



Analysis and Reporting on Civic Space and Engagement in Nepal

Final Report

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACHR	American Convention on Human Rights
ARI	Advocacy Readiness Index
CA	Common Assembly
CAR	Community Action Researcher
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CIAA	Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CR	Community Reporter
CS:MAP	Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DC	District Coordinator
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EBA	Evidence Based Advocacy
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ED	Executive Director
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMDC	Media for Development and Social Change
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
FoA	Freedom of Association
FoE	Freedom of Expression
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GGB	Good Governance Barometer
GoN	Government of Nepal
HEAD	Health, Education, Agriculture and Disaster Risk Reduction
HURADEC	Human Rights Awareness and Development Centre
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICNL	The International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDI	In-depth Interview
INSEC	Informal Sector Service Centre
ISO	Intermediary Service Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
KLL	Kathmandu Living Labs
LDAG	Listening, Discussion, and Action Group
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning
LGOA	Local Government Operation Act
MAG	Media Advocacy Group
MOFAGA	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding

MS Teams	Microsoft Teams
NEPAN	Nepal Participatory Action Network
NFN	NGO Federation of Nepal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNSWA	Nepal National Social Welfare Association
OCA	Organisational Capacity Assessment
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PC	Project/programme Coordinator
PCGG	Provincial Centre for Good Governance
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PEAR	Participatory and Evidence-based Action Research
PET	Public Expenditure Tracking
PF	Partnership Forum
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PPPC	Provincial Policy and Planning Commission
RTI	Right to Information
SCD	Sickle Cell Disease
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMS	Short Message Service
SOCH Nepal	Society for Humanism Nepal
SSB	Social Science Baha
TDC	Town Development Committee
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation centre
WWJ	Working Women Journalists

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

ARI: Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI) is a self-assessment tool used to assess the advocacy capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) on a scale from 0 to 5 in 13 competency areas divided into three sections: advocacy goals, plans and strategies; conducting advocacy; and organisational commitment to advocacy. ARI helps organisations to identify capacity-building needs for better advocacy by comparing progress with the baseline score.

CA: Common Assembly (CA), or *Sthaaniya Sabha*, is a ward-level coalition structure designed to bring together citizens, civil society actors and the local government for meaningful engagement and interaction, with the aim of finding local solutions to local issues. Meetings of CAs are held every three months in the presence of ward representatives during which matters related to public concerns and public service delivery such as education, health, agriculture and disaster risk reduction are discussed between citizens and local stakeholders.

CAR: Community Action Researcher (CAR) refers to a person from a community who is involved in collecting evidence for evidence-based advocacy on local issues.

EBA: Evidence-Based Advocacy (EBA) is an advocacy approach that involves processes from identification and prioritisation of issues for advocacy to issue analysis, strategy formulation, defining an advocacy plan, execution of the same, monitoring and evaluation and plan incorporation.

GGB: Good Governance Barometer (GGB) is a participatory, process-oriented tool for both development planning and social accountability. Through engaging with a multi-stakeholder group (including the government, civil society and the private sector) in a participatory modelling and evaluation process, the GGB translates complexities of a specific governance system into locally appropriate indicators and a clear distillation of that system's strengths and weaknesses. That distillation is used to plan development priorities, measure their effectiveness, and advocate for governance improvement.

HEAD: Health, Education, Agriculture, and Disaster Risk Reduction (HEAD) is a district-level collaborative alliance between CSOs on these sectoral themes. Since some existing coalitions of CSOs at the district level function as a HEAD coalition, they are referred to by different names such as the Media Advocacy Group (MAG), Human Rights Network (Ramechhap), DRR Network (Dolakha), and Sajha Sawal (Gorkha).

LDAG: Radio Listening Discussion and Action Group (LDAG) is a radio listening group formed at the ward level. LDAG members gather at a common place to listen to radio programmes such as 'Sajha Boli' and 'Saathi Sanga Manka Kura' and discuss local issues with the aim of finding solutions to those issues and challenges. Meetings of LDAGs are held biweekly in the presence of CSO officials.

OCA: Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) is an objective assessment tool to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of an organisation and benchmark its performance in a consistent manner. As an auto-diagnostic tool, OCA helps both staff and board members of CSOs to review the organisational capacity across seven domains—Governance, Administration, Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Organisational Management, Programme Management, and External Relations—and a total of 39 sub-sections and prepare a plan to strengthen organisational capacity.

OGP: Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at improving government transparency, accountability and responsiveness to citizens. It aims to secure concrete commitments from national and sub-national governments to promote open government, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP brings together government and civil society champions of reform who believe governments are more effective and credible when they are open to public inputs and oversight.

PEAR: Participatory Evidence-based Action Research (PEAR) is a research approach to collect evidence for advocacy related but not limited to health, agriculture, education and disaster risk reduction. The PEAR report is used to develop advocacy messages for effective advocacy campaigns in targeted local governments.

PET: Public Expenditure Tracking (PET) surveys are audits of financial flows that aim to measure the proportion of government resources actually benefitting faculties. It measures the amount of funds received from a nation's treasury at each point in the chain of public service delivery to determine whether resources reach their intended destination or if there have been leakages along the way. Findings of PET surveys can provide evidence of corruption and be used for advocacy and campaigning.

PF: Partnership Forum (PF), or *Sajhedari Manch*, is a coalition formed at municipal levels and headed by the mayor of a municipality. PF discusses issues of public concerns forwarded from the Common Assembly and issues raised by the members. These forums often contribute by formulating policies specific but not limited to health, education, agriculture, gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), disaster risk reduction (DRR). Meetings of PFs are held every four months. Ward chairpersons, journalists, private sector representatives, women and Dalits are among the members in the Forum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The role of civil society and the media is indispensable for the establishment of good governance and democratic norms. Civil society and the media can play an important role in practising and enforcing values such as participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency as components of good governance. In addition, civil society and the media can also work effectively to streamline existing public service delivery mechanisms. The main role of civil society and the media can be seen in taking the initiative to minimise the abuse of authority by public bodies and in making the general public aware of various issues related to public service delivery.

To that end, Social Science Baha (SSB), with support from FHI 360, undertook a study to understand whether and how the capacities of civil society and the media have changed and to what extent they are contributing to the improvement of local governance across a number of sites. The study had two other objectives: i) to assess the contribution of the Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) in aligning local-level laws and policies along principles of human rights and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), and ii) to understand whether and to what extent the project has contributed to ensuring public participation, accountability and transparency and public service delivery.

Data collection for the study was done using qualitative methods which consisted of a survey of secondary literature, including CS:MAP reports, along with primary data collection. The latter consisted of 137 in-depth interviews (IDIs), 90 key informant interviews (KIIs), and 64 focus group discussions (FGDs). The data collection covered one municipality each in the 20 districts selected for the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions surrounding it, interviews were conducted remotely using phone calls, Messenger and Viber and virtual meeting platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams (MS Teams).

Considering the important role civil society organisations and the media can play in the field of public service, various activities conducted by CS:MAP have further strengthened the role of civil society organisations and the media in Nepal as a whole. These include advocacy and organisational capacity building training to civil society organisations working on the ground as well as, for the purpose of supporting good governance, technical assistance in the formulation of various laws and policies to governments at various levels. It is clear that various alliances initiated by CS:MAP at the district, municipal and ward levels with the objective of creating shared civic space and promoting public participation in the governance process are gradually improving the overall conditions of public participation, accountability and transparency in public service delivery. However, there are still some challenges in moving forward to ensure broader public participation at the policy-making level by correcting anomalies in governance. The persisting trust deficit between government authorities and civil society has hindered meaningful engagement of civil society in advancing good governance. Due to the current state of partisan politics and the failure to accept the role of civil society as an important part of governance, the overall goal of good governance in Nepal has not been achieved. Having to report to various government authorities at all three tiers of government has affected the smooth operation of CSOs as well.

Assessing the general state of participation and inclusion in the governance process, the representation of economically disadvantaged, ethnically and geographically backward and other minorities and marginalised communities appears to be very low and challenging. Although the Government of Nepal has tried to ensure the participation of the above-mentioned groups and communities through constitutional, legal and various policy provisions, in some cases it has not been possible to do so due to practical reasons. Pre-existing hierarchical power relations in terms of gender, caste/ethnicity and economic class have either implicitly prevented or discouraged those groups from being part of the governance processes. Apart from this, owing to unequal access to information technology and lack of equitable distribution of other resources, a significant section of the society appears to have been deprived of easy access to public services. This inaccessibility has become more entrenched particularly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aimed at improving the overall state of public participation, inclusiveness, accountability and transparency in governance, CS:MAP was able to register an improvement in public awareness of governance through a number of practices taken to strengthen and empower civil society organisations and the media. As a result of efforts made by the coalitions for public participation in governance, the general public's interest in the governance process as a whole has increased comparatively in the last few years. However, there is a big dilemma as to whether these changes introduced have been institutionalised enough to continue at the same pace after the completion of the project.

It is too early to ascertain whether CS:MAP activities have helped engender systemic change by ensuring participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency in governance processes. There have, however, been some noteworthy initiatives by the project which, if nurtured, can make civil society more legitimate, accountable and resilient, paving the way forward to good governance into the future.

