1993) observation on national service that, "An ideal, either implicit or explicit, of active citizenship can be found as a constitutive element in every theory or proposal for national service" (p. 234). This emphasizes the fact that the goal of service is to promote and consolidate active citizenship. This theory, as Perry and Katula (2001) point out, is predicated on antecedents, attributes of service, attributes of the server, individual changes, and institutions (p. 336). Verba et al. (1995) identify antecedents as four generational processes beginning from infancy that include parental education, socioeconomic influences on political socialization in the home or community, church attendance, and community involvement. Although these antecedents are not necessarily deterministic, they raise two critical questions regarding the service-citizenship interface (Verba et al., pp. 336-38): To what extent may service be regarded as an efficient and effective method for either modifying or reinforcing the strong dynamics that operate between generations? And, how can service be instrumental as a mechanism of change? In terms of attributes of service, there is a debate among those who assert that service, by its very nature, promotes citizenship, those who state that only particular kinds of service promote citizenship, and those who question the very idea that service promotes citizenship (Verba et al., pp. 338-339). Individual differences such as age and social class are also taken to be factors in terms of how service influences citizenship. There are also individual changes such as intellectual stimulation, socialization, and practice, which impact on citizenship.

Institutional filters such as local communities, national political systems, schools, etc., can also be viewed as antecedents of service and therefore as filters for the effects of service on citizenship. The latter is very crucial because, "institutions . . . provide understandings about prescribed behavior, and implicit and explicit principles or norms around which actors' expectations converge. In this capacity as rule-defining and rule-enforcing mechanisms, institutions can magnify or attenuate the effects of

service on citizenship" (Verba et al., p. 340). Of the various theoretical approaches to understanding civic service—including philanthropy, institutionalism, conservative, critical, and social development—a modified version of institutionalism would fit the civic republican conception of citizenship in explicating the service-citizenship interface (Obadare, 2005, p. 13). Curiously, this fitting framework is based on the liberal tradition, which the republican conception of citizenship counterposes. The matching of a liberal concept of service with a republican notion of citizenship, however, is a useful one.

As developing countries invested heavily in the idea of public spending to develop emergent states and create national progress and unity, a strong conception of citizen obligation to the state was concomitantly developed. Consequently, the state promotes values of altruism, social solidarity, and collectivism, and supports these values through extensive state spending characterized by strong service delivery by the state (Patel, 2003, p. 93). As Patel argues, "civic service programs in these types of political and social systems would tend to be more institutionalized in the form of public policy and the regulation of such activities" (2003, p. 93). She then adds a very illuminating comment about the fact that "the impact of institutional approaches on civic service in the developing world appears to be limited due to the weakness of the state and democratic institutions, civil conflicts [and] fiscal constraints" (Patel, 2003, p. 94).

Yet, even in this developing context, the idea of service as an essential means of making citizens of the youth is so crucial that, even where it is afflicted by the problems noted by Patel and more, the "ideal" is still romanticized and promoted given that it is also crucial to the *social and political image* of these states which are mostly plagued by centrifugal forces (Obadare, 2005). Youth service and citizenship are linked in such contexts where, to use Youniss and Yates' words, "service is a means to form citizens who understand the struggle and rewards, energy and exhilaration, that make up the actual political process" of the struggle for national unity and progress (1997, p. 17, cited in Obadare, 2005, p. 14).

Methodology

We were interested in determining the extent to which NDS and NDVS are perceived to have been able to promote citizenship in the Nepali context. Accordingly, the case study approach was used in our evaluation of the role of national service in the promotion of citizenship values in Nepal.

Nepal is a centralised state and its capital city, Kathmandu, is the country's economic and political center. Although we conducted a number of interviews in peripheral areas, the focus of this study was Kathmandu as it is the center of political engineering and social mobilization. It has a relatively better record in terms of educational achievement and a vibrant, urban civil society, especially evident in the press and the pro-democracy movement.

The study divided the city into two districts, using socio-economic, political and demographic indices. The study also considered geographical spread in the division; that is, half of the surveyed districts have been picked from the hilly area and half from the low land.

