A SURVEY REPORT
ON
The Public Perception of the Role of
Civil Society Organizations and Media in Nepal

Prepared by
UNITY SERVICE COOPERATION, NEPAL
(USC NEPAL)

FOR THE
Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP)
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<tr>
<td>CAC</td>
<td>Citizen Awareness Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDCS</td>
<td>Country Development Cooperation Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS:MAP</td>
<td>Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAG</td>
<td>Disadvantaged Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAO</td>
<td>District Administration Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDC</td>
<td>District Development Committee (Now District Coordination Committee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPO</td>
<td>District Police Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GESI</td>
<td>Gender Equality and Social Inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>Household Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informants Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGCDP</td>
<td>Local Governance and Community Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSA</td>
<td>Non-State Actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSU</td>
<td>Primary Sample Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCDO</td>
<td>Woman and Child Development Office</td>
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<td>WCF</td>
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings derived from a study conducted to understand public perception of, and confidence in the role of civil society organizations (CSO) and media. Data collection for the study was completed in April 2017 and included a 1,500-respondent household survey (HHS), key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD). While those that participated in the HHS will be referred to as survey respondents or just respondents, those that participated in HHSs, KII and FGDs will collectively be referred to as study participants or just participants, in this report.

Key findings

People’s understanding of CSOs

Public perception of the spectrum of organizations that make up CSOs demonstrates a limited understanding. While people understand NGOs, media associations, user groups and committees to form part of the CSO family, almost half of the survey respondents and other study participants were unsure whether professional associations of lawyers, teachers, medical practitioners; and mutual interest associations of ethnic communities and business interest groups, constituted CSOs. Additionally, people’s perception of CSOs was shaped by their understanding that CSOs have an ‘emergency relief’ function. Government stakeholders, on the other hand, had a far better understanding of the types of organizations that constituted CSOs.

People’s understanding of the importance of CSOs

Both rural and urban survey respondents were not fully aware of the range of activities that CSOs performed. However, most considered CSOs as an instrument for the betterment of people, especially those from the weaker sections of society. While survey respondents were less aware of the advocacy and voter education role of CSOs, government stakeholders acknowledged CSO contribution in these two major areas.

Importance of media and their contribution

The vast majority of survey respondents, irrespective of their gender and geographical location, recognized the importance of media, particularly electronic media. They acknowledged media role in keeping people informed, entertained and opinion formation. Although people heralded the media for focusing on some burning issues related to women, marginalized and deprived groups of people, they were aware of the weaknesses of the sector arising from political pressure and polarization, and the lack of professional competence and ethics.

Most popular media

Electronic media (television, radio and mobile phones) was found most popular among respondents and participants, and they felt FM radio stations and content distributed over mobile phones, were most likely to influence people, their thoughts, ideas, opinions. Print media,
especially newspapers, were still popular in the urban areas whereas social media was gaining popularity throughout the country.

*People’s access to media and reliability of media*

There was consensus that people’s access to media outlets was still limited. Most communicated with media outlets through letters, SMS text messages, and through direct visits to the media outlets. However, the majority of people were still concerned that the media didn’t take their suggestions seriously or address them. People in urban locations believed media were more responsive to their suggestions than those in rural locations.

*People’s participation in CSO activities*

Access to CSO activities was still low for majority of respondents and participants, representative of communities in general. Those with access to CSOs were found to have attended meetings, discussion forums, training events, public hearings and annual general meetings. However, those attending public accountability events such as public hearing and annual general meetings tended to be lower, demonstrating lower public participation in social accountability events of CSOs.

*Issues of public concerns raised in CSO programs*

A large majority of respondents (82%) considered CSOs to be accountable in terms of discussing and raising issues of public concern. Likewise, a majority of respondents (54.33%) believed that they or their families included them as target groups for their programs. In addition, a vast majority of respondents (92.54%) among those that said they or their families had been targeted by CSO programs, felt they had benefited from such programs. There was broad consensus, especially among FGD and KII participants that CSOs were biased in their selection of target communities and locations for implementation.

*CSOs’ efforts in advocating for peoples’ voices*

CSOs, in general, were not perceived as very effective in advocating for people’s voices and taking their issues/ needs to the concerned authorities, or in lobbying to get such issues addressed. There were more hill respondents than from those from the terai and mountain regions who thought that CSOs advocated for their issues or causes. Similarly, compared to other castes/ ethnicities, those belonging to ‘Dalit’ communities were less satisfied with the advocacy initiatives of CSOs.

*Level of CSO transparency and accountability*

Transparency and accountability of CSOs were major concerns of both survey respondents as well as KII and FGD participants. CSOs were not perceived as transparent – both in terms of their financial transactions as well as programmatic coverage. However, they did acknowledge knowledge of some local CSOs that were using social accountability tools such as public hearings, public audits and social audits.
Media support to women, minority and marginalized communities

The majority of respondents thought that the electronic and print media supported the issues of women, minority groups and marginalized communities through regular publication and broadcasts; and by inviting people from these groups to programs organized by CSOs and media and involving them as resource persons in such programs. However, there was strong opinion that the media was not fulfilling their social responsibility of raising the issue of marginalized people adequately or ensuring their participation in media programs, events and activities.

Media raising priority issues and concerns of citizens

A slight majority of the respondents believed that the media prioritized issues and concerns of public interest, especially those that had a direct bearing on their everyday lives. More respondents from the hill regions believed that the media raised their issues and concerns as opposed to respondents from the Tarai, especially those from Madhesi ethnicity feeling relatively less represented by the media.

Transparency and accountability in media

The majority of respondents felt that the media were not transparent with regard to their financial sources and expenditures. This, they thought, was paradoxical given that they advocated for the transparency of other organizations. However, by raising local issues, slightly over half survey respondents agreed that the media were accountable to their audience.

Media’s compliance with government rules/regulations

Almost all respondents and participants had a strong feeling that the media followed government rules while working in the districts and that there were no major compliance issues.

Challenges faced by media

There was agreement that challenges, including political pressure, financial stability, professional deficit and trust deficit, limited the independence and credibility of media.

CSO focus on women, poor and marginalized communities

Respondents largely acknowledged CSO contribution, through their various activities, in enhancing the status of marginalized communities, including women and minority groups. Both KII and FGD participants agreed with and expressed satisfaction that CSO activities targeted women, ‘Dalits’, Janajatis and other traditionally marginalized or deprived communities.

In comparison to women, participants in FGDs exclusively conducted for marginalized communities, felt less represented by CSOs and media. They feel that there is first the need for change within CSOs and media, and then for them to affect change within communities. This shows an important development in Nepal’s movement for inclusion. While there is a greater acceptance and promotion of women’s inclusion, the same may not be true when it comes to the acceptance
and promotion of inclusion of marginalized and minority groups and communities.

*Major problems faced by CSOs*

The majority of respondents thought that CSOs working in districts incurred recurring challenges, including political pressure during staff recruitment, board reshuffling or identification of beneficiaries or project locations; inadequate resources; lack of public trust; lack of competent human resources; lack of adequate funds, and physical safety and security to be able to work in remote locations.

*Key recommendations*

The following list presents some key recommendations, emerging from this study or related to the study, for improving public understanding and confidence in the role of CSOs and media:

- Building public understanding of the concept of CSOs (moving beyond just NGOs and cooperatives) requires a proactive move from key CSO stakeholders. As part of the media, local FM radio stations can play a significant role in building public understanding through creative, entertaining and educating programming.
- In order to reshape public perception of CSOs, public debates and interactions should focus on the scope and limitations of CSOs, existing policies and practices that affect governance, and compliance issues that limit CSO and media performance.
- Timing of media programming should take into account time-frames that are most likely to attract the viewership / readership of women and marginalized communities.
- Periodic joint reflection and action meetings between local CSOs and media would be useful in the design of messages and to maximize coverage and uptake, leading to relevant actions.
- Negative public perception might be seen as a pretext for enforcing stringent policies and compliance requirements on CSOs and media. This can lead to a rapid shrinking of civic space and an autocratic regime – in the absence of effective civic oversight. There is therefore onus on the CSO and media sector to develop and implement credible self-regulation mechanisms and provide improve their public communication and engagement. This should include engagement with local people and government bodies in the use of social accountability tools.
- There is the need to build CSO capacity to articulate change in strategic vision; document program methodologies, models and results; and effectively communicate the same to relevant stakeholders. While doing so, CSO and media need to make it clear that advocacy is an important aspect of the work that they do and also explain the benefit of such advocacy work for their constituencies.
- The meaningful engagement of local people throughout the program/ project cycle management would help CSOs to develop social ambassadors. However, this can only happen when CSOs integrate truly participatory approaches within their management culture. Building CSO capacity in participatory approaches will have multiplier effects – from promoting its visibility, engaging key stakeholders, including beneficiaries as well as ensuring priority local problems are addressed. This will also help convey the important message that women, minority and marginalized communities have access to the benefits of CSO programs. It will help address the ‘trust deficit’ that has been discussed a few times in this report. As
there is strong opinion that media have neglected marginalized people, media need to engage them to give them a voice and then to be heard.