Viewed in this light, the expected improvement in governance can be achieved if public bodies take ownership of the good and successful practices of CS:MAP and other projects aimed at maintaining broader public participation, inclusiveness, accountability and transparency in governance. There is room for improvement though. For instance, membership in CS:MAP-led coalitions, which have proved to be effective civic platforms, should be allowed to be more flexible so that more people can participate in coalition meetings. In addition, the capacity of the local media also needs to be increased further with technical and human resources so that it can continue to work with CSOs on furthering the public agenda related to public service delivery.

At the same time, governments at various levels need to pay special attention to equitable distribution of resources, including ICT tools, to ensure equal access to public services. Because many of the above-mentioned problems/complexities related to public service are guided by the availability of resources, ensuring proper distribution can increase public awareness as well as make public service and governance more inclusive, participatory and result oriented. Considering that lack of resources a major reason for some groups/communities being deprived of participation in the governance processes, CS:MAP and other projects should

consider providing additional livelihood-related support so that people from such communities would also be able to engage meaningfully in the governance process.

1 BACKGROUND

Devolution and decentralisation of power under a federal system of governance are expected to generate institutional accountability and allocative efficiency.¹ It is argued that local governments are better equipped to discern the priorities and concerns of their constituencies.² Under a decentralised system of federal governance, citizens and their organisations have more information to monitor and hold politicians accountable for their actions, and are able to coordinate in smaller numbers.³ As such, decentralisation and devolution are viewed as a means of reducing corruption and enhancing good governance.⁴

On the contrary, some argue that the beneficial governance effects of decentralised forms of governance are tenuous. There is empirical evidence to suggest that decentralisation can be of limited benefit,⁵ and that the public apparatus can be held captive to the preferences and interests of local elites, implying the inability of citizens to either monitor or hold politicians to account.⁶ The administrative and negotiation capacity of small administrative units under a federal structure can be very low. Thus, even though administratively small units are formed, power becomes centralised, and local governments are unable to meet the aspirations of the people and improve access to services as expected.⁷ This, eventually, may weaken the likely coordination between governments at different levels and reduce government accountability.

In both federal and pre-federal Nepal, as in other countries in the past and with the aim of enhancing accountable and transparent governance and participatory democracy,⁸ emphasis has been placed on the crafting and strengthening of liberal institutions of democracy, including a vibrant, dense and autonomous civil society and media. An active and independent civic space is considered intrinsic to a democratic society and rule of law. As mentioned earlier, it cannot, however, be assumed that citizens are equal and that civic associations are fully able to

¹ Gardener, J. & Heymans, C. (2012). Basic Services and Decentralisation. Briefing note for the World Urban Forum. Evidence on Demand, UK.

² Tommasi, M., & Weinschelbaum, F. (2000). A Principal-Agent Building Block for the Study of Decentralization and Integration. *Econometric Society World Congress 2000 contributed Papers 0457*, Econometric Society.

³ Bardhan, P. K. & Mookherjee, D (2000). Capture and Governance at Local and National Levels. *American Economic Review*, 90 (2): 135-139.

⁴ Persson, T., & Tabellini, G. (2002). Political Economics and Public Finance. In A. J. Auerbach & M. Feldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Economics (1549-1659)*. The Netherlands: Elsevier Science B.V. The Universal criteria of good governance are defined as Effectiveness, Rule of Law, Accountability, Equity, and Participation. Accountability's sub-criteria, for example, are Checks & Balances, Integrity, Transparency, Mechanism for Recourse, and Government Responsiveness. (USAID, Implementation Guide Good Governance Barometer: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00MRNJ.pdf)

⁵ Faguet, J.P. (2005). The Effects of Decentralisation on Public Investment: Evidence and Four Lessons from Bolivia and Colombia. *London School of Economics Crisis State Programme Working Papers 1(62)*. Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.

⁶ Bardhan, P. (2002) 'Decentralization of Governance and Development'. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16 (4): 185-205.

⁷ Grossman, G. and Lewis, J.I. (2014) 'Administrative Unit Proliferation'. *American Political Science Review*, 108(1): 196-217.

⁸ Diamond, L. (1999). *Developing democracy: Towards consolidation*. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press; Diamond, L. Linz, J. J., & Lipset, M. S. (1990). *Politics in developing countries: Comparing experiences with democracy*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

play an independent, pro-democratic role.⁹ Giving due consideration to power relations there is a need, therefore, to promote more institutionalised and democratic public spaces where civil society and local government can take decisions on public affairs openly and in favour of the public good.¹⁰

Civic space and civil society organisations (CSOs), including the media, play a crucial role in ensuring the rights of citizens from all socio-economic backgrounds, in identifying local needs, prioritising the public interest and agenda in local development plans and programmes, facilitating meaningful participation of people in the decision-making process, and holding institutions and authorities accountable—ultimately contributing to the consolidation of the democratic system.¹¹ Civic participation is also recognised as being crucial to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹²

Additionally, civic participation is expected to improve planning at the local level by institutionalising participatory practices; increasing planning efficiency in terms of budgeting and financial management; and by promoting inclusive and equitable development. At the same time, it has also been argued that a wide range of participatory spaces can cause inequality and domination while also providing space for corruption as participants can turn institutions to their own personal advantage.¹³

Although CSOs in Nepal have used their knowledge and expertise to advocate for social and political change, leading arguably to a fairer and more equal society, people’s understanding of CSOs is still very limited. The government does not acknowledge the role of civil society in shaping and implementing the public agenda either. There are marked differences between the state and civil society as the latter defines development, democracy, and social inclusion on their own terms.¹⁴ The laws and decisions made by the government often contravene the independence of civil society, as was evidenced after the 2015 Gorkha earthquake when the government enacted the ‘one-door policy’ for post-earthquake reconstruction, leading to a huge trust deficit between the state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The policy serves as a relevant example that reflects the government’s perception that the role of CSOs should be limited to areas of national need and priorities as defined by the government.¹⁵ In that case, it resulted in many NGOs diverting their resources from housing reconstruction to other less-controversial sectors such as education, health and water facilities.¹⁶

⁹ Carothers, T. (2002). ‘The End of the Transition Paradigm’. *Journal of Democracy* 13(1), 5-21; Harriss, J., Törnquist, O., & Stokke, K. (2004). *Politicizing democracy: The new local politics of democratisation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁰ Törnquist, O., Webster, N., & Stokke, K. (Eds.). (2009). *Rethinking popular representation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹¹ *Civic Engagement in Democratic Governance: Resource Book*. Ministry of Federal and General Administration, May 2019.

¹² Human Rights Council, ‘Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development’, 24 June–12 July 2019.

¹³ Does Citizen Participation Improve Local Planning? An Empirical Analysis of Stakeholders’ Perceptions in Nepal, *Journal of South Asian Development* 11(3):276-304. DOI:10.1177/0973174116667097

¹⁴ Bhatta, C.D. (2016). The Interface between the State and Civil Society in Nepal. *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 10: 63–91.

¹⁵ ICNL. (2017). *Assessment of the Legal Environment for Civil Society and Media in Nepal*. Washington D.C.: The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL).

¹⁶ Ming Lam, L., Khanna, V. & Kuipers, R. (2017). Disaster Governance and Challenges in a Rural Nepali Community: Notes from Future Village NGO. *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 37(2): 75–86.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 seeks to ensure inclusive and participatory democratic governance in Nepal. Although having faced a restrictive environment at various points, civil society has played a critical role in popular movements against autocratic and undemocratic systems and rulers at various points in the country's history.¹⁷ There is evidence though that civic space in Nepal has shrunk and been constricted in recent years, particularly through legislative or policy changes.¹⁸

It is in this context FHI 360 implemented the Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) with support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) between 2016 and 2021,. The overall goal of the project was to foster a more legitimate, accountable and resilient civil society in Nepal that is capable of advancing the public interest. It aimed to achieve this goal by accomplishing the following four objectives while incorporating the principles of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) across all project activities:

Objective 1: Strengthen the enabling environment for civil society and the media;

Objective 2: Improve the capacity of civil society and the media for effective policy advocacy and government engagement;

Objective 3: Heighten coordinated and effective civil society and media oversight of public resource use and public service delivery;

Objective 4: Strengthen the organisational capacity and sustainability of selected CSOs working in USAID priority sectors to advance local solutions; and

Objective 5: Improve enforcement of fundamental human rights enshrined in the Constitution.¹⁹

CS:MAP was implemented in 20 districts of the formerly Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western regions of the country along with 14 districts severely affected by the 2015 earthquake, covering a total of 57 municipalities in 34 districts. The project aimed to foster a more legitimate, accountable, inclusive and participatory governance, and a resilient and effective Nepali civil society capable of advancing the public interest through engagement with public institutions and the public space.²⁰ Among others, it planned to achieve this target by providing technical and other capacity enhancement support to various institutions, including CSOs and the media, on key themes adopted by the project, namely, health, education, agriculture (livelihoods), and disaster risk reduction, by addressing the barriers that inhibit civic engagement or restrict civic space.

¹⁷ J. Baniya, 'Civil Society, Social Movements and Democratisation: A Case Study of Nepal' (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2014), ISSN 1504-3991.