Data sources and data analysis

Questionnaires. An open-ended questionnaire was used to measure and monitor specific responses as well as give respondents opportunities to express differing opinions on certain questions. Between July and September 2005, a total of 100 questionnaires were administered to 30 former NDS corps members and 70 former or current NDVS corps members. The participants were selected on the basis of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in the beginning of the programme. Altogether, six FGDs were conducted both in Kathmandu and all five development regions of the country. In addition, some of the participants in Kathmandu were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the field. FGDs with these experts helped to identify and locate participant(s). There was a slight problem in locating NDS participants outside of Kathmandu primarily because NDS was in operation in the seventies and most of the NDS cadres are based in Kathmandu (for service etc). The questionnaire used seven markers of citizenship values to appropriately simplify the relationship between national service and citizenship, clearly assess and measure the respondents' understanding of citizenship, and to assess whether citizenship values are divisible and to what extent the NDVS/NDS was deemed to have promoted particular aspects. These seven markers include: civility, social bond, community service, patriotism, sense of belonging, trust, and civic duties.

The identified respondents were administered questionnaires by the primary researcher and a field assistant in district headquarters, places of primary assignments, offices, and schools. The questionnaires were analyzed to identify trends that were subsequently elaborated upon in focus group discussions and interviews. The data generated from the questionnaires were analyzed generally and proportionally with a view to understanding the similarity or divergence of opinions between serving and former corps members.

In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted in Kathmandu to generate further explanations, understanding, and perceptions about the NDS/NDVS scheme, especially in regard to its role vis-à-vis citizenship values. The interviews were conducted with 30 subjects who did not participate in the survey. The target group included officials of the NDS/NDVS, serving and alumni members of the NDS/NDVS, academics, and members of the civil society at large. The interviews were recorded by the interviewer in long hand due to reservations from the interviewees (especially ex-NDS officials and current NDVS officials) about recording. The majority of the NDVS respondents were in the age group between 22-35 years and the average age of NDS respondents was around 51. Although it was not possible to balance the gender gap in the case of NDS cadres because of the non-availability of the participants, it was possible in the case of NDVS cadres.

Focus groups. A total of six focus group discussions (one in each region and one at the central level) were organized to provide additional insight. The focus groups involved between 8 and 10 participants (who were excluded from completing questionnaires) each, including active members and alumni of the NDS/NDVS. A total of 60 people participated in the focus groups. The participants, drawn from many different ethnic, socio-cultural, occupational and regional backgrounds, were carefully selected to reflect the diverse nature of the Nepali nation state. The focus groups were recorded on tape and transcribed to provide clarity and to document responses.

The Nexus between Service and Citizenship: The Findings

Qualitative findings

Qualitative findings drawn from questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews indicated a diversity of opinion on NDS and NDVS, including the exact meanings, motives behind their establishment, on their effectiveness, their performances, reasons behind joining the volunteer programs, factors affecting contribution in citizenship building and many more (See tables in section 3 for detailed findings). The majority of the cadres we interviewed were of the view that service programmes in Nepal are politically motivated. For example, one respondent (Tulasi Giri) who holds a Masters of Arts and a Bachelors of Law, was of the view that service programmes in Nepal are not effective because of their "over-politicization"; they have been established merely to fulfil political interests of the regime or political parties. Her views were shared by many other respondents as well. Politics has used and abused both "service and its actors—youths" said another respondent (Kalayan Adhihari) from Tarai (low land) who also holds a postgraduate degree. This respondent pointed to the high rate of "unemployment in the country" and the "over-politicisation" of society as a whole as factors. Most respondents claimed that NDVS has failed to promote the spirit of "voluntarism" and that they chose to become volunteers "merely to escape from unemployment and poverty in the country."

With regard to NDS, there were many positive remarks and most of them came from NDS cadres and people who obtained their services in the villages. They said that NDS was also politically motivated but succeeded in winning the hearts of the students as well as the villagers. A minority of others, however, noted that NDS cadres were merely engaged in promoting the regime's interests.

In terms of politicisation of service programmes in the country, one respondent responded strongly: "none of the political programmes remained independent of politics. All service programmes that are/were under operation in Nepal are captured by the political parties irrespective of their principles/commitments made in the paper." In the same vein, another respondent (Bhuwan Jung Shah, Baitadi) noted that Nepali youths are engaged in enriching their "political bio data" rather than improving their own capacity. Politics has become a '*gayatri mantra*' for youths say other respondents from the same district. Youths have been politicised to such an extent that they cannot do anything without being political. One has to be aligned with political party to have the things done in Nepal.