- Political leaning of CSOs and media have a bearing on their credibility and related public perception. There is no easy route to reduce political influence or curb political leaning. However, media organizations need to be oriented on how political leaning can be effective on the short term but is not beneficial on the long run.

- The media is also found to have been constrained by their own ‘professionalism deficit’ in prioritizing issues for reporting, gathering information and disseminating news and information that is accurate, balanced and credible. There is hence the need for continued training for editors and journalists on journalistic ethics, evidence-based investigative reporting, and public interest reporting.
2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The very idea of CSOs manifests the essence of associational life where a myriad of decentralized voluntary groups, organized and unorganized, help shape core human values such as freedom, justice and solidarity. A free press and a vibrant civil society serve as vehicles of freedom essential for a life worthy of human beings. However, what constitute CSOs is often contested, leading to the debate as to whether organizational form or shape is necessary to qualify as a CSO.

Nepal has a long tradition of both public benefit and mutual benefit organizations. Despite the general requirement for legal identity, there are CSOs in Nepal that function as informal organizations, without any kind of government registration or affiliation. Form and shape notwithstanding, CSOs and media generally serve as the ‘public sphere’ that link the State and society, ideally representing citizen interests with the State. Accordingly, CSO vision, mission and objectives have almost always been aligned towards advancing the public interest. However, there is also a widespread concern as to whether the emerging Nepali CSO and media sectors truly represent the real needs, experiences and aspirations of Nepal citizens.

More recently, Nepali CSOs and media organizations have been criticized for denying easy access to and garnering meaningful participation of their constituents. Media reports and public deliberations also discredit CSOs and media for a lack of transparency and accountability related to their work. In the absence of a credible counter-argument, there is the tendency for the entire CSO and media sectors to be maligned for malpractices linked to a smaller sub-set of these sectors. There is also a growing tendency, of late, for the State to impose policy and regulatory requirements for the CSO and media sectors that are not always ‘enabling’, or in keeping with international standards and best practice. It can safely be stated that the State finds some form of justification for its ‘control-oriented’ policy initiation, within the waning public confidence and trust for CSOs and media. This propensity to ‘control’ has most recently been evident in provisions within the draft ‘Social Welfare and Development Bill’ and the ‘National Mass Communication Policy’, two key legal-policy frameworks that will influence ‘freedom of association’ and ‘freedom of expression’ in Nepal. This tendency can lead to a rapid shrinking of civic space, so vital for a functioning democracy.

The ‘Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project’ (CS:MAP) is a five year (2016-2021) intervention that aims to foster a more legitimate, accountable and resilient Nepali civil society that is capable of advancing the public interest. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by FHI 360, Equal Access International, the International Center for Not-for-profit Law, and other partners, the project is being implemented in 34 districts of Nepal (20 USAID CDCS districts and 14 earthquake affected districts). One of the results envisioned by the project is ‘improved public understanding and confidence in the role of CSOs and media’.

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1 Jurgen Habermas (1996) describes the public sphere as a space where citizens come together to put forth their autonomous views with the objective of influencing the political institutions of society. He considers civil society to be an organized expression of these views and argues that democracy hinges on this relationship between the State and civil society.
To establish a baseline that could objectively be compared with the project results, FHI 360 carried out a “Public Perception Study of the Role of Civil Society Organizations and Media in Nepal”, data collection for which was conducted during March-April 2017. This report presents the results from this study conducted in seven sample districts (chosen from among the 34 project districts) – Sindhuli, Dolakha and Nuwakot from among the earthquake affected districts, and Kapilvastu, Rolpa, Bardiya and Baitadi representing the CDCS districts.

2.2 OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

Specific objectives of the study were to:
- Gauge public perceptions of civil society organizations and media role in advancing public voices and agenda;
- Assess public confidence of civil society and media governance, among others, especially in participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability;
- Measure the extent to which women and minority groups feel CSOs, including media represent them; and
- Examine public perception of different media platforms, media habits and preferences.

While a Household Survey (HHS) was designed and administered among 1,500 respondents to collect quantitative data, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) were designed and utilized to generate qualitative data. Sixty percent of the 1,500 households were sampled from rural locations (VDCs) while forty percent were sampled from urban locations utilizing a stratified multistage random sampling approach. Three FGDs were conducted in each of the 7 districts, of which two were administered in rural and one in urban areas. Hence the total number of FGDs conducted were 21, of which 14 were conducted in rural and 7 in urban locations. Likewise, 3 of these FGDs were conducted with women participants, 4 had participation from traditionally marginalized groups, and 14 were conducted with mixed participation. Of the 105 KIIs conducted, 70 (10 in each district) were held with general stakeholders while 35 were with government officials working in the 7 districts (5 per district).

2.3 METHODOLOGY

Sampling approach and determination of sample size for household survey

The objectives of the study, available resources and the need for a statistically significant and representative sample size were key factors that guided the selection of a mixed method for this study – a quantitative survey supported by qualitative FGDs and KIIs. These factors also determined the size of the survey sample and the numbers of FGDs and KIIs. The household for this survey was considered an entity within one roof and pre-designed close-ended questionnaires were administered to one individual within each household.

A stratified multi-stage sampling approach was adopted for the selection of households for the survey. First and foremost, seven districts were purposively selected from among the 34 project districts, such that they represented the three ecological regions (mountains, hills and terai) and the four development regions (central, western, mid-western and far-western) that CS:MAP
covered. The total number of households existing in the 7 selected districts, as derived from Nepal’s National Census data (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011), was 425,839. The sample size to include in survey for a 95% confidence level and a 2.5% margin of error was determined as 1,500 (using standard sample size calculator – https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm). The number of households in the survey sample in each district was then determined proportionate to the total number of households in that district, such that the total number of households to be surveyed within all 7 districts was 1,500 (see Table 1.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampled districts</th>
<th>Total households in sampled districts</th>
<th>Number of households determined for survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardiya</td>
<td>83,176</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baitadi</td>
<td>45,191</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolpa</td>
<td>43,757</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindhuli</td>
<td>57,581</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolakha</td>
<td>45,688</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwakot</td>
<td>59,215</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>425,839</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: District-wise household numbers determined for survey

The number of sample households determined were then broken down such that 40% were chosen from urban and 60% from rural locations per district. One urban municipality and two rural VDCs were again randomly chosen. The rural samples were chosen such that one VDC was easily accessible while the other was not easily accessible. Accessibility was assessed based on whether they offered all-weather or fair-weather road connectivity. Hence, through this sampling stage, three Wards were randomly chosen from district headquarter based municipalities, three from easily accessible VDCs and another three from not easily accessible VDCs. The final sample offered three clusters of 3 randomly selected Wards in each district. The number of sample survey households for each Ward in each cluster was also proportionately determined utilizing National Census 2011 data (see Table 1.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>Random sampled Wards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardiya</td>
<td>Gulariya</td>
<td>5, 9, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baitadi</td>
<td>Dasharath Chand</td>
<td>2, 7, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolpa</td>
<td>Liwang</td>
<td>2, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapilvastu</td>
<td>Kapilbastu</td>
<td>6, 12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindhuli</td>
<td>Kamalami</td>
<td>8, 11, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolakha</td>
<td>Bhimeswor</td>
<td>5, 7, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwakot</td>
<td>Bidur</td>
<td>1, 5, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Ward-wise household numbers determined for survey
The number of survey households determined per Ward were again distributed among 2 to 4 randomly selected settlements within each Ward. In each settlement, the first household for administering the survey questionnaire was randomly selected. The next household for the survey was selected by moving either left or right from the first household and skipping a pre-determined number of households, and so on. The skip interval was determined based on the total number of households available in the randomly selected settlements and the total number of households to be surveyed in that particular Ward. The survey training and guideline emphasized a 1:1 male female ratio for survey respondents, and by including a 40:60 urban rural household selection, the survey sample has ensured randomness as well as representativeness. A brief account of demographic and socio-economic profile of surveyed households is given in Annex 1 (Tables 1.1-1.8).