¹⁸ For details, see: Ritika Singh, Shambhawi Paudel, Sudeshna Tapa & Jeevan Baniya 2020. Civic Space in Nepal. The South Asia Collective, pp. 126-163; S. Nazneen and D. Thapa, 'The Implications of Closing Civic Space for Sustainable Development in Nepal' (IDS and ACT Alliance, 2019), <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/the-implications-of-closing-civic-space-for-sustainabledevelopment-in-nepal>; V-DEM, Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows. DEMOCRACY REPORT 2020. https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy_report.pdf.

¹⁹ Objective 5 was implemented in 2020 for a one year period only.

²⁰ USAID and FHI 360. Fact Sheet: Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP). January, 19, 2021.

In order to achieve these objectives, CS:MAP worked through implementing partners and employed strategies such as conducting trainings, orientation sessions and workshops for various stakeholders; providing grants and technical assistance to CSOs; engaging in policy seminars and dialogue, advocacy and social auditing as well as utilising media and outreach campaigns and tools—most notably, community scorecards, the Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI), and videos on civic engagement and civil society’s role.²¹

During the project period, FHI 360 took the lead in improving the advocacy, oversight and organisational capacity of CSOs while Equal Access International (EAI) mobilised experts to provide training and technical assistance to selected media organisations on radio programmes, investigative journalism and reporting. Likewise, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) provided legal and policy expertise support to CSOs in drafting and reviewing laws and policies to improve the enabling environment for CSOs and the media.²² CS:MAP also sub-contracted five intermediary service organisations (ISOs)—MITRA Samaj, Nepal Participatory Action Nepal (NEPAN), National Social Welfare Association (NNSWA), Shtrii Shakti and Kathmandu Living Labs (KLL)—to provide specific services and support to CSOs on organisational development, evidence-based advocacy, social accountability, and GESI-related topics.

In a bid to establish a mechanism and process for bottom-up coordination between individuals and institutions at the community, district and national levels, CS:MAP formed a coalition at all these levels. At the national level, CS:MAP partnered with national CSOs to engage stakeholders at the central level on issues affecting the operating environment for civil society and the media. This included working with existing network of its advocacy partners, the NGO Federation Nepal (NFN) and the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), in collaboration with district-level CSOs and journalist forums such as the Association of Working Women Journalists (WWJ) and Sancharika Samuha for advocacy. Going further, NFN and FNJ have signed a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) to recognise the alliance and continue to collaborate for better civic space and media freedom.²³

At the district level, CS:MAP formed a Health, Education, Agriculture, and Disaster Risk Reduction (HEAD) coalition of subnational CSOs to discuss concerns related to those sectors. The HEAD coalition focuses on strengthening joint advocacy to improve governance, promote social accountability and inclusive development by engaging with the authorities on existing policy. Since CS:MAP has also adopted existing CSO coalitions in the districts for the same purpose, existing coalitions can sometimes be known by different names in these districts other than HEAD.

Likewise, at the municipal level, Partnership Forums (PFs), headed by the Mayor/Chair of the municipality, discusses issues raised by the Common Assembly (CA) and makes action plans to address those issues. Meetings of the PF is held every three months in the presence of ward chairpersons, journalists, private sector representatives, women, Dalit and others in the community. The PF has an active role in strengthening partnerships between CSOs and the

²¹ This information has been drawn from a review of annual reports and progress reports made available by the CS:MAP programme team.

²² USAID and FHI 360. Annual Work Plan (Year 1) Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP). June, 03, 2016.

²³ USAID and FHI 360. Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) Mid-term Performance Evaluation, September, 2018.

local government. These forums often contribute by formulating policies related to health, agriculture, disaster risk reduction, GESI and education.

At the ward level, the CA brings together citizens, civil society actors and the local governments for meaningful engagement and interaction to identify and address pressing issues at the local level and whenever possible to resolve them. CA meetings are organised every three months by district-based partner CSOs of CS:MAP at local meeting spaces with internet access.²⁴ Radio listening groups called Listening Discussion Action Groups (LDAGs) are also active at the ward level. LDAGs hold regular meetings to discuss issues raised by the CS:MAP supported radio programmes, *Sajha Boli* and *Saathi Sanga Manka Kura* (SSMK). While youth members of LDAGs get information on current issues such as government policies and programmes, reproductive health, sexual violence, workplace discrimination and human rights among others from the radio, LDAGs' links with radio programmes also enable them to influence the content of the radio programme, thereby ensuring that government authorities at local, provincial and national levels become aware of local issues.²⁵

The CS:MAP project also prioritised the role of information and communications technology (ICT) to strengthen governance and for civic engagement. There is no consensus on how the socio-cultural, economic and policy environments determine the contribution of ICT towards development and governance although several studies have demonstrated its enabling role in advancing public interest and in effective, accountable and transparent governance as well as inclusive and participatory governance.²⁶ Through ICT, public institutions can share information about public matters or services and receive feedback from citizens at the same time. It also facilitates the participation of citizens and other relevant stakeholders in discussions and consultations about decision-making on policies and plans while also being instrumental in raising awareness and for advocacy.²⁷

These and similar practices initiated under the CS:MAP project can be very helpful in enhancing the role of civil society and the media as a whole. However, since the CS:MAP project was implemented only in limited administrative areas/units within the country, there still persists a risk that most of the positive outcomes the project has engendered, or may introduce in the future, have been or will be limited to specific areas, leaving a larger section of the country and people deprived of such outcomes.

²⁴ USAID and FHI 360. Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project (CS:MAP) Mid-term Performance Evaluation. September, 2018.

²⁵ This information has been drawn from a review of annual reports and progress reports made available by the CS:MAP programme team.

²⁶ Gagliardi, D., Misuraca, G., Niglia, F., & Pasi, G. (2019). How ICTs Shape the Relationship Between the State and the Citizens: Exploring New Paradigms Between Civic Engagement and Social Innovation. Proceedings of the 52nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

<https://doi.org/10.24251/hicss.2019.357>; Olphert, Wendy and Damodaran, Leela (2007) "Citizen Participation and engagement in the Design of e-Government Services: The Missing Link in Effective ICT Design and Delivery," Journal of the Association for Information Systems: Vol. 8 : Iss. 9 , Article 27. DOI: 10.17705/1jais.00140; Davies, Ian; Bennett, Lance; Loader, Brian; Mellor, Suzanne; Vromen, Ariadne; Coleman, Stephen; Xenos, Mike, 2012. Four questions about the educational potential of social media for promoting civic engagement. Citizenship Teaching & Learning, Volume 7, Number 3, 10 July 2012, pp. 293-306(14); Gigler, Bjorn-Soren, Decentralization, Clientelism and Popular Participation — Is There a Role for ICTs to Improve Local Governance? (April 17, 2009). Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Information and Communication ICTD, Carnegie Mellon University. Carnegie Mellon University, 2009.

²⁷ Civic Engagement in Democratic Governance: Resource Book. Ministry of Federal and General Administration, May 2019.

1.1 Civic Participation, Inclusion, Transparency and Accountability: Legal and Policy Frameworks

Favourable legal and policy arrangements are important in facilitating public participation and/or making the authorities responsible to ensure participation of the public in governance processes. With regard to the national legal framework in Nepal, the Constitution of Nepal defines the state of Nepal to be inclusive and states that there shall prevail no discrimination against citizens on any grounds.²⁸ The Constitution also specifies the state's commitment to ensure economic equality, prosperity and social justice based on the principle of participation and by eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, ethnicity, region, language, religion and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability.²⁹ It reserves the right to make special provisions purposefully to protect, empower and 'develop' women, Dalit, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslim and other indigenous and other minority groups as well.³⁰ These values of inclusivity and non-discrimination have also been affirmed in the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) signed between the Government of Nepal (GoN) and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The signatories to the CPA agreed to abide by the principles of social justice, people's right to information, accountability, transparency and participation in public services and independence of civil society, and to end problems specific to women, Dalit, indigenous people, Janajati, Madhesi, oppressed and all other minority communities by ending all forms of discrimination against these groups.³¹

In alignment with the constitutional provisions and with the objective of promoting gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), the Local Government Operation Act, (LGOA) 2017³²

²⁸ The preamble of the Constitution of Nepal specifies that the state of Nepal is committed to eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, region, language, religion and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability. Similarly, Article 4 of the constitution defines the state of Nepal as an inclusive state. (GoN. 2015. Constitution of Nepal. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.

<https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>)

²⁹ The preamble of the Constitution of Nepal specifies that the state of Nepal is committed to eliminating discrimination based on class, caste, region, language, religion and gender and all forms of caste-based untouchability. Similarly, Article 18(2) of the constitution mentions that the application of general laws will apply equally to all regardless of their origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, physical condition, condition of health, marital status, pregnancy, economic condition, language or region, ideology and the like. In addition to these provisions, Article 4 of the constitution defines the state of Nepal as an inclusive state. (GoN. 2015. Constitution of Nepal. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.

<https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>)

³⁰ In the Article 18(3) of the Constitution of Nepal, it's been stated that there shall prevail no discrimination against citizens on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language, region, ideology and the like. The article also specifies that the state could enact special laws with the objective of protecting, empowering and developing the groups of people/communities that have long been marginalised socially and culturally.

³¹ 'Comprehensive Peace Accord'.