The study also revealed that the growing number of NGOs and INGOs in the country have badly tarnished the image of service and voluntarism in the country. "Even the Red Cross has lost its reputation due to 'monetisation' of society—a culture mainly developed by (I)NGOS," commented another respondent who is also Head of the Community College in Kapilvastu district in Southern Nepal. It appears that the culture of helping each other in time of need in the rural areas (*Marda parda sahayog garne parampara*) and working free of cost (*shramdan*) for the benefit of society is slowly dying out due to the "monetisation" of society. For example Ram Chandra Chaudhary, an NDVS cadre, strongly subscribed to the existence of this tendency in society. There were mixed reactions among respondents, however, in terms of promoting civic nationalism. Some argued (mostly its cadres) that NDVS cadres have to travel widely within Nepal, thus gaining opportunities to interact with the people of different regions which promoted the formation of some sort of civic bond amongst them. In contrast, NDS cadres had to remain in one fixed place and had no opportunity of mixing with the people of different regions.

In terms of their effectiveness in promoting citizenship values, many agreed with a respondent who argued that "NDVS has been solely working to meet the developmental need of the society

(development partner of the state), it has not been able to promote any sort of service or civic nationalism for that matter" (Pamhpha Devi Shrestha, Mahottari district). Many NDVS cadres said that the main reason to become a volunteer is primarily to gain some sort of experience that would increase chances of getting good jobs (possibly in the UN System) in the future.

What has been clear, however, is that in the case of NDVS many respondents said that this programme cannot be equated with "service" as its has merely been working as the development partner of the government (to meet the growing demand of technical manpower) and has not been able to generate citizenship values. It is clear from the explicit statements made by the respondents that many have joined the programme not in the interest of providing 'service' to the community but rather for their own job experience. In contrast, the NDS was solely established to instill some sort of sense of social belonging among young generations and it did contribute to that end.

On the question of overall effectiveness of NDVS compared to NDS, a majority of the NDVS cadres said that there is no provision for follow-up in NDVS while there was routine follow-up in NDS. As a result NDVS has failed to establish its identity in society. A majority of the youngsters, for example, are not aware of NDVS whereas NDS cadres used to be known as *bikase sir* (development sir) by the villagers and were quite popular in society. In contrast, citing NDVS, one respondent (Rama Parajuli, Syangja) said that "nobody knows about us except ourselves," whereas NDS was quite popular in the villages partly because it was run through schools and partly because NDS cadres had to be with villagers every Friday after classes.

There were, however, negative remarks about NDS as well. Many argued that NDS was solely established to serve the interest of the regime but once it came into operation it was appreciated by the all strata of society as it was free from politics. There were even demonstrations not to shut down the programmes. However, despite its popularity, the programme was prematurely aborted citing financial reasons but when we interviewed ex-NDS cadres, they said that some of the NDS cadres were found to have been heavily involved in political activities and spoke against the Royal regime during the referendum in 1980. In a nutshell, NDS was motivated both by sense of duty and social responsibility whereas the same has not been the case with NDVS.

Quantitative findings

Quantitative findings from the survey indicate a similarly complex picture.

Meaning of civic service programs (NDS/NDVS). This study is interested in measuring to what extent service programs have been able to generate a sense of civic awareness and promote citizenship values in the Nepali context. As one item in the questionnaire, subjects in the NDS and NDVS groups were asked to evaluate the meaning of the program in which they participated. Thirty subjects, therefore, evaluated the NDS program and 70 subjects the NDVS program.
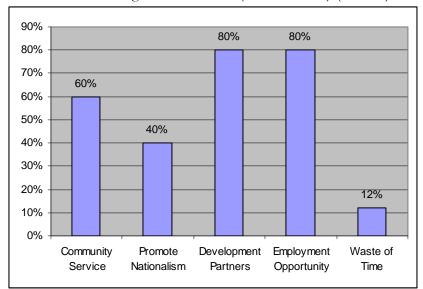
Table 1: The meaning of civic service (NDS/NDVS) (N=100)[a]

a. Each variable was measured separately. Only affirmative responses are presented in the table.

Of the total 100 respondents surveyed (NDS and NDVS respondents combined), 80% see NDVS as a program designed to assist development-related activities in rural areas. Equal numbers of respondents see NDVS as an employment opportunity to escape from widespread unemployment in the country. In addition, 40% see the program as helpful to promote a sense of nationalism among youths, and 60% see the program as a tool of community service through engagement in activities like health, education, agriculture, and others. Lastly, 12% candidates see it as not relevant and a waste of time.

