

In recent years, the government, under pressure from the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and other donors, has attempted to restructure its bureaucracy and reduce its size. Over-staffing is, however, still commonplace.

Structure

The ministries and departments of the Government of Nepal are responsible for the administrative matters of government. A minister heads each ministry or department. Ministers are politicians, not career bureaucrats. Most senior bureaucrats—secretaries, joint- and under-secretaries, directors general, and so on—are political appointees. They are chosen more for their contacts and the degree to which the politicians trust them than for their professional skills and experience. (A typical Nepalese joke: Did you hear about the person with a Ph.D. in *culture* who was appointed as the Secretary to the Ministry of *Agriculture*?)

The next level of bureaucrats are the *subbas*, the clerks. Beware of them; they are the ones who are likely to direct you into a never ending bureaucratic maze. They will ask you to fill out endless forms and send you from one desk or office to another. Fortunately, as a foreigner, most of your contacts will be with more senior officials.

It is important to identify which department, section and individual can best assist you. It is advisable to get assistance from a local contact person in this regard, so as not to waste your time.

In the past, the ruling class controlled decision making; now the ruling politicians make most of the decisions of government, even decisions on minor details. You will find it easier to cope with the frustrations of dealing with government by accepting the fact that decision making is slow. You must learn to endure routine bureaucratic procedures at each step. Progress is torturously slow and must be monitored regularly. Unless you prod frequently, your file will get stuck up in the system. Here is where your Nepalese counterpart can assist you.

Efficiency is hampered by archaic conditions in most government offices. Mid-level managers have no computers, fax machines and photocopiers, equipment Canadians take for granted. In some ministries, only the foreign consultants have computers.

Ministries compete fiercely for budgets and qualified personnel; cooperation and coordination among them are rare unless directed by top officials.