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/NP_061122_Comprehensive%20Peace%20Agreement%20between%20the%20Government%20and%20the%20CPN%20%28Maoist%29.pdf. Accessed on 25 November 2021.

³² Section 12 of the Act specifies that the ward committee should prioritise women, Dalit, people with disabilities and marginalised and minority groups among others while conducting development activities in the ward. (GoN. 2017. Local Government Operation Act, 2017 (2074 B.S) (Nepali). Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission. <https://bit.ly/3Jcmxod>. Accessed on 27 November 2021)

requires local governments to prioritise developmental activities that benefit women, children and backward classes with meaningful involvement and participation of the local people in planning and implementation of development programmes at the local level. Likewise, various government bodies have formulated and implemented GESI guidelines for the purpose of mainstreaming GESI in their plan and programmes.³³ The government of Nepal has also introduced reservations and quota systems in public services and made provisions for the proportional representation of marginalised, women and minority groups in state affairs.³⁴

The Constitution of Nepal has prescribed that every citizen of the country shall have the freedom to assemble and form unions and associations and that no other laws and/or acts shall restrict them from doing so.³⁵ The Government of Nepal has also tried to facilitate/regulate the presence of civil society through various laws. The Social Welfare Act, 1992 and the LGOA, 2017 are two major legal instruments that recognise the role and importance of civil society in governance processes in Nepal. The Social Welfare Act, 1992,³⁶ in particular, entails the engagement of welfare-oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in carrying out social welfare and developmental activities for the overall betterment of individuals and communities, specifically the underserved. The Act also envisages a separate body called the Social Welfare Council for the purpose of facilitating the work of organisations involved in social welfare activities in Nepal. The LGOA, 2017 requires local government authorities to involve and create an environment for CSOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and other NGOs, cooperatives, consumers and the private sector in the planning and implementation of development activities and activities affecting service delivery processes.³⁷ Likewise, the Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008, too, requires public bodies to involve and consult all stakeholders, including civil society and the general public, in planning, implementation and decision-making processes related to matters of public interest.³⁸ Clause 29 of the act has even spelt out the provision of public hearings for the purpose of transparency, fair and lawful concerns. Freedom of Association (FoA) and Freedom of Expression (FoE) are considered two key facets of the democratic way of life and for broader participation of citizens in public affairs and decision-making processes.³⁹ These rights have also been enshrined in

³³ For example, see MoPIT. 2017. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Operational Guidelines, 2017. Kathmandu: Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport.

http://www.mopit.gov.np/actfile/Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20Mainstreaming%20GESI%20in%20MOPIT%20English-2_1569147282.pdf; MoHP. 2018. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy of the Health Sector, 2018. <https://mohp.gov.np/downloads/Gender%20Equality%20and%20Social%20Inclusion%20Strategy%20English%20Version%20FINAL.pdf>

³⁴ Druzca, K. 2017. Talking About Inclusion: Attitudes and Affirmative Action in Nepal. *Development Policy Review*, 35(2): 161–195.

³⁵ Article 17(2) of the Constitution of Nepal identifies ‘freedom to form unions and associations’ and freedom to assemble as fundamental rights of the citizens of the country. (GoN. 2015. Constitution of Nepal.

Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.

<https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>)

³⁶ GoN. 1992. The Social Welfare Act, 2049 (1992). Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.

<https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/social-welfare-act-2049-1992.pdf>

³⁷ GoN. 2017. Local Government Operation Act, 2017. <https://bit.ly/3Jcmxod>.

³⁸ See Section 4, 28, GoN. 2008. Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2064 (2008).

Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission. <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/good-governance-management-and-operation-act-2064-2006.pdf>.

³⁹ Thomas I. Emerson, ‘Freedom of Association and Freedom of Expression’, *The Yale Law Journal* 74, no.1 (1964), 35; Jack M. Balkan, ‘Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for

various international standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR).⁴⁰ With regard to the Nepal's national legal framework both these rights have been enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 along with the right to information.⁴¹ The preamble of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2007 stipulates the state's responsibility to be open, transparent and accountable and to ensure people's easy access to the information held in public bodies.⁴² The Act also clearly mentions the responsibility of state authorities to disseminate laws, policies and decisions on public issues and/or make them easily accessible to the public.⁴³

Similarly, the RTI Rules, 2009 details the responsibility of public bodies and procedure to information from public authorities.⁴⁴ For example, Rule 3 of the Rules states that it is the duty of public authorities to publish information related to programmes and/or projects run by public bodies in the previous fiscal year, details of the website of public bodies, and other details about public bodies which have been published elsewhere. Similarly, Rules 4 and 5 specify the fees required to acquire information from public bodies and the process to register an appeal to ask for information from these public authorities, respectively.

In order to make the public service sector accountable and transparent, the Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008 states that public hearings should be held at regular intervals.⁴⁵ Accountable governance requires a clear and efficient grievance redress mechanism.⁴⁶ The Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008 and the RTI Act, 2007 are key acts that guide the government and the public bodies to maintain grievance

the Information Society', New York University Law Review 79, no.1 (2004), 55; Stefan Sottiaux & Stefan Rummens, 'Concentric Democracy: Resolving the Incoherence in the European Court of Human Rights' Case Law on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association', International Journal of Constitutional Law 10, no. 1 (2012), 106-126.

⁴⁰ Articles 19 and 20. UN, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf; Articles 19(1), 19(2), 21 and 22(1). UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171; Articles 13(1) and 16(1). 'American Convention on Human Rights', <https://www.cidh.oas.org/basicos/english/basic3.american%20convention.htm>.

⁴¹ Article 17 of the Constitution of Nepal specifies 'Freedom of Opinion and Expression' and 'Freedom to Form Union and Associations' as two of the most vital fundamental rights of citizens. Similarly, Article 27 of the constitution has dispensed the right to information to the citizens of the country. (GoN. 2015. Constitution of Nepal. Nepal Law Commission, <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevaling-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal>, accessed on 28 November 2021.

⁴² GoN, Right to Information Act, 2064 (2007), Nepal Law Commission, <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/right-to-information-act-2064-2007.pdf>, accessed on 28 November 2021.

⁴³ GoN. 2007. Right to Information Act, 2064 (2007). Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission. <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/right-to-information-act-2064-2007.pdf>

⁴⁴ GoN, Right to Information Rules 2065 (2009), Nepal Law Commission, https://ntnc.org.np/sites/default/files/doc_page/Right%20to%20Information%20Regulation%202009%20%282065%20BS%29.pdf, accessed on 28 November 2021.

⁴⁵ Section 19 of the Act clearly states that public hearings must be conducted by the concerned authorities every four months.

⁴⁶ Alathur, S., Ilavarasan, P.V. & Gupta, M.P. (2012). Citizen Participation and Effectiveness of E-petition: Sutharyakeralam – India. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy* 6(4): 392–403. doi:10.1108/17506161211267536

handling/registration mechanisms.⁴⁷ Similarly, the Civic Engagement Resource Book (2019), introduced by the MOFAGA, has clearly stated that laws, policies and decisions should be well disseminated to the public.⁴⁸

Instead of a single legal framework, there are several laws and policies that govern the registration, management, operation and monitoring of CSOs and NGOs in Nepal.⁴⁹ One can seek registration of non-state organisations under the three different acts—the Association Registration Act, 1977; the National Directive Act, 1961; and the Companies Act, 2006.⁵⁰ In addition to these, the Social Welfare Act, 1992; the National Guidance Act, 2018; and the Poverty Alleviation Fund Act, 2006 are some other laws governing such organisations in the country.⁵¹

⁴⁷ As specified in Chapter 4, Clause 31 of the Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008, public offices shall maintain a complaint box in a visible place. To address such complaints, the responsible public institution shall open the complaint box every three days and take required initiatives in case of any reasonable suggestions or complaints in the box. [GoN. 2008. Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2064 (2008). Nepal Law Commission. <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/good-governance-management-and-operation-act-2064-2006.pdf>; Section 6 of the RTI Act, 2007 has laid down the provision of information officers in public bodies. These information officers are responsible for providing people (service seekers) with details about the services that can be accessed from the concerned public body. (GoN. 2007. Right to Information Act, 2007. Nepal Law Commission. <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/right-to-information-act-2064-2007.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. 2019. Civic Engagement in Democratic Governance Process Resource Book. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal (GoN), 93-98.

⁴⁹ GoGo Foundation. 2017. Legal Landscape Report on Civil Society Organisations of Nepal. <http://www.gogofoundation.org/downloads/CSMAP%20Report.pdf>

⁵⁰ ICNL. Nepal. <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/nepal> . Accessed on 12 December 2021.