The next item on the questionnaire asked the respondents to select the purpose of the civic service program in which they participated. Again, respondents evaluated only the program in which they had served.
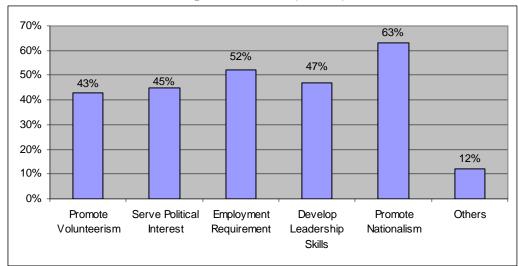
Table 2: Reason for establishing NDS/NDVS (N=100)[a]

a. Each variable was measured separately. Only affirmative responses are presented in the table.

The purpose of NDS/NDVS was identified by 63% of respondents as promoting nationalism among youths; meanwhile, 52% saw it as a requirement for successful performance in the job market, 43% saw it as a means to promote volunteerism among youths, and 45% of the total respondents said that both programs (NDS and NDVS) designed by different political regimes to promote their own political interest as an attempt to permanently capture the helm of political power. Similarly, 47% saw it as an opportunity to develop leadership skills while still completing their education and only 12% of the total respondents said that they were not clear about the program.

NDS/NDVS: Performance evaluation

This study sought to measure how the respondents perceived the performance of their respective programs. To this end, respondents were first asked whether they thought the programs had achieved their respective objectives. Such objectives were defined in the questionnaire to include the promotion of volunteerism, a sense of national belonging, national integration, and civic awareness, as well as serving as a training platform for future leaders, promoting discipline amongst youth, and fostering social bonds among others.
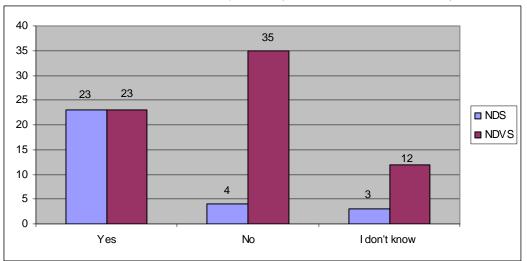
Table 3: Performance of aims and objectives (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

Of the total 30 NDS cadres surveyed, 23 of them responded that NDS was successful in achieving its aims and objectives, 4 of them said it failed to do so, and 3 of them said that they were undecided. Overall, the responses received regarding NDS were mostly positive. With regard to NDVS, of the total 70 cadres surveyed, 35 said that the program failed to fulfil its objective, 23 of them said program partially succeeded in its goal, and 12 were undecided.

Respondents were also asked to evaluate their program's success with particular objectives. The next question asked respondents to evaluate whether or not their program promoted volunteerism.
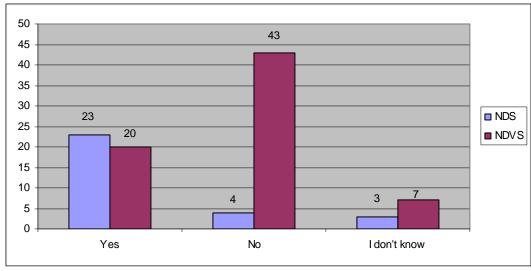
Table 4: Promoting volunteerism (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

With regard to the overarching objective of both programs to promote volunteerism in society through mobilization, it appears from Table 4 that NDVS was unsuccessful in this regard; 20 of 70 respondents said that the program did promote volunteerism and 43 said that it did not. NDS, in

contrast, appears to have been more successful. Of 30 respondents, 23 agreed that the program had promoted volunteerism and only 4 disagreed.

To identify perceived reasons for the program's success or failure, respondents were asked to privilege one or more of the following factors affecting the performance of the scheme: funding, political factors, youth factors,[6] NGO factors, and social factors. The political and NGO factors are particularly important in the case of Nepal as it has normally been claimed that the over-politicization of Nepali society during the last 50 years has undermined the concept of a traditional approach towards society. Similarly, it has been often said that western NGOs and their local subsidies have destroyed the organic notion of service and monetized it. Hence the societal factor is also important in this regard.
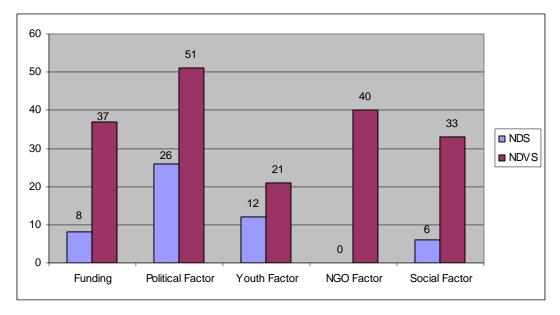
Table 5: Factors affecting program (NDS/NDVS) performance[a] (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

a. Respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer.