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs were included in the design of this study with the purpose of triangulating quantitative data derived from the household surveys. As such, 21 FGDs were conducted (3 in each district) with the participation of 15-20 participants in each FGD. Of the 3 FGDs in each district, two were organized in rural VDCs and one in a municipality. Some of these FGDs were also organized exclusively for women and for marginalized groups (see Table 1.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th># of FGDs with mixed groups</th>
<th># of FGDs with women groups</th>
<th># of FGDs with marginalized groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bardiya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baitadi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolpa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapilvastu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindhuli</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolakha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwakot</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Number of FGDs organized in each district by group classification*

FGD participants included representatives from Ward Citizen Forums (WCFs), Citizen Awareness Centers (CACs), NGOs, community groups formed under different projects, various women’s groups, ethnic groups and other CSOs such as associations of school teachers, university teachers, engineers, lawyers, students, parents, journalists, and pressure groups. A semi-structured checklist prepared in the Nepali language was used in each FGD and the discussion outcomes were noted down. The facilitators of FGDs used either note books or paper sheets to record the outcomes of the discussions. In a few cases, the FGD proceedings were also recorded using voice recorders available on mobile phone sets. Each FGD was organized in a separate room either in a school building or VDC/Municipality building or in the local hotel. The room for FGDs was selected to ensure that a facilitated discussion was possible with FGD participants able to see one another. A brief account of the demographic profile of FGD participants is given in Annex 1 (Table 1.9).
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Individual KIIs were carried out with 15 participants in each district by administering a semi-structured checklist prepared in the Nepali language. Of these, 10 KIIs were conducted with representatives (who had not participated in FGDs) from representing human rights organizations, political parties, peace committees and other similar organizations available around the relevant household survey clusters. The remaining five KIIs were conducted with government officials in each district by administering a separate checklist, specifically designed to assess the level of satisfaction with CSOs and media self-regulation among government stakeholders. The government officials participating in KIIs included those responsible for the registration and renewal of CSOs at the District Administrative Offices (DAO), representatives of district level Women and Child Development Offices (WCDO), representatives from District Development Committees (DDC), representatives from Municipalities/VDCs, representatives from District Police Offices (DPO), and representatives from District Courts (DC) etc. During the KIIs, the participants were explained the purpose of the study and were asked to fill in their responses within the provided checklists. These filled in checklists were then collected and reviewed by the data-collection team and further clarifications/explanations were sought as deemed necessary. The data-collectors who oversaw the filling of KII checklists verbally asked checklist questions and filled out responses for those participants who did not fill out the checklist themselves.

2.4 MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

As discussed above, the following tools were used to collect data for this study:

- Closed and structured questionnaire (for household survey)
- Open ended and semi structured checklist for KII
- Open ended and semi structured checklist for FGD

The draft tools were discussed and finalized after a series of consultations between the USC study team and FHI 360. The final drafts of the study tools were then pre-tested in Aryaltar within Nagarjun Municipality in Kathmandu district. Modifications were made to the study tools based on the experience from the pretest leading to the finalization of study tools for data collection.

Seven field supervisors (one per district) and 14 enumerators (2 per district) were recruited and trained to carry out the field data collection work. The one-day training dealt with methods to select households, survey respondents, FGD and KII participants; administration of the survey tools; logistic arrangements; and importance of ethical compliance. While the enumerators were assigned the task of carrying out the household surveys, the field supervisors were responsible for overseeing the work of the enumerators, supporting them, and ensuring data quality and compliance. The field supervisors also led the KIIs and the FGDs in their respective districts.

2.5 DATA QUALITY

Efforts were made to reduce errors and enrich the quality of data collected. This was done by simplifying the content, language, and presentation of the study tools; providing guidelines (field manual) to aid the selection of survey respondents; recruiting qualified and experienced field supervisors and enumerators and providing training on survey tools and their administration; and
the process for monitoring, supervising and rechecking work submitted by enumerators by the field supervisors. Team members from USC and FHI 360 also carried out random visits to data collection sites to check on the field supervisors and enumerators and to ensure that they followed standard practices during data collection.

The filled-in survey questionnaires, KII forms and FGD checklists were rechecked to verify required numbers and that they had been signed off by respective enumerators and field supervisors to ensure completion and legitimacy. The filled in data-sheets were also sampled and checked for accuracy. For the computer entry of the survey data, five experienced data-entry operators were recruited and given training on the SPSS-20 data-entry software. Double entry of data were carried out for 10% of the survey forms to ensure a minimum margin of error during data-entry. A statistician ensured that all entered data were cleaned before analysis.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

1. Despite applying a standard sampling method in selecting the seven districts, districts from the eastern development region of Nepal could not be included in the study sample as they were not a part of CS:MAP.

2. Ideally, it would have been easier to select households for survey within the 2 to 4 settlements selected within each Ward from an official list of households. It was also beyond the scope of the project to map and create such a list prior to conducting surveys. However, in the absence of such a list, enumerators had been trained to randomly start from one household, turn either right or left from that household, and apply skip logic to determine the next eligible household. This process may not have been very efficient as it can be difficult to count households, especially when they exist in clusters or in not-very-orderly patterns. However, the field supervisors ensured that enumerators followed the field manual for selecting households for administering surveys.

3. In the absence of audio recording devices, FGDs could only be recorded in the form of written notes. This may have led to some elements of what was discussed not being adequately recorded.
3. FINDINGS

3.1 PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Public understanding of CSOs by type

The study attempted to uncover public understanding of the type of organizations or entities they perceived as CSOs. This was done by ascertaining their level of familiarization with various types of CSOs and mutual benefit organizations such as NGOs, users’ committees, cooperatives, women’s groups, associations of ethnic communities, associations of professional groups, media associations, business community associations, and so on.

While there was a high percentage of respondents that perceived NGOs, media associations, users’ groups / committees, and cooperatives as CSOs, relatively less respondents understood or considered mutual benefit organizations such as associations of professional groups, ethnic communities and business communities as CSOs (see Table 2.1). Association of professional groups include those of teachers, lawyers, doctors and other professional bodies. Association of ethnic communities and business community associations were included under the ‘others’ category in Table 2.1. This shows that there is a lack of sound understanding among people of the types of organizations that make up CSOs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
<th>Media associations</th>
<th>Users committees</th>
<th>Cooperatives</th>
<th>Professional associations</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sindhuli (n = 203)</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolakha (n = 161)</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwakot (n = 209)</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total EADs (573)</em></td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapilvastu (n = 321)</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolpa (n = 154)</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>96.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardiya (n = 293)</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baitadi (n = 159)</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total CDCS-Ds (n=927)</em></td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total (n=1500)</em></td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Public perception of the type of organizations that constitute CSOs (%)

This result from the household survey was also echoed by FGD participants for whom, CSOs entailed INGOs, NGOs, cooperatives and user’s committees. While survey respondents considered media associations to be part of CSOs, FGD participants (who were not given multiple choice options like the survey respondents) did not consider association of professional organizations and media associations to be part of the CSO family. FGD participants were also seen to consider organizations that delivered ‘emergency relief’ as CSOs, while they believed that CSOs did not or were not meant to work on ‘advocacy’.

FGD participants were also seen to endorse organizations that contributed to social transformation by targeting women and deprived communities as CSOs. Some even believed that CSOs were meant to address citizen’s concerns as prioritized by the government, depicting an understanding that CSOs were under government control. In summary, FGDs defined CSOs as locally established progressive entities that serve women, children and deprived communities through promoting
participation and providing services such as health, education and drinking water – all with the aim of alleviating poverty.

On the other hand, there was relatively good understanding among government officials (participants in KII) of the broad concept of CSOs, as assessed through their understanding of the type of organizations that constitute CSOs and their roles. This may be attributed to their education levels as well as their understanding of CSOs, cultivated through extensive participation in various workshops, seminars and programs related to and/ or organized by CSOs.

Level of awareness about CSO composition varied slightly by whether survey respondents were male or female (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Understanding of CSO composition (male vs. female)](image)

**Public understanding of the role of CSOs**

A majority (30.87%) of survey respondents thought that CSOs were engaged in tasks related to the interests of ‘Dalit’ or minority groups. Likewise, 27.07% believed that CSOs engaged in actions aimed at improving public awareness; 23.6% believed CSOs engaged in development work benefitting general people; 20.87% thought CSOs worked in the interest of children; 13.27% stated that CSOs worked to expand services to remote areas; 12.67% considered CSOs to engage in advocacy on issues of public concern; and 11.27% thought CSOs carried out activities aimed at promoting their own business.

FGD participants claimed that despite a phenomenal increase in the number of CSOs being registered, not all CSOs are active. Moreover, projects such as Suaahara and LGCDP were also identified as CSOs by the FGD participants. This further demonstrates a lack of clear understanding of the type of organizations that fall under the CSO umbrella, as well as an existing confusion between CSOs and projects. This confusion notwithstanding, CSOs with the ability to mobilize large resources, or projects that mobilized large amounts of funding resources were seen to be most familiar among FGD participants.

KIIIs with government officials showed that apart from having a good understanding of the type of organizations that constituted CSOs, government officials were also familiar with the role of CSOs. They were found to be optimistic and believed that about two-thirds of registered CSOs in
the districts were carrying out activities around awareness raising, income generation, infrastructure development, health service delivery, advocacy campaigns, voter education, and service delivery in the sectors of education, drinking water supply and sanitation, among others. While a sizeable section of survey respondents and FGD participants were found to be less aware of the advocacy and voter education roles of CSOs, government officials acknowledged CSOs’ contribution to these two major areas.

Some FGD participants were found to endorse the notion that active CSOs serve as a barometer of a democratic society and thus help society prosper. While almost all FGD participants considered CSOs as key actors and felt that their dynamic presence was highly desirable, they also opined that CSOs could be more effective if they were more accountable and transparent.