⁵¹ GoGo Foundation. 2017. Legal Landscape Report on Civil Society Organisations of Nepal. <http://www.gogofoundation.org/downloads/CSMAP%20Report.pdf>

Table 1: Key laws and regulations governing civil society organisations in Nepal

Year	Act	Specific implications for civil society organisations
Existing		
1961	National Directive Act	The government can issue orders and instructions to organisations registered under the Act with regard to their activities as deemed appropriate. Any orders or instructions issued by the government is final and cannot be questioned in any court of law.
1977	Association Registration Act	The Act details requirements for registration and (annual) renewal, and of approval from the government. All of these provisions can be used for delaying the CSO registration process even though the Act provides no specific ground to reject an application for registration.
1992	Social Welfare Act	CSOs receiving foreign funding have to be affiliated with the SWC under this Act. In addition, CSOs must also receive case-by-case project approval in order to receive such funds from foreign sources. INGOs are also required to affiliate with the SWC.
2006	Companies Act	The Act has some safeguards against arbitrary denial of registration of any company even though it has some operational requirements for non-profit companies which do not apply to for-profit groups.
2012	Local Government Resource Mobility and Management Directive	CSOs need to provide details of activities to local authorities for the renewal process. In planning development projects, CSOs are required to prioritise projects currently under operation in local areas.
2017	Local Government Operation Act	Encourages CSOs, including NGOs, user committees, cooperative institutions, and other social and community organisations, to work in coordination with local governments. Several types of work require coordination and prior approval from local governments.
2019	International Development Cooperation Policy	International aid mobilised through Nepali groups has to be in line with government priorities, which is identified mostly as infrastructure development.
Proposed		
2014	Social Welfare and Development Act	Requirement of permission from Foreign Ministry; dissolution of NGO possible on orders of local authorities; SWC has the power to suspend or dissolve the Executive Committee of NGOs if engaged in activities that contravene their memorandum of understanding, or prevailing laws.
2018	National Integrity and Ethics Policy	Requires groups to seek government permission to receive foreign grants. INGOs banned from advocating on policy issues and from making ‘inappropriate allegations’, ‘spreading ill will’, or doing anything to ‘jeopardise the Nepali civilisation, culture, social relationships and harmony’.
2019	Bill to Amend and Consolidate Laws Relating to Establishment, Registration and Operation of Social Organisations	Meant to replace the Association Registration Act 1977, the National Directive Act 1961, and the Social Welfare Act 1992, CSOs are directed to choose only one area of work among 13 functional categories.

Source: Ritika Singh, Shambhawi Paudel, Sudeshna Thapa, Jeevan Baniya, ‘Civic Space in Nepal’ in *South Asia State of Minorities 2020* (New Delhi: The South Asia Collective, 2020), 126–163.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This report is based on a study conducted by Social Science Baha (SSB), Kathmandu to assess the impacts and contribution of the CS:MAP project in enhancing and promoting inclusive, participatory and effective governance through civic engagement. It tries to address the broad questions about whether and how civil society and the media have advanced public interest in the programme intervention areas.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- to identify how the project interventions have contributed to aligning laws and policies with constitutional guarantees, international standards and principles of human rights and gender equality and social inclusion at all three tiers of the government;
- to explore how and to what extent the project has helped ensure and strengthen public participation, inclusivity and accountability in public service delivery at the local level; and
- to understand whether and how the capacities and influences of civil society and media have evolved, and to what extent they have contributed to the improvement of local governance.

Table 2: Research Sites

SN	Municipality	District	Province	Ecological Region	Remarks
1.	Kalika Rural Municipality	Rasuwa	Bagmati	Mountain	Earthquake-affected
2.	Tamakoshi Rural Municipality	Dolakha	Bagmati	Mountain	Earthquake-affected
3.	Budhanilkantha Municipality	Kathmandu	Bagmati	Hill	Earthquake-affected
4.	Changunarayan Municipality	Bhaktapur	Bagmati	Hill	Earthquake-affected
5.	Khandadevi Rural Municipality	Ramechhap	Bagmati	Hill	Earthquake-affected
6.	Neelakantha Municipality	Dhading	Bagmati	Hill	Earthquake-affected
7.	Panauti Municipality	Kavre	Bagmati	Hill	Earthquake-affected
8.	Gorkha Municipality	Gorkha	Gandaki	Hill	Earthquake-affected
9.	Bheriganga Municipality	Surkhet	Karnali	Hill	CDCS
10.	Triveni Rural Municipality	Rukum-West	Karnali	Hill	CDCS
11.	Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality	Bardiya	Lumbini	Tarai	CDCS
12.	Duduwa Rural Municipality	Banke	Lumbini	Tarai	CDCS
13.	Bijaynagar Rural Municipality	Kapilvastu	Lumbini	Tarai	CDCS
14.	Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City	Dang	Lumbini	Tarai	CDCS
15.	Isma Rural Municipality	Gulmi	Lumbini	Hill	CDCS
16.	Triveni Rural Municipality	Rolpa	Lumbini	Hill	CDCS
17.	Gauriganga Municipality	Kailali	Sudurpaschim	Tarai	CDCS
18.	Krishnapur Municipality	Kanchanpur	Sudurpaschim	Tarai	CDCS
19.	Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality	Achham	Sudurpaschim	Hill	CDCS
20.	Amargadhi Municipality	Dadeldhura	Sudurpaschim	Hill	CDCS

1.3 Methodological Approach

1.3.1 Research Sites

A total of 20 municipalities in 20 districts (Table 2) were selected for the study from among the districts where CS:MAP was being implemented. The selection of municipalities was done with a view to ensuring the widest possible coverage and diversity in terms of ecological region and province, inclusion of municipalities from earthquake-affected districts as well as ensuring that all the CS:MAP partner CSOs were included.

1.3.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection was done in two phases. SSB had mobilised five two-person research teams, with each responsible for covering four municipalities. Roughly half the interviews and FGDs for all the 20 municipalities were undertaken in the first phase and a progress report submitted. The remaining interviews and FGDs were conducted in the second phase, which had the advantage of being informed by a discussion with the CS:MAP team on the progress report.

Interviewees and FGDs for the study were conducted between 19 August to 12 November 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions surrounding it, data collection had to be done remotely, using phones, social network platforms like Viber and WhatsApp and online meeting platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams (MS Teams). However, in at least three study sites,⁵² a few in-person interviews and FGDs were conducted as well. Although, as envisaged in the study proposal, the primary data collection for the study was to be held between July to September 2021, the process got delayed primarily due to poor network/internet connections across the study areas. Researchers had to make several rounds of calls to connect with interviewees before completing each interview.

Prior to commencing fieldwork, the research team underwent an intensive three-day orientation workshop held on 12-14 August 2021. In addition to providing researchers with an overview of CS:MAP, the researchers also participated in interactive discussions on interview checklists for all the stakeholders during the orientation workshop. Subsequently, all the interview checklists were revised for brevity and clarity following feedback received from the CS:MAP team. The research team also participated in an introductory meeting, facilitated by the CS:MAP team with CS:MAP partners at the local level held on 11 August 2021.

1.3.3 In-Depth Interviews with CS:MAP Implementation Team

A total of 137 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with the CS:MAP implementation team, including national advocacy partners, were conducted. In order to fill the information gaps noted in the first progress report submitted to FHI 360, the second phase of data collection also included follow-up interviews with 31 IDI interviewees from the first phase.

⁵² A few interviewees and/or facilitators in Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur, Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu and Panauti Municipality in Kavre requested the study team members to join them in person for interviews and FGDs in their municipalities.

IDIs were conducted with officials of local CSOs in each of the 20 municipalities in order to better understand the opportunities and challenges for realising the values and goals of more inclusive, accountable, transparent and effective governance and discern how and whether civil society and the media are advancing the public interest at the district, provincial and central levels of governance. The executive heads of organisations were interviewed to gather information about the overall institutional capacity of CSOs. Similarly, project/programme coordinators were interviewed for details relating to the implementation of the project—such as their experiences and lessons learnt as well as the gaps and limitations faced—and the level of engagement with local stakeholders.

The research team also conducted seven interviews with national advocacy partners to understand the policy advocacy efforts at the national level. The list of all the individuals interviewed is provided in Annex I.

1.3.4 Key Informant Interviews with Key Stakeholders

A total of 90 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with civil society members such as human rights defenders and journalists, representatives of local governments, and civil servants at local governments, among others. This number included eight follow-up KIIs as well. The interviews were conducted with journalists to assess the role of the media in enhancing civic engagement. Similarly, interviews were conducted with local government officials to understand their experience of working with CSOs and ascertain whether they are of the view that their skills and capacities have been enhanced following the CS:MAP interventions. (*Note: For the purpose of this report, ‘government officials’ refer to office-bearers of local governments while ‘civil servants’ refers to those from the civil service assigned to local governments.*) Also interviewed were two representatives of local intermediary service organisations (ISOs) which had trained CS:MAP grantees to explore practices and challenges in skills training and coaching on various CS:MAP-related activities.

The KIIs helped to identify practices, strengths and gaps in different interventions and strategies employed, and explore the role of various agencies involved in building capacities and the skills of leadership and staff of the institutions involved in programme implementation.

1.3.5 Focus Group Discussions with Key Stakeholders

Data collected included a total of 64 focus group discussions (FGDs) with the general public (i.e., indirect beneficiaries of CS:MAP). Participants for the FGDs were selected with the help of the direct beneficiaries identified as well as officials from the CS:MAP team. As far as possible, six to 10 participants consisting mainly of indirect beneficiaries (both males and females and belonging to different caste/ethnic groups) participated in each FGD. The study team coordinated with local facilitators to bring the participants together as a group for the remotely conducted FGDs while maintaining social distancing protocols.