With regard to NDS, of the total 30 respondents surveyed, 26 respondents identified political factors as the main problem. The response with respect to NDVS was less clear-cut. Of the total 70 respondents surveyed, 51 indicated political factors, 40 indicated NGO factors, 33 identified social factors, and 21 identified youth factors.

Link between service and citizenship

Central to this research is the extent to which the service programs helped to promote citizenship values and, by extension, a civic image that reflects Nepali identity. Have the service programs enhanced citizenship values as defined by the seven criteria discussed above?

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[6] "Youth factor" refers to the influence of disillusioned youth who took part in the NDS or NDVS program.
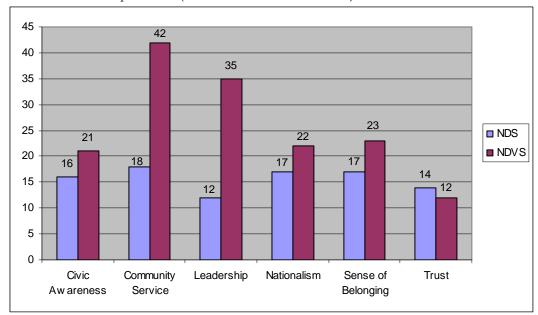
Table 6: Citizenship values[a] (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

a. Respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer.

Of the total 30 NDS respondents surveyed, 16 of them said that the program helped to promote civic awareness, 18 of them said the program contributed towards community service, 12 of them said it helped to develop leadership skills, 17 of them said it helped to promote Nepali nationalism, 17 of them said it helped to instill the sense of belonging towards state among cadres and 14 of them said it helped to build up trust in society. Overall, NDS received good scores for promoting citizenship values in Nepali society.

Similarly with respect to NDVS, of the 70 respondents surveyed, only 21 said the program helped to promote civic awareness, while 42 of them said the program contributed towards community service, 35 of them said it helped to develop leadership skills, 22 of them said it helped to promote nationalism, 23 of them said it helped to instill a sense of belonging towards the state among cadres and 12 of them said it helped to build up trust in society. Overall, what has been revealed with respect to NDVS is that respondents perceived that the program contributed very little towards promoting the notion of civic citizenship in society.

We are also interested to know, given that the program did not contribute positively, why the cadres joined in the first place. We have taken factors like service, civic awareness, job experience, desire to avoid unemployment and desire to achieve a better future (e.g. jobs in international NGOs) as the reasons of joining the programs in the case of NDVS, whereas NDS was mandatory.
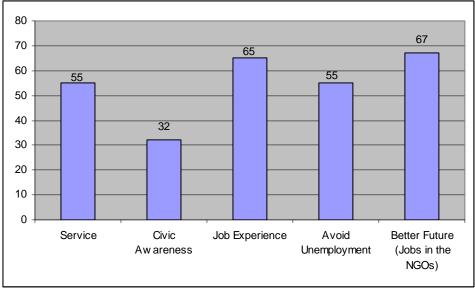
Table 7: Reason for joining NDVS[a] (N=70)

a. Each variable was measured separately. Only affirmative responses are presented in the table. NDS participants were not included in this survey because NDS was mandatory.

A total of 70 respondents was surveyed, and respondents were permitted to select more than one reason. Of a possible total of 70 for each reason, to render service to society was chosen by 55, to generate a sense of civic awareness in society by 32, for the job experience by 65, to avoid massive unemployment in the country by 55, and to get better jobs in the NGOs and UN systems by 67.

Evaluation of the program (NDVS): Continuity and discontinuity

All respondents were asked to assess the overall performance of NDVS. Evaluation against its set goals and objectives was particularly important when respondents were asked questions pertaining to the NDVS and its aims and objectives, with a view to knowing if respondents feel it is successful, partially successful, or not successful. These questions help to further validate the program and its rationale to continue or discontinue despite its successes and failures in delivering set goals. It is wise to keep in mind that the NDS alumni may have been more loyal to that program because of their service in it; we would do well to allow for the influence of bias in the responses of the NDS alumni.
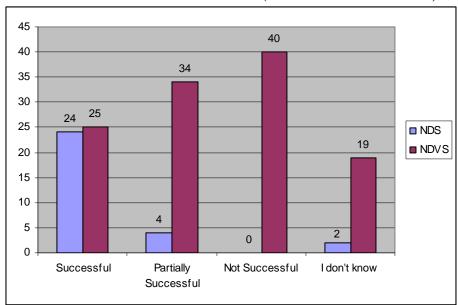
Table 8: NDVS Performance Evaluation[a] (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

a. Respondents were permitted to choose more than one answer.