Other key observations that came from FGDs with regard to CSO role were as follows:
- CSO work on reconstruction and rehabilitation in the earthquake affected districts was not adequate;
- There is a strong need for legal aid and other forms of support for victims of conflict; and
- There is a noticeable shift in the scope of CSOs’ work in the context of changed political landscape following promulgation of a new constitution and State restructuring.

### 3.2 PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF MEDIA

#### Importance of media and their contribution

Almost 97% of the survey respondents felt that communication media is important for the society (see figure 2).

![Figure 2: Public perception of media importance by gender and rural/urban settlement](image)

The communication media were considered important by survey respondents for a number of reasons – for information dissemination, entertainment, opinion formation, and for promoting debate on various issues/thoughts/opinions (see figure 3).
Figure 3: Public perception of importance of media by function

As stated by an FGD participant in the Dolakha district, the positive changes that have taken place in the media sector in the last decade are characterized by ‘a mobile in every hand, a television in each household and FM radio stations at every corner’. The most significant development in the media sector, as expressed by a majority of FGD participants, was the growth in the number and scope of media outlets (print and electronic) in Nepal and a proportionate increase in citizen’s access to media. In the words of an FGD participant in the Rolpa district, ‘the world is visible and audible simply because of positive developments in the media’.

Most popular media

Upon being asked what was the one media they used or most preferred, 88.6% of survey respondents chose electronic media including radio, television and mobile phones. Chosen by a mere 2%, social media networks were a distant second. Although there was no follow-up question to ascertain the type of media they accessed using mobile phones, 62.7% respondents cited ease of access as one of the reasons for their choice of media. The choice of mobile phones relates logically to ease of access. However, ‘source of information’ was the reason cited by 75% respondents for their choice of media followed by ‘source of entertainment’ (65%), followed by ‘personal liking’ (49%) and ‘reliable’ (37%), apart from ease of access.

The FGD participants – both in urban and rural areas – were found to be most familiar with three types of media – FM radio, television, and newspapers. Mobile phones, as a media device, were seen to be popular among all FGD participants. While participants in an FGD conducted in the Nuwakot district headquarters indicated that local newspapers were getting popular in recent years, participants in the Dolakha district were of the opinion that the print media were gradually losing their grounds in rural areas. Participants were silent about ‘street drama’, ‘story-telling’ and other traditional forms of information dissemination e.g. the Chiragi system in the Tharu communities or the Katwal system in the hilly regions. It was probably a sign that such traditional systems of information dissemination were gradually disappearing from the rural areas.
A large number KII participants substantiated the results from the household survey and FGDs saying that FM radio, mobile telephone and television were respectively the most popular media in their localities. According to them, newspapers were also popular, particularly in urban areas.

People’s interaction with media outlets and their perception of reliability of media

An attempt was made to assess the extent to which audiences interacted with media outlets and what forms of interactions were most common. Less than one in three (30.3%) survey respondent believed they had some form of interaction with local media outlets. Of these, most (67.62%) had personally visited media outlets to express their issues and concerns, 35.46% communicated via SMS, 32.46% wrote letters, and 17.84% had contact with media-persons visiting their communities. Only 33% of respondents acknowledged that media outlets acknowledged their communications. Of these, 77.2% said that media published their comments or suggestions, 35% got SMS responses and 28% said they got invited to attend programs and events organized by media outlets.

Slightly more than three of four survey respondents (76.3%) considered their local media to be reliable. Female respondents (80.6%) were seen to trust the media more than their male counterparts (72.3%). Likewise, while 17.5% male respondents considered their local media to be unreliable, only 5.8% of female respondents thought so. Also, it was seen that while 80.8% respondents in urban locations thought the local media were reliable, only 73.2% of respondents in rural locations thought so (see figure 4).

![Figure 4: Perception of media reliability across gender and urban / rural settlement](image)

Majority of the KII respondents were found to have some form of contact with local media outlets and were familiar with their activities. However, KII participants were slightly more skeptical than survey respondents when it came to media reliability. Although a majority were seen to fully or partially agree that local media were reliable, about fifty percent of KII participants believed that local media were politically influenced and/ or biased.
3.3 PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN CIVIL SOCIETY GOVERNANCE

People’s participation in CSO activities

Public confidence in CSO governance can only come if people have access to CSO activities and find the space for participation in such activities. Public participation in CSO programs/projects can occur in various forms – meetings, public hearings, general assemblies, one-on-one consultations, focus group discussions, surveys, interviews, or other means. However, effective participation requires public engagement over a longer term rather than one-off meetings that merely aim to ensure numbers. The assessment of participation was done taking this important factor into account and through the design of several questions within the household survey aimed at ascertaining participation.

Approximately 54% survey respondents (49.7% in the earthquake affected districts and 56.5% in the CDCS districts) had not participated in any CSO events/activities in the last three months. Participation differed significantly by district with 90.9% respondents having attended some kind of CSO event in Rolpa district. However, only 13.7% and 18.2% respondents acknowledged such participation in Baitadi and Dolakha districts respectively. The low participation in Dolakha district, and the relatively lower public participation in earthquake affected districts in comparison to CDCS districts, may need further exploring. Dolakha was one among the fourteen most severely affected districts during the devastating earthquakes in 2015. This district also has significant CSO activities around reconstruction and rehabilitation, and significant public participation in such activities was expected.

Of the respondents who said they had attended some form of CSO event in the last three months, most (75.62%) had attended meetings, followed by 57.72% who had attended discussion forums, 24.07% who had attended trainings, 14.66% who had participated in general assemblies, and 8.64% who had taken part in public hearings. While it was difficult to gauge the extent or depth of public participation in CSO events, the fact that only 8.6% and 14.7% respondents had attended events aimed at promoting social accountability – such as public hearings and annual general meetings, might be of interest. However, on being asked if matters of public concern had been raised or discussed in the events they attended, almost 82% answered in the affirmative. This points to the fact that public events were mostly meaningful in that they put forth a matter of public interest or concern.

Upon being asked whether they or their family members had been contacted by local CSOs, 55.67% mentioned they had been contacted by some CSOs. About 14.33% of survey respondents believed they had been contacted by most CSOs active in their locality, while 30% said they had not been contacted by any CSO at all. Dolakha and Kapilvastu districts had comparatively higher numbers of respondents who claimed they had not been contacted by local CSOs.

Matters of public concerns raised at CSO events

There is greater likelihood for people to have confidence in CSOs if they feel that such CSOs represent their interest and concerns. A high majority of survey respondents (81.9%) acknowledged that the CSOs working in the districts discussed their problems as well as issues of
public concerns. Raising issues of public interest and concern within debates and discussions involving public participation might be looked upon as a positive sign that CSOs were aware of people’s needs and priorities. However, being aware of needs and priorities may not always translate to inclusion of such issues in program design and implementation. This was evident from the fact that only 55% of survey respondents felt that CSOs had targeted them (and their issues and concerns) in their program design and implementation (see Figure 5).

Of respondents who believed that they had been targeted by CSOs in the design and implementation of programs/activities, 92.5% asserted that they or their family members had benefitted from CSO programs. This data speaks well for CSOs in districts outside of the capital Kathmandu. It demonstrates that almost all of the more than 50% respondents who felt that CSOs targeted their issues and concerns in the design and implementation of their programs/activities, also felt that they (or their family members) had benefitted from CSO programs/activities in some way. The following list summarizes the key areas where such respondents felt they (or their family members) had benefited from CSO program/activities (respondents were allowed the choice of more than one area of benefit):

1. Improved economic status (70.67%)
2. Enhanced awareness (59.31%)
3. Increased access to information (51.78%)
4. Improved management of sanitation and drinking water (39.76%)
5. Improved level of child education (30.91%)
6. Improved situation in the treatment of disease (26.82%)

About 44% of survey respondents felt that only some groups and communities benefited from CSO programs. Of these, 83.6% felt that women benefited most, followed by ‘Dalit’ communities (56.6%) and children (34.9%). Interestingly, almost half the respondents believed that ‘elite’ groups also benefited from CSO programs, in response to this question that allowed multiple responses. When translated in Nepali, elite groups were defined as those who have traditionally been close to political power or belonged to higher caste groups. When asked for reasons why such groups or communities benefited from CSO programs, 68.29% respondents believed that they were the intended target groups. Almost half the respondents (49.3%) felt that people who were shrewd or opportunist in nature had better access to and benefited from CSO programs. Likewise, about 23% felt that CSOs targeted such groups as beneficiaries as there was higher probability to
demonstrate results; and about 20% respondents thought political pressure was also responsible in CSO choice of beneficiaries. In driving home the point that people with better ability to voice their issues and concerns, or those with better access to CSOs are more likely to benefit from CSO programs, an FGD participant in Dolakha district made reference to a famous adage in Nepali – ‘bolne ko pitho bikchha, nabolne ko chaamal bikaina’ or, ‘a skilled orator can sell flour with ease while one without such skills, may not be able to sell rice’ (rice being considered superior to flour).