In particular, the FGDs were conducted to understand social and other barriers to civic engagement or threats to ‘civic space’ and the identification of pathways to successfully advance collective the public interest through civic engagement. The FGDs were useful in exploring the engagement of CSOs and the media in policy advocacy and advancing the public interest and understanding the extent to which their activities have been sensitive to GESI

needs. The FGDs also helped to understand the status of public service delivery in the selected municipalities and rural municipalities and gauge public perceptions regarding the work of CSOs as well as that of public institutions and officials.

1.3.6 Roundtable Discussions with Key Stakeholders

Three province-level roundtable discussions were conducted successfully from 26 to 28 December 2021. These roundtable discussions were joined by various stakeholders at provincial and local levels, such as officials at the provincial line ministries, members of provincial parliaments, officials at the Provincial Policy and Planning Commissions (PPPCs), officials at Provincial Centre for Good Governance (PCGG), local government officials, civil servants at the local level, journalists, and CSO officials, among others. The SSB team presented key findings from the study at these roundtable discussions and collected suggestions pertaining to the study from the participants.

1.4 Challenges Faced During Primary Data Collection

1.4.1 Methodological Challenges

Some of the major challenges facing the study with regard to conducting interviews and FGDs remotely included connectivity issues and the obvious limitations in rapport building with the interviewees identified for the study. In most of the study sites, researchers had to call interviewees several times to build rapport before requesting a mutually suitable time to participate in the study. It was particularly difficult to interpret the tone of the interviewees and FGD participants or for researchers to make note of their facial expressions and gestures, both very crucial elements of the interview process.

Furthermore, due to poor digital literacy and lack of access to electronic devices and the internet, most of the FGD participants could not join FGD sessions from their homes. As a result, facilitators had to gather them in a place where the former used their own electronic devices to connect participants with the Kathmandu-based research team. Some of the facilitators were present throughout the FGD sessions, giving instructions to the participants on how to respond to particular questions despite repeated requests to refrain from doing so. When requested by researchers to leave the session, facilitators everywhere rightly said that they needed to be present in order to help the participants stay connected in case they faced connectivity issues.

Likewise, the use of a single electronic device (computer, laptop or mobile phone) to connect multiple FGD participants with the study teams resulted in discussions where only a few participants could engage actively. In most cases, the person(s) closest to the device (computer, laptop or mobile phone) ended up speaking the most while other participants had little to no engagement. As a result, researchers had to call out individual participants, urging each to share their experiences and impressions. The dynamics of an engaged discussion could thus not be replicated in such a setting.

Another challenge of conducting FGDs remotely was the difficulty in retaining FGD participants throughout the session. In the case of FGDs conducted in Kailali, Banke, Bardiya and Gulmi, the number of participants dropped from eight to two by the end of the sessions. In

Bardiya and Banke, FGDs were initially conducted with each participant connecting individually from their homes. However, this proved ineffective as participants failed to stay connected throughout the session and left the sessions abruptly, citing busy schedules or poor network connection.

Ensuring inclusive participation in the FGDs also proved difficult as most of the FGDs saw the participation of individuals from similar social backgrounds. Thus, some FGDs had either only females or males while some included individuals from only particular caste/ethnic groups. Some FGDs saw participation of individuals from the same household.

1.4.2 Logistical Challenges

Specifically, in the study sites in Achham, Dolakha, Gulmi, Ramechhap, Rolpa, and Rukum, unstable mobile networks and poor internet connection meant delays in arranging interviews and FGDs. As reported by the facilitators, conducting FGDs in the study sites in Rolpa, Achham, Rukum and Dolakha proved impossible due to poor internet connection and unstable mobile networks. In some cases, the facilitators had to conduct FGDs through phone calls after the electricity was cut off or due to poor internet connections.

1.4.3 Challenges with Regard to Facilitation

As agreed upon by the CS:MAP team and SSB, CS:MAP's local partner organisations helped the researchers to identify key informants and FGD participants. Although in the first few days of the data collection process, the researchers experienced some kind of hesitation on the part of local partner organisations in arranging FGDs, particularly when the study sites were in distant areas from CSOs' offices which required them to travel long distances, often on foot.

1.4.4 Other Practical Challenges

Another challenge was the reluctance of civil servants and government officials to take part in the study and at times they even cancelled pre-scheduled meetings citing their busy schedule. It also proved difficult to conduct interviews with civil servants and government officials during the second phase since it coincided with the major festivals (Dashain, Tihar and Chhat) in Nepal. Some civil servants and government officials who had initially agreed for interviews later even refused to entertain phone calls.

In some districts like Dolakha, Ramechhap and Kathmandu, local governments had imposed partial lockdowns (at the time of first phase of the study), which also prohibited CSOs from arranging FGDs. For instance, CSOs in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap expressed their ethical dilemma about inviting people in physical gatherings for FGD sessions when they themselves had suspended most of their project activities due to the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Selecting non-beneficiaries of CS:MAP as FGD participants turned out to be a tough task as well. The CSOs were hesitant to connect and coordinate with non-beneficiaries since they believed that the general population might not be entirely positive in their responses regarding the work and achievement of the CSOs but also because of difficulties in requesting individuals to come in a group setting amidst a pandemic.

2 KEY FINDINGS

The findings of the study have been broadly categorised into three main sections—the role and strategies of civil society and the media for enhancing governance; the relevance and effectiveness of civic engagement; and areas where civil society could be strengthened and the challenges thereof. The findings also make reference to CS:MAP’s interventions to discuss the impacts of the same and to measure whether and to what extent the civil society in the intervention areas have become legitimate, accountable and resilient. The caveat that this study is not an evaluation of CS:MAP’s interventions should also be noted here.

The section on the overall role of civil society describes the initiatives undertaken for the improvement in prevailing conditions of participation, inclusion, accountability, and transparency in the governance process. Special emphasis has been placed on identifying those aspects of public concern that have seen coordination between civil society and local government authorities. This section also outlines activities of national and local level authorities to engage civil society as a whole as well as those initiatives welcomed or shunned by the same authorities.

The second section on the relevance and effectiveness of civic engagement discusses various concepts related to civic engagement and the main components and elements affecting civic engagement and civil society activities at the district, (rural)municipality and ward levels. The final section analyses the key challenges facing civic engagement with a particular focus on areas that require further focus for enhanced civic participation. It should be pointed out though that the details presented in each section need to read as a continuum since they are closely interlinked.

2.1 Enhancing Governance through Civil Society and Media

Government officials, civil servants and CSO workers across the board reported that CSOs in general have played an instrumental role in increasing civic engagement and participation both in decision-making processes and ensuring prompt and improved public service delivery. In addition to contributing to government accountability towards the public and lobbying with local governments for improved public services, CSOs have also been involved in providing relief to vulnerable populations.

In at least three sites, working closely with local authorities, CSOs were known to have been actively involved in providing relief and rehabilitation support to victims of natural disasters.⁵³ CSOs were active in some these areas even during the Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), working as contact points between locals and the authorities when government offices had been confined mostly to the district headquarters.⁵⁴ CSOs have also been providing support to vulnerable groups not reached by elected local bodies. In Achham, for instance, CSOs have

⁵³ Interviews with Member, HEAD coalition, Rolpa, 04112021; member (HEAD), Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 03112021; and head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura, 29082021.

⁵⁴ Interviews with CSO official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; member (HEAD), Dolakha, 03112021 and CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021.

been providing regular cash support to orphans, the landless and returnee migrants, particularly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as it was difficult for these vulnerable populations even to meet their daily needs.⁵⁵

CSOs have also worked to correct existing anomalies in the public service sector. In order to keep government officials accountable to the general public, CSOs employed various strategies such as lobbying government officials and civil servants, attending community events and organising rallies and protests and the like. For instance, CSOs in Banke were able to pressure officials of the District Land Revenue Office through sit-ins outside the office to establish a help desk and put up a citizens' charter in the office premises.⁵⁶ The sit-in had been organised against the involvement of intermediaries in many other government offices.

Similarly, in Panauti Municipality in Kavre, a CSO-led initiative helped a ward office reduce *beruju* (financial irregularities)⁵⁷ after CSOs continuously lobbied for it, leading the ward chairperson to form an 'Beruju Minimisation Committee'. The committee reviewed the details of financial transactions of various users' groups and ensured financial compliance, resulting in reduction of irregularities. Encouraged by the results and to make the campaign sustainable, the ward office also provided training to the chairpersons and secretaries of different users' groups in the municipality on curbing such financial irregularities.⁵⁸ As a result, public trust in the ward office has increased. A government official from Panauti Municipality in Kavre said,⁵⁹

When I first assumed office, there used to be a lot of irregularities. Now that CS:MAP's partner organisation in the municipality continuously lobbies for transparency and accountability in the municipal-level budget, *beruju* is almost non-existent.

In all the (rural)municipalities covered in the study, CSOs have also helped create a shared civic space for government officials, civil society representatives, civil servants and the general public, where they can come together to identify, discuss and find solutions to locally pertinent issues. CSO representatives from six study sites referred to CSOs as the 'bridge' connecting service providers (local governments) with service recipients (people).⁶⁰ A CSO worker from Bardiya stated that CSOs have risen above their institutional and ideological interests to deal with issues of common concern, which has contributed to effective and efficient public service delivery, meaningful public participation, transparency and accountability locally.⁶¹ As a

⁵⁵ FGD, Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 24082021 and journalist, Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 25082021.