Of the total 30 NDS respondents surveyed, 24 said that the program was successful in delivering its objective and set goals, 4 of them said it was partially unsuccessful, and 2 were unable to give any verdict. Similarly, of the total 70 NDVS respondents surveyed, only 25 respondents said it was successful, 34 said it was partially successful, 40 said it was completely unsuccessful, and 19 did not give any verdict.

Table 9: Overall relevance/knowledge of existence (NDS N=30; NDVS N=70)

Of the total 30 respondents surveyed, 23 gave positive remarks, 4 negative, and 3 were undecided. With regard to the existence and relevance of the NDVS program, only 21 respondents of the total 70 respondents surveyed made positive remarks, 43 gave negative remarks, and 6 were undecided.

Conclusion: Critique of Service and Citizenship Building in Nepal

Most critics still agree that a national service program is an essential pillar of nation building. The national service scheme in Nepal is necessary, and needs to be redesigned and refocused to achieve its goals. In this section we will examine the effectiveness of NDS and NDVS with respect to citizenship building, shedding light on how the programs are perceived in Nepali context. We will also highlight challenges faced by the service programs and provide some suggestions on policy that would improve the state of service in Nepal, ultimately helping it achieve citizenship building and generating the sense of belonging among Nepali youths.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to acknowledge this study's limitations. Like all research, this study has several limitations which compromise the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results. The samples were selected based on convenience sampling techniques. This self-selection bias may have skewed the results, positively or negatively, as the respondents were motivated to participate. In addition, the samples for the respective methods were relatively small. Another limitation is related to the research design. As a cross-sectional, retrospective study, we are limited in our ability to draw causal inferences; we have no baseline information on the participants' perceptions prior to their participation in the NDS or NDVS. Finally, while objectivity is the goal of social science, the author's own political views may have unwittingly affected the interpretation of the data.

Returning to discussion of the research presented here, it is often said that the Maoist insurgency in Nepal is linked both to a lack of civic engagement and a growing radicalization of youths by political parties and their leaders. It has also been argued that effective and politically secular service programs could have engaged youths in productive ways rather than leaving them to be shaped by political leaders and their parties. It is possible that effective service programs would have had positive impacts on youths and resulted in the growth of civic citizenship building in the country.

Service programs in Nepal are not effective to promote citizenship primarily because every successive government of Nepal has attempted to "politicize" them for their own benefits. The findings from the study appear to confirm these hypotheses. Any sociological account of citizenship—and its relationship to service—needs to consider three interconnected dimensions of citizenship (Roche, 2002, p. 217). The first dimension encompasses the typical ideals and values of citizenship; the second is the socio-structural context that underlies citizenship; and the third is the change in the nature of citizenship and its structural context (Roche, 2002, p. 217, cited in Obadare, 2005, p. 40). The failure of NDVS to promote perceived citizenship values in the youths towards the construction of civil society in Nepal can be understood as the result of the objective and subjective conditions of the socio-political context. These conditions were exacerbated by the state's partisan national polices. These policies, over the years, appear to have had direct bearing on the effectiveness of service programmes; and promoted clientalism.

There is no doubt, as both the survey, FGDs, and interviews point out, that NDVS offers important social services without which life in some rural areas in the country would be less tolerable. It has also helped to mobilize youths in different geographic regions of the country and make them aware of the realities of those regions. The program has also helped volunteers to interact with people from different social, political, economic and cultural backgrounds, which ultimately helps to bring them together. At the same time, the findings suggest that the NDVS would have been more successful if it had its own independent secular program of citizenship training that required mandatory service and that had set educational criteria for participation. With the change of government, the political party that comes into power tends to introduce their own program of citizenship building in Nepal. This has not been helpful for NDVS to work independently and design its own operational framework.