About half of the government stakeholders consulted through KIIs felt that CSOs interacted with their target groups and stakeholders, including with government line agencies, about their programs and working approaches. As CSOs are required to coordinate and collaborate with the government’s line agencies while implementing their programs and projects, government response indicated that not all government stakeholders felt that CSOs complied to such requirement.

CSOs’ efforts in advocating for peoples’ needs

Survey respondents cited health (83.67%), followed by education (79.27%), food (75.8%), government services (51.33), and legal aid and services (45%) as priorities when inquired what their basic needs were. Almost 44% of respondents thought CSOs did not engage in advocacy aimed at furthering people’s basic needs. Surprisingly, about 40.33% respondents thought that CSOs actually advocated for people’s basic needs. This is a high percentage considering that only 12.67% respondents had considered CSOs to engage in advocacy on issues of public concern (in the public perception of CSO role on page 15). This implies a degree of ambiguity in public understanding of the concept of advocacy, or how CSOs can engage in advocacy.

Public perception of the role of CSOs in advocating for people’s issues also varied with geographical location and caste/ethnicity. While over 50% respondents from hill districts believed that CSOs took up their cases to concerned authorities or institutions, the number of respondents from the terai and mountain regions that felt the same, was lower. Similarly, in comparison to other castes and ethnicities, ‘Dalits’ and Madhesis were less inclined to assert that CSOs advocated for their issues. As such, 34.1% terai ‘Dalits’, 44.6% Madhesi ‘Dalits’, and 35.5% Madhesi Brahmin/Rajput did not feel that CSOs advocated for their issues with concerned authorities.

Level of CSOs’ transparency and accountability

Survey respondents were asked whether CSOs were open about who their target groups or beneficiaries were; the geographical areas chosen for implementation; whether CSOs disclosed their operating and program budgets to the public; whether their expenses were made public; whether CSOs consulted them during their annual assessment of expenditures incurred versus results achieved; whether CSOs adhered to the principles of inclusion in forming project groups and committees; the extent to which CSOs remained alert to the effective utilization of resources at their disposal; how CSOs addressed the issues of women and marginalized groups; whether there was political pressure on CSOs; and whether and how CSOs supported the government’s programs and service delivery role. These questions were designed specifically to assess transparency and accountability within CSOs.
More than half of the survey respondents (52.2%) felt that CSOs were transparent about who their target groups or beneficiaries were, or about the geographical areas chosen for implementation. Likewise, 42.53% thought CSOs disclosed their operating and program budgets to the public (see figure 6); 21% and 27.2% respectively felt that all or partial information related to their expenses were made public; and 33.33% believed CSOs consulted them during their annual assessment of expenditures incurred versus results achieved.

Figure 6: Public perception of whether or not CSOs disclose program budgets

FGD participants felt that CSOs were not impartial in their dealings. This relates to 26.73% and 36.73% of survey respondents respectively agreeing that there was either absolute or partial political pressure and influence on CSOs. Of those that said there was absolute or partial political influence on CSOs, 85.61% believed such pressure influenced the working locations of CSOs, 72.9% felt political pressure influenced staff recruitment, and 29.94 saw political influence in the composition of Board of Directors.

Very few government stakeholders that participated in KIIs agreed that CSOs were transparent, with a majority of them saying CSOs were only partially transparent. The government KII participants who thought CSOs were not transparent or only partially transparent believed that this was because CSOs were not accountable and committed to their target groups. This probably presents a representative picture of how government stakeholders perceive CSOs.

FGD participants seemed to recall several instances where CSOs had made use of social accountability tools such as public hearings, social audits, and public debates. However, they felt that CSOs failed to furnish adequate and complete financial information that could be trusted or deemed reliable. They further added that mismanagement of funds in both NGOs and INGOs was a problem, although they believed INGOs and local cooperatives were more transparent and accountable than NGOs, user groups and CBOs.

CSOs: working modalities and use of local resources

Higher than three-quarters of survey respondents (78.07%) believed that CSOs adhered to the principles of inclusion in forming project groups and committees; while only 14.2% thought CSOs remained alert to the effective utilization of resources at their disposal. This demonstrates that
while CSOs are fairly transparent about who their target groups are or the geographical focus of their implementation, they were less transparent about operating and program budgets, even less transparent about program expenditures, and not very mindful of effective utilization of resources. To the credit of CSOs, a high majority of respondents believed they were inclusive in the choice of beneficiaries or in the formation of groups and committees.

Over 50% of the survey respondents had either complete (13.4%) or partial (42.3%) confidence in the roles and working modalities of CSOs. While only 14.2% survey respondents believed that CSOs were fully cognizant of the need for effective utilization of resources at their disposal, 47.4% thought CSOs were partially cognizant of the same. Almost one in three KII participants believed CSOs were fully aware of the need for effective utilization of resources, while a similar proportion felt they were aware to some extent.

3.4 PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN MEDIA GOVERNANCE

Media support to women, minority and marginalized communities

A fair majority of survey respondents (64.87%) were of the opinion that the media supported issues related to women, minorities and marginalized communities (see figure 7). Of these respondents, almost all felt that the media supported issues related to women, minority and marginalized communities by publishing or broadcasting issues of concern. Likewise, 37% among these respondents believed the media invited women, minorities and marginalized communities to participate or be part of media programs, and 10.38% thought media supported women and members from minority and marginalized communities by actually engaging them as resource persons in their programs.

![Figure 7: Public perception of whether media support issues of women, minority and marginalized groups](image)

Stakeholders participating in KIIIs believed that media had done well to raise issues related to women, deprived and excluded groups, although they believed that this was still not adequate. FGD participants were of the opinion that media had effectively raised the issues of domestic violence, girls trafficking, caste-based discrimination against ‘Dalits’ and had hence furthered the empowerment of women, minority and marginalized communities.
Media and public/ citizen interest reporting

A slight majority (54.13%) of the survey respondents believed that the media had raised priority and pertinent issues that had a direct bearing upon people’s daily lives. While respondents from Rolpa (74%) and Nuwakot (71.3%) districts were seen to be more satisfied with media’s role in raising issues of citizen concern, the situation was different in Kapilvastu where 45.2% respondents thought that the media failed to adequately raise issues of public interest priority (see figure 8).

![Figure 8: Public perception of whether media addressed issues of public interest priority distributed by district](image)

Transparency and accountability in media

The majority of participants in KIIs with CSO stakeholders were of the opinion that the media were either highly transparent, or transparent to some extent. FGD participants, on the other hand, were of the opinion that the media never disclosed their financial transactions to the public. In some districts (e.g. Kapilvastu) people expressed a strong sentiment that the media, which otherwise advocates for transparency, were themselves not transparent. The KIIs were designed for assessing transparency from an ‘economic’ stand-point and accountability from an ‘editorial’ or ‘content’ standpoint.

Both KII and FGD participants were in agreement that the media were accountable to people from a content or editorial standpoint. Media accountability to their audiences can also be observed from how they are perceived by 64.87% of survey respondents to support issues aimed at empowering women, minority and marginalized communities; and by 54.13% respondents to raise priority and pertinent issues related to people’s interest and concerns that had a bearing on their everyday lives.

Media’s compliance with government rules/regulations

Almost all KII participants agreed that the media in the districts follow government rules. They were fairly satisfied in the way that media functioned or performed with regard to compliance.
Major problems faced by media

Information was sought to understand what the public perceived as the major problems facing media. Such information was deemed useful to gauge whether the public were cognizant of the challenges that the media faced that limited their capacity to advance public interest. The following list provides a summary of problems as articulated by KII and FGD participants:

- Financial problems – difficult to survive professionally without seeking government grants
- Trust deficit – prevailing image of the media, especially print media being biased
- Political pressures – high level of political influence, as political parties aim to coopt various media as their ‘mouth piece’. Financially weak and professionally deficient media can neither get rid of political affiliation nor resist political pressures
- Professionalism deficit – lack of competent human resources
- Limited or no access to the government facilities/ supports

FGD participants felt electronic and print media were currently faced with the following problems:

- Irregular supply of electrical power (frequent power cuts)
- Insecurity: reporters and journalists are often threatened by politicians, bureaucrats, smugglers and business groups that do not want the media to report their short-comings
- Huge political influence: Apart from professionalism deficit media reliance on political parties for favors and financial leverage puts them at risk of political manipulation
- Lack of professionalism: As a result, credibility of media is questioned and the number of listeners (in case of FM radio stations) are gradually decreasing
- Lack of credibility also leads to lack of public support when media are threatened
- Lack of competent personnel: due to financial constraints, many media houses, especially print media, cannot hire experienced and trained media personnel.