⁵⁶ CSO worker, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021. In order to provide detailed information about the services provided by any public office, a Citizens' Charter is kept inside the office premises so that the service recipients can access it easily. The Citizens' Charter reflects the office's commitment to quality and timely service delivery, grievance redressal mechanism, transparency and accountability.

⁵⁷ Financial Procedure Act, 1999 defines the term *beruju*, or an 'irregular amount' is 'a transaction carried on without fulfilling requirements as per prevailing law or a transaction of which such accounting as to be maintained has not been maintained or a transaction which has been carried on in an irregular or unreasonable manner'. (GoN, Financial Procedures Act, 1999. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission. <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/financial-procedures-act-2055-1999.pdf>.)

⁵⁸ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

⁵⁹ Interview with government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021.

⁶⁰ Interviews with CSO official, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; CSO representative, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021; CSO official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; Civil Society Member, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 29082021; FGD, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 22092021.

⁶¹ Interview with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

result, they have succeeded in developing a ‘we feeling’ among local people in the rural municipality. In Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura, CSOs active in the municipality jointly demanded that the local government construct a community health post that would serve as a safe place for pregnant women during medical check-ups. Following several rounds of meetings and discussions with government officials, a health post was constructed in the municipality, providing relief to pregnant women who had to face the indignity of undergoing check-ups out in the open.⁶²

2.1.1 CSO-Media Collaboration

Interviewees across all the sites mentioned the potential of the media, with the support of CSOs, of playing an important role in identification of issues more effectively. Public awareness and information dissemination can be strengthened through the media, and even minor issues can generate wider attention when the media and CSOs work in collaboration. CSOs and media have worked together to improve public service delivery through activities such as monitoring public services, identifying peoples’ grievances, and forwarding the issues to concerned bodies. CSOs and the media also help to ensure inclusive participation in development projects.

In most of the study areas, the media helps publicise issues of general concern raised by CSOs to the public and concerned bodies.⁶³ Thus, research participants expressed a strong belief that CSOs and the media complement each other and regarded their joint advocacy efforts for effective public service delivery to have been successful. For example, in Kavre district, CSOs raised their voice against the unlawful taxation imposed by the municipal government. The locals in the area had been paying revenue on land that had already been appropriated by the government for the construction of roads.⁶⁴ CSOs brought this matter up for discussion and the media also raised this issue. As a result of this joint effort, Panauti Municipality enacted a procedure for proper and effective regulation of the land acquisition process. Similarly, an FGD participant from Bijaynagar Rural Municipality in Kapilvastu said that the police check-point at Bijaynagar conducted a public hearing for the first time following pressure for the same from the media.⁶⁵

In Gorkha Municipality, CS:MAP had launched the Civil Society Joint Action Programme under which regular meetings were held between the media and civil society every two months. As a result, it led to a common understanding, perception and thinking between the two groups and made their advocacy effort more effective.⁶⁶ Collaboration meant the media was able to give publicity to issues raised by the civil society, create a debate and put pressure on public service providers.

In Panauti Municipality, Equal Access Nepal produced radio programmes on education, health, agriculture, and disaster management.⁶⁷ With regard to the last, the radio programme provided details such as the beneficiary population, number of displaced households, and progress on post-earthquake reconstruction. The radio also aired an informative programme on the toll-free

⁶² Interview with CSO worker, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021.

⁶³ Interviews with Civil Society Member, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 29082021; journalist, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 20082021)

⁶⁴ Interview with CSO official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021.

⁶⁵ FGD, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 27092021.

⁶⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

⁶⁷ Interview with journalist, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 31102021.

number of the National Women's Commission for prevention of domestic violence and human trafficking along with one that dealt with issues that could not be heard quickly by the Judicial Committee of the municipality.

Stressing the importance of collaboration between CSOs and the media, a journalist from Bheriganga Municipality in Surkhet mentioned how a joint initiative was able to bring about improvement in the health system in the municipality.⁶⁸

Until recently, the presence of health workers at health posts under the Bheriganga Municipality was almost negligible. But a joint initiative of CSOs and the media active at the local level for some time called for vigilance on the mandatory presence of health workers in the health posts in the municipality. As a result, there is a regular presence of health workers in all the health posts within the municipality.

Likewise, in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan in Dang, in order to strengthen collaboration between CSOs and the media, a network called 'Free Media Network' has been formed. The network holds meetings every two months to discuss matters that need to be raised, followed up by joint advocacy. According to a journalist there, this collective effort has led to many positive changes in Dang and recent improvements seen in the health sector in the district is being seen as exemplary.⁶⁹ He also credited the CSO-media collaboration for the resumption of the construction of a four-lane road in Dang which had been halted for various reasons by the contractors.

Journalists from all the (rural) municipalities covered were unanimous in their view that the role of the media had increased since the 2017 local elections. Where the media used to prioritise only political events, since the formation of local governments, the press has begun covering a wide range of issues such as education, health, agriculture, and public service delivery. Further, media organisations have also started appointing municipality-based reporters.

Journalists from four study sites said they and their media houses have become independent of influence of actors such as business interest groups and require no support from external parties to sustain themselves.⁷⁰ Most of these media houses subsist on money raised through advertisements and voluntary support from different community-based organisations (CBOs). Further highlighting the growing significance of new media companies, the journalists from all the study sites held that more people in their (rural) municipalities have access to information than in the past. Previously, the radio and weekly newspapers were the only sources of information for most whereas in recent years due to advancement in ICT, the number of media outlets has also gone up. There is also greater access to news and information due to increased access of people to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. The journalists argued that this has led to healthier competition among media companies and impartial coverage of events. A radio journalist from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rukum West said that media

⁶⁸ Interview with journalist, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 20082021.

⁶⁹ Interview with journalist, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 31102021.

⁷⁰ Interviews with journalist, Changuarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 26082021; journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021; journalist, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 21082021 and journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021.

outlets in the district themselves have started training journalists on ethics of journalism and other aspect aimed at enhancing their capacity.⁷¹

At the same time, there have also been some cases where the media has not been able to fulfil its watchdog role mainly because of lack of resources. In such a scenario, engaging in evidence-based advocacy (EBA)⁷² or investigative journalism, which requires time, money and effort, is a challenge in itself.⁷³ And even when journalists prepare well-researched reports, media houses do not always consider such news worthy of publication or broadcasting.⁷⁴

Regarding perceptions of the media, FGD participants in most of the study sites were of the view that journalists do not mislead people and that they provide the right information to people; the media has contributed to expanding access of people to information; and public hearing programmes organised by the media are increasing their effectiveness. For instance, a journalist from Ramechhap said that the media play a significant role in raising people's awareness and improving public service delivery by prioritising common peoples' issues, advocating for better public service delivery, collecting grievances, monitoring activities of several government offices, and facilitating public hearing programmes of government offices.⁷⁵

While journalists accuse government officials of trying to avoid the media, fearing that their activities would be exposed,⁷⁶ there are also those who say reporting is guided by journalists' political affiliation and focus on urban centres.⁷⁷ According to a journalist from Gulmi, people perceive the media as biased due to their links with political parties. Journalists are considered members of political parties and carry news of 'their' party while minimising the views of the other parties.

While most of the interviewees involved said that CSOs have played an important role in making the public sector inclusive and transparent, that was not always the case with the media. Residents from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap reported not having seen any journalist reporting on everyday issues from their area.⁷⁸ Regarding the presence of the media at the local level, the media was uniformly blamed as being city-centric. FGD participants in three study sites held the common opinion that poor people living in rural areas are always ignored by the media.⁷⁹ An FGD participant from Dhading said,⁸⁰

⁷¹ Interview with journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum west, 29082021.

⁷² EBA is an approach for advocacy that involves processes from identification and prioritisation of issue-to-issue analysis, strategy formulation, defining an advocacy plan, execution of an advocacy plan, monitoring and evaluation and plan incorporation. (USAID & FHI 360, Participatory Evidence Based Action Research (PEAR) toolkit, n.d.<https://bit.ly/31aUAvR>)

⁷³ Interview with journalist, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 23082021.

⁷⁴ Interview with journalist, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 23082021.

⁷⁵ Interview with journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 31102021.

⁷⁶ Interviews with journalist, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021; journalist, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 27082021.

⁷⁷ Interviews with government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

⁷⁸ (FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021.

⁷⁹ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19092021; FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021.

⁸⁰ FGD, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30092021.

It takes about 15-20 minutes to get to Dhadingbesi, the nearest town to my village, from my home. Our place, despite being so close to the urban centre, does not have good access to the media. I have not seen any media covering the issues in our place.

FGD participants in five districts said that due to the political affiliations of journalists, the media is not effective since they deal only with political news.⁸¹ FGD participants from Ramechhap expressed a lack of faith in the local media since the major political parties have their own journalists' groups and the governing party at the local level invites only those affiliated to their party to their programmes or disseminates information only through them.