The idea of participation in the NDVS does not appear to have inspired patriotic interest as inspired by NDS. Likewise, the surfeit of NGOs and civil society groups did not help to generate a sense of service in society.[7] The intermediary institutions did not help to transform the notion of citizenship, based on clientalism, into a modern one based on rights and duties. It is also clear from the findings that the mushrooming NGOs in the country that are engaged in service delivery in the rural areas have usurped the appeal of voluntarism and service largely due to monetization. Even several of the interviewees in this study were uncooperative because they expected money in return for their time. Hence, one can argue that the old notion of service and voluntarism is fading away with the arrival of NGO-led service programs.

Moreover, political struggle in Nepal is centered on who should participate in the determination of people's sovereignty over state power and how (Dahal, 2004). This has been further confused by the growth of civil societies based on power of kinship culture (Dahal, 2006a) and has resulted in the emergence of large impersonal associations engaged in vested political actions detrimental to the growth of citizenship. The gap between "duty-bound" rural voluntary groups, with no access to modernity, and "elite urban civic groups" with all modern amenities at its disposal, has further deconstructed the notion of citizenship equality and devalued the purpose of public politics.

Therefore the process of state-civil society interaction in the social construction of citizenship is best captured in specific models of citizenship in Nepal, such as "consumerism" or "clientalism" and "legal citizenship." The issue of "citizenship" has challenged the Nepali state and stands as major contributing factor towards the politics of exclusion/inclusion. The current notion of "citizenship" has failed to embrace the lower caste, ethnic communities, women, and regions like Terai, Karnali Pradesh, and the Far-Western region into the active life of the nation. This poses a serious threat to nation- building. Civil society, for its part, has failed to initiate public discourse on shaping citizenship policies and mediating among the state, market, and international regimes.

The extant practice of citizenship in Nepal is against Walzer's (1989) and the Aristotelian (trans. 1948) understandings of citizenship. Aristotelian citizenship endows every citizen with a right to participate in the political process of a country with equality by virtue of being a member of a political community *irrespective of his/her status in a society* (Aristotle, pp. 40-45, emphasis added).

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[7] Most of the NGOs and civil society groups in Nepal are founded on a partisan basis and established by the political leaders and Kathmandu-based English speaking elites who are far away from the actual problems being faced by the society at large.

Similarly Walzer (1989) "describes citizenship first as an office, a responsibility, a burden proudly assumed; second, as a status an entitlement, a right or set of rights passively enjoyed. The first makes citizenship the core of our life, the second makes it its outer frame" (p. 216). There is no gainsaying that a major bane of most postcolonial states including Nepal is the failure to achieve a fruitful coexistence of these two models of citizenship. As such the archetypal citizen that Aristotle defines as "a man who shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of office" has been notable for his marked absence (Walzer, 1989, p. 216-7).

The theoretical discussion above suggests that good citizenship requires civic participation that connects citizens with the state by instilling a sense of ownership among citizenry. Volunteerism—civic service to society—is the bridge that makes this connection more meaningful because volunteerism helps to foster new relationships with the state based on consent, rather than force. Ownership is achieved by engaging citizens with various societal forces and recognizing the political equality of citizens in the process of decision-making.

Hence, what can be further augmented from this discussion is that the "civic republican" notion of citizenship does not exist in Nepal, despite the prevalence of traditional notions of service, for two obvious reasons. First, the state has not developed a consistent vision of citizenship. The state has granted only legal citizenship to its nationals, but not the concomitant rights. Second, citizens have not transcended kinship and familial boundaries to interact in republican style, that is, with a sense of community, of friendship, and of concord. Service under these circumstances will not be sufficient for the promotion of citizenship values (Heather, 2002, p. 55) and a "republican" notion of citizenship will not emerge even in the foreseeable future.

Whatever level of civic-mindedness exists is the relic of traditional volunteerism, which is not in a position to counter the challenges posed by the modern state. The situation has been further damaged by more than half a century of political crisis, accompanied by crises of political leadership that valued monetary gain over stability. Perhaps, Yadama and Messerschmidt (2002) were right to assert that the presence of a "democracy context" matters for the successful establishment of a national service program. Hence, under the prevailing circumstances, where democracy has been understood and interpreted inconsistently, any scheme for national belonging cannot be successful. In this situation, all social, political, and economic exertions within the nation—all democratization procedures and development plans—are null and void because there is no agreed upon code of conduct or no pan-national protocol to underwrite and sustain them.