3.5 CSOs REPRESENTING WOMEN, MINORITY AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Public perception of how well CSOs represented women, minority and marginalized communities was assessed through their perception of inclusion among CSO beneficiaries, community groups and committees. As high as 78.07% of survey respondents acknowledged CSOs took an inclusive approach in the formation of community groups and committees. The impact of programs that targeted these groups, and the type of programs that were most effective was also assessed. On the question of effectiveness of CSO programs for women, marginalized and minority groups, 55.4% respondents thought that there was some positive impact, 16.07% felt there was significant positive impact, while 15.47% believed there was no positive impact at all. None of the respondents thought that CSO programs for women, marginalized and minority groups had any kind of negative impact. In terms of program areas form which respondents believed women benefited most, 68.4% said saving, credit and microfinance, followed by skills development training (57.07%), income generating activities (41.93%) and empowerment programs (35.73%) (see figure 9).
Likewise, in the case of marginalized and minority communities, 46.2% quoted saving, credit and microfinance, 42.47% said skills development training, 31.2% said income generating activities and 26.87% said empowerment (see figure 10).

These responses had two dimensions – first, most of the CSOs were seen to have significant focus on economic empowerment of women and marginalized communities; and second, public perception demonstrates an understanding of conventional roles of CSOs. Both KII and FGD participants agreed with and expressed satisfaction that CSO activities targeted women, ‘Dalits’, Janajatis and other traditionally marginalized or deprived communities.

**CSO support for government plans and programs**

The extent to which CSOs engaged with government agencies in the design of policies and plans, and in the design and implementation of projects and activities remained a focus of KIIs conducted with government stakeholders. The one question in the household survey on whether CSOs contribute and support local level government programs and service delivery saw 21.73% respondents affirm with confidence; 34.67% thought that CSOs supported to some extent, while
21.8% respondents believed that CSOs did not contribute to or support government programs and service delivery at all.

Although the governments’ decentralization practice and program implementation strategy for erstwhile local bodies (DDCs, municipalities and VDCs) called for the mobilization of local CSOs for implementing development programs, FGD and KII participants thought current practice was otherwise. Government stakeholders who participated in KIIs were concerned that not many CSOs complied with government rules and guidelines while implementing their activities in the districts. What may be worth noting though, is that, all operational CSOs are required to go through a cumbersome process for legal status renewal each year that includes recommendations and certification of compliance by multiple government agencies, especially for CSOs registered under the Association Registration Act.

Political pressure on CSOs

Majority (63.4%) of household survey respondents felt that CSOs working in districts operated under some form of political pressure. Most FGD participants and almost all government KII participants agreed that CSOs were associated with political parties, to varying degrees. Survey respondents and FGD and KII participants were of the opinion that political pressure was mostly applied to influence:

1. Staff recruitment
   - Inclusion of political party cadres on CSO Board of Directors
   - Selection/identification of project beneficiaries, including project locations.

Major problems faced by CSOs

KII and FGD participants cited the following problems faced by CSOs:

- Political pressure and influence
- Social dissatisfaction with CSO activities
- Inadequate resources
- Lack of competent human resources
- Increasing expectations of local people; difficulty in addressing all
- Insecurity and inadequate funds to work in remote areas.

3.6 MEDIA REPRESENTING WOMEN, MINORITY AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Public perception of different media platforms, media habits and preferences

About 65% respondents stated that media supported the issues of women, minority and marginalized groups. Of these respondents, almost all felt that the media supported issues related to women, minority and marginalized communities by publishing or broadcasting issues of concern. Likewise, 37% among these respondents believed the media invited women, minorities and marginalized communities to participate or be part of media programs, and 10.38% thought media supported women and members from minority and marginalized communities by actually engaging them as resource persons in their programs.
Stakeholders participating in KIIs believed that media had done well to raise issues related to women, deprived and excluded groups, although they believed that this was still not adequate. FGD participants were of the opinion that media had effectively raised the issues of domestic violence, girls trafficking, caste-based discrimination against ‘Dalits’ and had hence furthered the empowerment of women, minority and marginalized communities. Similarly, government officials participating in KIIs thought that media played a key role in bringing forward the problems of women and marginalized groups.

3.7 PUBLIC EXPECTATION OF CSO AND MEDIA ROLE IN FUTURE

The public expectation of CSO and media role in future was extensively discussed in all FGDs and KIIs. Participants expected CSOs to be transparent and accountable to their constituencies. Moreover, developing relevant programming to address pertinent local problems and issues was another expectation from CSOs. While there was a strong opinion among participants that CSOs increase participation of marginalized communities, they also expected CSOs to provide service delivery in the areas of education, employment, health, drinking water, sanitation etc. Further, they also expected CSOs to reach out to the most marginalized people living in remote villages.

Specific recommendations put forth by KII and FGD participants towards improving the effectiveness of CSOs include:

- Make program activities and program budget public by using social accountability tools such as public hearing, public/social audit and by mobilizing local electronic and print media.
- Mobilize peoples’ participation by involving them in decision making to ensure that their immediate priorities and needs are included in program design and implementation.
- Improve linkages and collaboration with government agencies and INGOs working in the districts.
- Make an effort to be technically and financially efficient.
- Refrain from partisan politics and maintain neutrality.

Notably, a participant in a FGD conducted in Dolakha district suggested that in future, CSOs should not support ‘Hunekhane’ people (elite and influential people who have enough already) but should support ‘Hundaakhane’ people or groups (poor people struggling to fulfill basic needs).

For media, FGD and KII participants expected them to focus future efforts in the following areas:

- Awareness raising
- Impartial news-reporting
- Entertainment
- Reliable information
- Increased focus on local news and issues

Among survey respondents, only 53.3% felt that the media were disseminating information of their preference mainly because of the following reasons:
1. Affiliation with political parties
2. Lack of professional competency
3. Focus on undue economic gain
4. Lack of professional ethics and norms
5. Absence of good governance in the country

3.8 GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS’ PERCEPTION OF CSOs AND MEDIA

Perception of government officials towards CSOs

Some of the government officials participating in KIIS were satisfied with the work carried out by CSOs. They believed that CSOs have had an important role in making people aware of various issues linked to their lives and livelihoods. Similarly, they were of the opinion that CSOs had extended various kind of support, especially to children, women and traditionally marginalized groups and communities. They said “Such work would have been difficult for the government institutions to carry out on their own”. However, majority of government officials were not satisfied with the sustainability aspect of CSO interventions as they were not able to independently mobilize resources from multiple sources and keep their programs going long enough so that there is meaningful impact. They thought that CSOs were either not serious or lacked capacity with regard to longer term sustainability or longevity of their programs. Besides this, they believed that many of the CSOs failed to design realistic phase-out plans. In their opinion, CSOs fail to make necessary arrangements to ensure that beneficiaries continue to benefit from CSO interventions even after projects phase out. Another serious concern raised by government officials was that most CSOs failed to work in coordination with local government agencies and were also not serious about making their activities transparent.

Government officials also thought that most CSOs, especially those in remote locations outside of the district headquarters, were not familiar with the existence and use of social accountability tools aimed at improving their internal governance. Government officials also accused CSOs of making ‘ritualistic’ rather than ‘meaningful’ use of social accountability tools, and were therefore perceived as not being accountable and honest to the people they purportedly served.

To increase the capacity of CSOs and to make them better able to use social accountability tools, government officials suggested that CSOs need to be trained to: i) increase internal awareness of their social responsibilities, ii) increase internal understanding of the importance of social accountability tools, and iii) enhance skills in the effective utilization of such tools. Almost half of the officials interviewed suggested that legal action was needed to make sure that all CSOs consistently used social accountability tools. They also thought proper guidance, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems should make CSOs more capable in the use of social accountability tools.

Perception of government officials towards media

Almost half of the officials interviewed were found to be satisfied with the role of the media in making people informed about current events and increasing their level of awareness on various crucial issues. However, the other half were not fully satisfied with what the media had achieved this far. They were of the view that the media worked to further their own interests rather than the interest of the public at large, and were neither neutral nor accurate in their reporting. Those that
were unhappy with the media thought they were biased and that those working within such media were focused on personal gains.

Most government officials, however, thought that there had been some positive changes in the media sector in the last one year. They observed that some of the media outlets had started deputing their reporters even at the VDC level, and that such reporters had started visiting offices and meeting with local individuals while developing news stories. They had also seen such information being usually reported on and published in a timely manner. The availability of diverse media platforms such as FM radios, newspapers, television channels, online platforms, national radio services and social media networks over mobile telephone services, and increased media footprint in even remote locations has meant that more and more people are now connected. Competition, government officials believe, has led media organizations to be more professional, responsive and people-oriented. Government officials also believed that there was an increasing tendency among media to address as priority, social issues such as child marriage, women trafficking, and domestic violence, among others. However, most agreed that there is still a long way to go for the media in districts to become fully professional, neutral, transparent, and accountable.

Government officials also believed that the media lacked the capacity to carry out in-depth analysis of problems and possible ways forward, before bringing the issue out for debate in the public domain. Another reason highlighted by government officials for media inability to address burning local issues was their preoccupation with commercial and political gain and the tendency for only political news to make the cut. According to them the problems of women in rural and inaccessible areas were acute but they were rarely covered by media.

Some recommendations from government KII participants for making the media more reliable, transparent and people-oriented were as follows:

- Follow government rules and guidelines so that all media outlets follow ethical and professional practices
- Develop code of conduct and enforce effectively
- Focus more on local news and local problems
- Establish linkages with government agencies to ensure security and other support
- Develop professional competency.

To increase the capacity of media and make them more responsible towards society, government officials suggested that media-persons need to be provided with effective training. They also suggested that media-persons need to be facilitated in accessing resources and other necessary supports. They also thought media-persons need to be given some form of incentive to be more research oriented, impartial and proactive. They added that journalists must also be encouraged to go to the neglected/under covered locations for news reporting. They added that government should formulate and implement policies to make journalists more responsible and research oriented. For them, effective implementation of policies implies punishment to those that don’t comply. Government officials also suggested that media people should frequently interact with local stakeholders and get their feedback on how media performance could be made more effective.
3.9 INCLUSION AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) has remained a key cross-cutting development agenda that CSOs are meant to advocate for and integrate within their programs. Hence, public perception around whether CSOs were inclusive from design to implementation to evaluation of their programs, remained an important consideration of this study. Accordingly, all three study tools were designed to gauge inclusion.

The survey response was encouraging, with 78.1% of respondents confirming that CSOs included women and representatives from traditionally marginalized communities, minority groups and those that were excluded because they were poor, within the groups and committees that they formed or targeted. Respondents identified ‘saving, credit and micro-finance’ and ‘skills development trainings’ as interventions that CSOs conducted for women, minority and marginalized communities. Only 40.33% of respondents saw advocacy as a role that CSOs were engaged in with almost 44% saying advocacy for the basic needs and priorities of citizens, especially women, minority and marginalized groups, was a CSO mandate. This demonstrates public perception of CSO role as being more focused on service delivery and economic empowerment and less so on advocacy.

What is also of significance here is that a majority of survey respondents (55.4) were of the view that CSO programs only had some positive impact on women, minority and marginalized communities. Only 16.07% believed that CSOs had significant impact. This depicts low public confidence in effectiveness of CSO programs.

About 65% survey respondents stated that media support women, minority and marginalized groups by regularly publishing or broadcasting their issues to a wider audience. More than one-third (37%) of those that agreed that media supported women, minority and marginalized groups, thought they did so by inviting them to participate in their programs as resource persons; while some (10.38%) believed that the media actually engaged such communities and groups as media-persons, journalists or reporters.

By asserting that CSOs and media have been able to target women, minority and marginalized groups and communities and / or build public understanding of their issues by raising them, both KIIs and FGDs complemented the deductions made from the household survey data. Complementing survey data, government stakeholders and others agreed that CSO programs are still lacking in terms of effective implementation and having the desired impact.

Perception of women and marginalized groups

Three and four FGDs had been carried out exclusively with women and members from marginalized communities respectively to understand the extent to which they felt represented by CSOs and media. Women participants felt that while there has been a gradual growth in women participation in CSOs and media, they felt that the number of women who were engaged in the media as news-readers and reporters was far from satisfactory. Women also acknowledged and attributed the growth in women being included within groups and committees formed by CSOs to binding policy requirements – both in the external environment and internally within CSOs. They
perceived this as a very positive development and were also excited about the increasing trend in CSOs and media inviting more women to their activities and programs. They also thought that CSOs, especially, had begun to entrust women with more responsible roles and positions.

Women participants also agreed that CSOs and media had also contributed, in various ways, towards the enhancement of women’s social, cultural, political and economic status. They believed that such contribution occurred primarily through capacity building interventions like training, exposure visits and experience sharing opportunities. Such opportunities have not only helped build their skills and confidence, but had also helped enhance their social status, they agreed. They also asserted that enhancement of economic status, through CSO programs mainly, equated to an increase in social status. They stated further that an increase in social standing meant there was more opportunity to be invited to different community meetings and forums; and by having a say in decisions, they felt politically empowered. They credited the media for regularly focusing on women issues and for raising awareness among women of various social and political developments, and empowering them by doing so. By doing so, they agree that they have been made aware of their political and social rights and entitlements and have understood the importance of their participation. However, they still think CSOs and media have a significant role in addressing some long-existing challenges that women continue to face resulting from deep-rooted traditions and patriarchy. In this regard, they foresee a greater role for sustained and meaningful women’s participation in CSO and media programs and activities.

In comparison to women, participants in the four FGDs conducted for marginalized communities, felt less represented by CSOs and media. They felt that CSOs and media did include them in programs only to make up mandatory numbers. They feel that there is first the need for change within CSOs and media, and then for them to affect change within communities. This shows an important development in Nepal’s movement for inclusion. While there is a greater acceptance and promotion of women’s inclusion, the same may not be true when it comes to the acceptance and promotion of inclusion of marginalized and minority groups and communities. This requires serious orientation among CSO and media leadership and for greater impetus on getting CSOs and media to develop GESI policies and guidelines that promote inclusion. However, there is more probability for impact from such steps, only when CSO and media leaders have a deeper understanding of the benefits of diversity and pluralistic values in creating a society that is tolerant, just and free from conflict.
4. CONCLUSION

This section includes two parts: the first part lays out the baseline values derived from the household survey, for key indicators distilled from the study objectives; and the second part lays out a summary of findings.

4.1 BASELINE VALUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Indicators</th>
<th>Baseline Value (2017 May)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of CSOs in advancing public voices and agenda</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of people who have not attended CSO’s program in last three months</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents claiming to have been contacted by CSOs working in their localities</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents acknowledging CSOs discussed their problems as well as issues of public concerns</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of media in advancing public voices and agenda</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents claiming that media is important for the society</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents using electronic media</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents claim to have access to media</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who believe that media is reliable</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public confidence in civil society governance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of people who have attended CSO’s public hearing in last three months</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of people who have attended CSO’s AGCM in last three months</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of respondents who feels CSOs have targeted them in their program designing and during implementation</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who feel either they themselves or their family members have been benefitted by CSOs programs</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who feel that the benefits have reached out to marginalized groups (women)</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who feel that the benefits have reached out to marginalized groups (Dalits)</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who believe that benefits of CSO programs goes to those groups who raise voice for their needs</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who feel that the beneficiaries of CSO programs are their primary target groups</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who believe that CSOs raise their problems/issues to the concerned agencies</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who claim to have participated CSO program where they disclose their programs</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents claiming they (themselves or family members) have been involved in formulation and/or implementation of CSO program</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents who claim that the CSOs informed them about their target groups and working areas</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents unsure if CSOs are transparent in sharing their program budgets</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
% of respondents unsure about CSOs disclosing their financial transactions 52%
% of respondents who feel that CSOs include all communities while forming groups 78.1%
% of respondents who believe that CSOs are aware of utilizing their resources properly 50%

Public confidence in media governance
% of respondents who feel that media has played role to support women, minority and marginalized communities 65%
% of respondents who believe that media raise prioritized issues/areas that have direct bearing upon people’s lives 54.1%
% of respondent who consider media to be fully transparent 38.6%
% of respondent who don’t believe that media is ‘people oriented’ 13%

CSOs representing women and minority groups
% of respondent who believe that CSOs have contributed to increase access of women to financial resources through savings and credit/microfinance 68%
% of respondent who believe that CSOs have contributed to empower women 36%
% of respondent who feel that CSOs are under political pressure 63.4%

Media representing women and minority groups
% of respondent who believe that media has supported women and marginalized groups to bring out their issues to the public 65%
% of respondents who believe that media has provided a platform for women to be interviewed and share their problems 38.8%

4.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

People’s understanding of CSOs

Public perception of the spectrum of organizations that make up CSOs demonstrates a limited understanding. While people understand NGOs, media associations, user groups and committees to form part of the CSO family, almost half of the survey respondents and other study participants were unsure whether professional associations of lawyers, teachers, medical practitioners; and mutual interest associations of ethnic communities and business interest groups, constituted CSOs. Some projects being locally implemented were also understood as CSOs. This may also be due to the tendency to put projects under the banners of NGOs. Public understanding, or the lack of it, seems to stem from their proximity to and engagement with the different types of CSOs. Additionally, people’s perception of CSOs was shaped by their understanding that CSOs have an ‘emergency relief’ function. People also thought CSOs should come under strong government regulation, probably linked, again, to the ‘emergency relief’ role they saw CSOs fulfilling. Government stakeholders, on the other hand, had a far better understanding of the types of organizations that constituted CSOs.

People’s understanding of the importance of CSOs

Both rural and urban survey respondents were not fully aware of the range of activities that CSOs performed. However, most considered CSOs as an instrument for the betterment of people, especially those from the weaker sections of society. While survey respondents were less aware of
the advocacy and voter education role of CSOs, government stakeholders acknowledged CSO contribution in these two major areas.