This debate summarizes socio-political conditions that undermine the goals of NDVS. Only a resolution of the ontological status of membership can presage and precede service, for already implied in the conception of service is the notion of "community." Consequently, in the context of youth service within a nation-space, a community in which ideas of citizenship are rooted would be grounds on which the idea of service will first of all be based, before service can then, at the secondary level, begin to influence further enactment of citizenship as duty.

For a program designed to repair society by nurturing a new breed of citizens through active service to the nation, some fundamentals are necessary. First as Perry and Katula, (2001, p. 340) put it, a "sense of community reinforces the community problem-solving abilities [and] community cohesiveness." In the absence of this, then, a sense of the possibilities of *political community* is crucial.

On the heels of this *social image* must follow sustained and positive political acts at the macro level that micro-level acts—such as youth service—will feed into, and which will nourish and reactivate these acts and such service. Without this resonance at the macro level, isolated cases of individual and even collective service will not make citizens of youths who are exposed to realities which contradict all they have imbibed during the period of service.

In the linkage of service and citizenship, it is not only the *specific* time and space of service that matters, but what happens *after* the practice of *service* and in particular contexts, both as a process of continuation of service and as the consequences of sacrifice that are observed in the spatial context (Obadare, 2005, p. 42). In a state like Nepal, where everything is influenced by politics and both state and society better understand the languages of nepotism and favoritism rather than civility, what can be the hope for a scheme that attempts to produce new citizens in a vacuum? Perhaps this could be one reason, among others, why most of the NDVS cadres (90%) reported that their major reason for joining the program was not to serve society but rather to get experience that would aid entry into the job market (interest was most commonly in UN systems and international NGOs). No one said that volunteering would help to build civic citizenship. Perhaps they are right to do so in a country like Nepal where everything has been influenced by politics of *afno manche,*[8] be it the question of getting into job market or anything else. Citizens imbued with the patriotic ideal and idea of citizenship as duty cannot be produced in a vacuum.

In Ebenzer Obadare's (2005, p. 43) conclusion in his report on Nigerian service, he proposes that a useful way to proceed in the future would be to invert the question theoretically and see whether that helps us deal with data from developing or fractious polities. Rather than asking if service influences citizenship, it might be more useful to ask if citizenship influences service. If the question is posed in this way—(if) citizenship (then) service, rather than, (if) service (then) citizenship—we are likely to start from a departure point that is alive to the peculiarities of post-colonial polities with the interface of citizen and subject.

This approach is useful because Nepali citizenship lacks "moral-ideological content" (Obadare, 2005, p. 100); that is, legal citizenship has little or no value because it is neither respected nor linked to civil, political, or social rights. Given this lack of meaning, it might be improper to expect service to transform notions of citizenship, in that these notions concern even the ontological status of membership of political community. The current discourse on citizenship in Nepal cannot understand or does not care to understand that citizenship is inextricably bound to how we relate to the natural environment and to the people of our country. Citizenship has to do with attitudes and relationships, with sentiments of belonging and with emotions, with contribution towards the building of new society, and not only with mere birth. A sense of citizenship normally comes through service to the society which can be instilled in youth through various volunteer and civic programs.

Having said all this, however, the importance of service programs cannot be understated. Where service programs have been successful, they have contributed immensely to citizenship building. In this regard, Donald J. Eberly (1994) discusses general outcomes of a successful national service program which are worth mentioning here. To paraphrase and summarize Eberly's outcomes, "national service is a binding force for a common cause, helps to generate civic renewal and

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[8] This is the term used to designate one's inner circle of people.

enhances the sense of belonging and citizenship building which ultimately fortifies democracy because national service programs are based on reality, not demagogy."

Finally, the study does not necessarily suggest (dis)continuity of these particular service programs (as these findings are provisional and that they will need to be confirmed by future research) but it certainly advocates for inclusive and non-partisan service programs for the true development of citizenship values which will help to construct potential common ground, purpose, and political language within the diversified society of Nepal. The most important factors, among others, that the study identifies from the policy point of view are that (1) service programs can only be vibrant if they are conducted by politically impartial organizations; and (2) likewise the sense of belonging to the society can only be instilled among youngsters provided some sort of service programs are introduced at both the school and university levels. These factors will help unify the Nepali state both socially and politically and bring all societal forces (including youngsters) into the institutional life of the state. Equally important is the question of what extent a traditional service program can contribute towards political and social unification of Nepali state and embrace modern citizenship values rather than current practices of citizenship, which are based on consumerist notions. Perhaps promotion of traditional methods of volunteerism would also bridge the gap generated by the modern notion of civic practices.

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