Importance of media and their contribution

The vast majority of survey respondents, irrespective of their gender and geographical location, recognized the importance of media, particularly electronic media. They acknowledged media role in keeping people informed, entertained and opinion formation. Although people heralded the media for focusing on some burning issues related to women, marginalized and deprived groups of people, they were aware of the weaknesses of the sector arising from political pressure and polarization, and the lack of professional competence and ethics. They hope for the media to be more neutral and provide accurate news and information with a local focus. While women agreed that media contributed to their well-being, marginalized communities did not feel they were adequately represented by the media in voicing issues and concerns particular to them.

Most popular media

Electronic media (television, radio and mobile phones) was found most popular among respondents and participants, and they felt FM radio stations and content distributed over mobile phones, were most likely to influence people, their thoughts, ideas, opinions. Print media, especially newspapers, were still popular in the urban areas whereas social media was gaining popularity throughout the country.

People’s access to media and reliability of media

There was consensus among the respondents and participants that people’s access to media outlets was still limited for many people. Most communicated with media outlets through letters, SMS text messages, and through direct visits to the media outlets. However, the majority of people were still concerned that the media didn’t take their suggestions seriously or address them. People in urban locations believed media were more responsive to their suggestions than those in rural locations.

People’s participation in CSO activities

Access to CSO activities was still low for majority of respondents and participants, representative of communities in general. Those with access to CSOs were found to have attended meetings, discussion forums, training events, public hearings and annual general meetings. However, those attending public accountability events such as public hearing and annual general meetings tended to be lower, demonstrating lower public participation in social accountability events of CSOs.

Issues of public concerns raised in CSO programs

A large majority of respondents (82%) considered CSOs to be accountable in terms of discussing and raising issues of public concern. Likewise, a majority of respondents (54.33%) believed that they or their families included them as target groups for their programs. In addition, a vast majority of respondents (92.54%) among those that said they or their families had been targeted by CSO
programs, felt they had benefited from such programs. They believed that apart from women and members from the Dalit community, other sections of society such as children, religious minorities, communities living in locations that are relatively easier to access, and ‘elite’ groups also benefitted from CSOs’ programs. There was broad consensus, especially among FGD and KII participants that CSOs were biased in their selection of target communities and / or a perceived understanding among a large group of respondents and FGD and KII participants that CSOs were biased in selecting target groups for their programs.

**CSOs’ efforts in advocating for peoples’ voices**

CSOs, in general, were not perceived as very effective in advocating for people’s voices and taking their issues/ needs to the concerned authorities, or in lobbying to get such issues addressed. There were more hill respondents than from those from the terai and mountain regions who thought that CSOs advocated for their issues or causes. Similarly, compared to other castes/ ethnicities, those belonging to ‘Dalit’ communities were less satisfied with the advocacy initiatives of CSOs.

**Level of CSO transparency and accountability**

Transparency and accountability of CSOs were major concerns of both survey respondents as well as KII and FGD participants. CSOs were not perceived as transparent – both in terms of their financial transactions as well as programmatic coverage. Most respondents thought that cooperatives and INGOs were more transparent than local CSOs. However, they did acknowledge knowledge of some local CSOs that were using social accountability tools such as public hearings, public audits and social audits. Almost half of the respondents believed that CSOs did not disclose their program details, target groups and working areas even while CSOs are mandatorily required to do so to be eligible for renewal every year.

**Media support to women, minority and marginalized communities**

The majority of respondents thought that the electronic and print media supported the issues of women, minority groups and marginalized communities through regular publication and broadcasts; and by inviting people from these groups to programs organized by CSOs and media and involving them as resource persons in such programs. However, there was strong opinion that the media was not fulfilling their social responsibility of raising the issue of marginalized people adequately or ensuring their participation in media programs, events and activities.

**Media raising priority issues and concerns of citizens**

A slight majority of the respondents believed that the media prioritized issues and concerns of public interest, especially those that had a direct bearing on their everyday lives. More respondents from the hill regions believed that the media raised their issues and concerns as opposed to respondents from the terai, especially those from Madhesi ethnicity feeling relatively less represented by the media.
Transparency and accountability in media

The majority of respondents felt that the media were not transparent with regard to their financial sources and expenditures. This, they thought, was paradoxical given that they advocated for the transparency of other organizations. However, by raising local issues, slightly over half survey respondents agreed that the media were accountable to their audience.

Media’s compliance with government rules/regulations

Almost all respondents and participants had a strong feeling that the media followed government rules while working in the districts and that there were no major compliance issues.

Challenges faced by media

There was agreement that challenges, including political pressure, financial stability, professional deficit and trust deficit, limited the independence and credibility of media.

CSO focus on women, poor and marginalized communities

Respondents largely acknowledged CSO contribution, through their various activities, in enhancing the status of marginalized communities, including women and minority groups. People believed that access to financial resources, saving, credit and microfinance programs, skills development training, and income generating activities had largely contributed to such empowerment. Both KII and FGD participants agreed with and expressed satisfaction that CSO activities targeted women, ‘Dalits’, Janajatis and other traditionally marginalized or deprived communities.

In comparison to women, participants in FGDs exclusively conducted for marginalized communities, felt less represented by CSOs and media. They felt that CSOs and media did include them in programs only to make up mandatory numbers. They feel that there is first the need for change within CSOs and media, and then for them to affect change within communities. This shows an important development in Nepal’s movement for inclusion. While there is a greater acceptance and promotion of women’s inclusion, the same may not be true when it comes to the acceptance and promotion of inclusion of marginalized and minority groups and communities.

Major problems faced by CSOs

The majority of respondents thought that CSOs working in districts incurred recurring challenges, including political pressure during staff recruitment, board reshuffling or identification of beneficiaries or project locations; inadequate resources; lack of public trust; lack of competent human resources; lack of adequate funds, and physical safety and security to be able to work in remote locations.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, carried out to assess the level of public understanding and confidence of the role of CSOs and media, has generated baseline values (2017) for certain indicators and strengthened certain assumptions made of CSOs and media. While perception was earlier based on emotion rather than evidence, this study substantiates findings through empirical evidence. Though some issues are prominent to specific attributes disaggregated by specific group of people, such as sex and geography, the majority of findings are worth generalizing.

On one hand, public perception reveals reasons for trust deficit in the public domain and steps that can be taken to address these. On the other, it helps in the design of appropriate messages that would help debunk some of the myths and misconceptions that exist. For example, not all CSOs are corrupt, or lack adequate internal governance mechanisms, or do not work in the interest of the weaker sections of society. This study will help address areas for messaging that will aid positive perception building. In the overall scheme of affairs, such interventions will be important in expanding the civic space that is so characteristic of a vibrant democracy. However, there is the need for key stakeholders to work hard to further improve the public understanding and confidence in CSOs and media organizations in Nepal.

Here are some key recommendations emerging from this study, that can lead to improving public understanding and confidence in the role of CSOs and media:

• Building public understanding of the concept of CSOs (moving beyond just NGOs and cooperatives) requires a proactive move from key CSO stakeholders. As part of the media, local FM radio stations can play a significant role in building public understanding through creative, entertaining and educating programming.
• In order to reshape public perception of CSOs, public debates and interactions should focus on the scope and limitations of CSOs, existing policies and practices that affect governance, and compliance issues that limit CSO and media performance.
• Timing of media programming should take into account time-frames that are most likely to attract the viewership / readership of women and marginalized communities.
• Periodic joint reflection and action meetings between local CSOs and media would be useful in the design of messages and to maximize coverage and uptake, leading to relevant actions.
• Negative public perception might be seen as a pretext for enforcing stringent policies and compliance requirements on CSOs and media. This can lead to a rapid shrinking of civic space and an autocratic regime – in the absence of effective civic oversight. There is therefore onus on the CSO and media sector to develop and implement credible self-regulation mechanisms and provide improve their public communication and engagement. This should include engagement with local people and government bodies in the use of social accountability tools.
• There is the need to build CSO capacity to articulate change in strategic vision; document program methodologies, models and results; and effectively communicate the same to relevant stakeholders. While doing so, CSO and media need to make it clear that advocacy is an important aspect of the work that they do and also explain the benefit of such advocacy work for their constituencies.
• The meaningful engagement of local people throughout the program/ project cycle management would help CSOs to develop social ambassadors. However, this can only happen
when CSOs integrate truly participatory approaches within their management culture. Building CSO capacity in participatory approaches will have multiplier effects – from promoting its visibility, engaging key stakeholders, including beneficiaries as well as ensuring priority local problems are addressed. This will also help convey the important message that women, minority and marginalized communities have access to the benefits of CSO programs. It will help address the ‘trust deficit’ that has been discussed a few times in this report. As there is strong opinion that media have neglected marginalized people, media need to engage them to give them a voice and then to be heard.

- Political leaning of CSOs and media have a bearing on their credibility and related public perception. There is no easy route to reduce political influence or curb political leaning. However, media organizations need to be oriented on how political leaning can be effective on the short term but is not beneficial on the long run.

- The media is also found to have been constrained by their own ‘professionalism deficit’ in prioritizing issues for reporting, gathering information and disseminating news and information that is accurate, balanced and credible. There is hence the need for continued training for editors and journalists on journalistic ethics, evidence-based investigative reporting, and public interest reporting.