2.1.2 Shrinking Civic Space

Various factors seem to have created barriers to the effectiveness of CSOs and the media in recent times. CSO and media interviewees from seven study sites reported a narrowing of the civic space in their (rural) municipalities after the 2017 local elections. They identified the intimidating and controlling nature of government officials and civil servants as a major hindrance to the proliferation of civic space in Nepal since then.⁸² In the words of a journalist from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap,⁸³

In the newly introduced federal system, local government officials consider themselves the most important stakeholder responsible for public service delivery in the municipality. They are not interested in listening to advice or concerns from anyone. Civil servants, who, in the absence of locally elected bodies in the country from 2002 to 2017, were the only officials in local governments across the country, are not keen to listen to the concerns of anyone either.

A CSO official from Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi echoed that view.⁸⁴

After the formation of local governments in 2017, the role of civil society in the municipality has been largely undermined. That is because the local government has the power to formulate plans and policies on its own, without necessarily asking for help even from federal and provincial governments. Subsequently, this has developed into a situation where civil society actors have been largely ignored during planning and monitoring.

Similarly, a CSO official from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that both elected and administrative officials consider themselves 'not as people's servants, but as their masters'.⁸⁵ An official working with CS:MAP's local partner organisation in Triveni Rural

⁸¹ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19092021; FGD, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur, 24092021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021; FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 01102021; FGD, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30092021.

⁸² Interviews with civil society activist, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 25082021; CSO representative, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021; CSO representatives, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; member (HEAD), Dolakha, 03112021; CSO representatives, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021/20082021; journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 01112021; CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

⁸³ Interview with journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 01112021.

⁸⁴ Interview with civil society activist, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 25082021.

⁸⁵ Interview with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

Municipality in Rukum West claimed that government officials were hesitant to work with CSOs.⁸⁶ He explained,

First of all, government officials in our region are reluctant to make any improvement in the public service sector due to advocacy initiatives undertaken by CSOs. They think that the only institution approved by the people is the local government. These civil servants are also of the opinion that the local government itself is capable of working on people's issues and does not need any support from CSOs.

FGD participants in Panauti Municipality in Kavre, however, attributed a very different reason for the reduction in the role of CSOs in their municipality. The FGD participants said that after the local governments were formed in 2017 the role of CSOs has been reduced as citizens can contact the government officials on their own and do not need CSOs to serve as facilitators.⁸⁷

Interviewees from three study sites said that it has been comparatively more difficult for them to deal with civil servants than elected officials.⁸⁸ This, they said, was because of the high turnover of the former with new one assuming office every three months, requiring CSOs to explain to them over and over about the intervention being undertaken. This frequent transfer of government employees at the local level has weakened the advocacy effort while also delaying programme activities. A CSO official from Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali elaborated on his experience of working with government officials and civil servants,⁸⁹

It takes time to make new civil servants and government officials understand. Due to differences in perspectives on governance between CSOs and civil servants, it is difficult particularly for advocacy. These civil servants and government officials are generally resistant to proposed changes made by CSOs. However, there are a few who are always open to listening to CSO officials and integrating their suggestions into policies and plans.

An official working with CS:MAP's local partner organisation in Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu said that due to the legal requirement to be registered at the local level, CSOs have not been able to be independent of influence from the local government.⁹⁰

I believe that the provision of NGOs having to go through the bureaucratic procedure for registration itself is flawed. Such a provision constrains people's right to freedom of association and freedom of expression. They [the local government] often threaten CSOs, saying that they could cancel our registration if CSOs do not function as per local government authorities' interest. I strongly believe that CSOs other than those who work on financial issues need not be compelled to go through this bureaucratic process. Otherwise, it will be difficult for us to function freely.

Apart from the lack of interest on the part of the newly formed local governments to engage with other stakeholders, mutual accusations between and among government officials, civil servants and CSOs have also played its part in lowering the level of engagement of CSOs in

⁸⁶ Interview with CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021.

⁸⁷ FGD, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 28092021.

⁸⁸ Interviews with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 21082021; CSO representatives, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021/14092021; government official, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021.

⁸⁹ Interview with CSO representative, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021.

⁹⁰ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021.

governance processes. CSO representatives accused government officials and civil servants of being arbitrary and conservative.⁹¹ CSO members from four study sites mentioned that local government authorities invite only those CSOs that share similar political ideologies in the process of selection of plans, budgeting, and policy formulation.⁹²

On the other hand, civil servants from two study sites claimed that CSOs link up with political parties even though they are expected to oversee the activities of bodies like political parties.⁹³ A civil servant from Panauti Municipality in Kavre explained why the linkage was necessary.⁹⁴

CSOs in the municipality are afraid that if they do not take the side of a political party, it will be very difficult for them to be awarded projects. And, even if they did, it would be almost impossible for them to undertake their projects successfully without the support of government officials.

2.2 Relevance and Effectiveness of Civic Engagement

This study found that the overall conditions of civic engagement has improved gradually in recent times. People's access to public services has increased, so has the degree of inclusion, accountability and transparency in public service delivery. The initiatives taken with the objective of discussing and deliberating issues related to public service have achieved significant success in eliminating distortions seen in the public service sector as well as in society. Interviewees everywhere stated that coalitions initiated as part of CS:MAP's intervention have been very helpful not only for civic engagement but for oversight of public service delivery processes as well. Since these coalitions' membership includes government officials, civil servants, journalists, CSO officials and representatives of the private sector, bodies such as the CAs, PFs and HEAD have gained added legitimacy.

These coalitions provide space for interactions and collaboration among the general public, CSOs and government officials. There remain though possibilities for greater CSO engagement with local governments and district-based government agencies. A former CSO worker in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang said these coalitions have fostered a culture of 'teamwork', proving that social problems can best be resolved through the collective effort of all the stakeholders.⁹⁵ These coalitions discuss and solve not only issues related to public service delivery, but also engage in social issues like domestic violence, COVID-19 vaccination, *chhau pratha*,⁹⁶ child marriage, labour and education, among others.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Interviews with CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO representative, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021.

⁹² Interviews with member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 04112021; CSO representative, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021.

⁹³ Interviews with civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021; civil servant, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021.

⁹⁴ Interview with civil servant, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021.

⁹⁵ Interview with former CSO worker, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021.

⁹⁶ *Chhau pratha* is a customary practice prevalent mostly in the far-western hills of Nepal in which women and girls are kept secluded in huts and animal sheds away from their homes during menstruation.

⁹⁷ Interviews with the head of CS:MAP's partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 29082021; community reporter (LDAG), Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 25082021; Ward Member, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021.

Interviewees and FGD participants in all the study sites said that the general public have been using these platforms to learn and share their ideas, knowledge and experiences. As these coalitions are groups consisting of citizens' representatives from different backgrounds, government offices have now started addressing the concerns forwarded by coalitions more easily.

The majority of the research participants agreed that the coalitions initiated and supported by CS:MAP have helped raise issues of public concern more effectively, which would not have been possible through only an individual's effort. Some of these are general such as those related to health, education, administrative irregularities, but also include ones specific to certain groups like farmers and landless. In many study sites, as a result of these coalitions, there have been significant changes in the way public services are delivered. Coalitions have also been instrumental in improving administrative irregularities and inconsistencies such as delays in providing services to service recipients and ambiguity surrounding public expenditure. Most CSO members said that the involvement of government officials in these coalitions has also increased their effectiveness.

These civic engagement platforms have not been free from challenges. The more pressing ones are conflicts of interest between different members of these platforms and the fact that most of coalition members are guided by their own political interests.

2.2.1 Civic Engagement at Municipal and Ward Levels

Initiatives for civic engagement at the municipality and ward levels have been relatively more effective given their relatively small size, making it easy for contact to be established. Government officials from most of the study sites agreed that local coalitions such as LDAG, CA and PF have helped bridge the gap between local representatives and the public, enabling both to come together to discuss and resolve issues of public concern.

According to participants in this study, one of the reasons for the recent increase in civic engagement is the presence of ward and municipal level coalitions which enable discussion of issues of public interest or public service in those forums before being taken to the concerned authorities for redressal. These mostly have to do with delays and irregularities in the public service but the coalitions are also able to highlight matters that require special priority to be provided by public bodies. For instance, as stated by a CA member from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa, after a meeting with the health post in charge, they were able to convince the health post to print the names of the medicine available in the health post in Nepali.⁹⁸ Similarly, in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang, the PF and CA together raised the issue of sickle cell disease (SCD)—a group of blood disorders, commonly seen among the people from Tharu community.⁹⁹ In this context, the local CSOs along with the coalitions conducted evidence-based advocacy and lobbied for a 'special package' for patients stricken with SCD. Consequently, the City of Dang allocated a budget of 1 million rupees for SCD patients while also conducting various awareness campaigns on SCD.¹⁰⁰ In Gorkha

⁹⁸ Interview with member (CA), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 30082021.

⁹⁹ Pande, R, Ghimire, P.G., Chand, P.B. & Gupta, S. (2019). Sickle Cell Disease in Western Nepal. *Nepal Journal of Medical Sciences* 4(1): 15-19.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with CSO workers, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 27082021/28082021.

Municipality, a PF member said that the forum began monitoring the process of building a COVID-19 hospital and an isolation centre for COVID-19 patients in the municipality.¹⁰¹

LDAG members from Bheriganga Municipality in Surkhet said that in the agriculture sector, the LDAG was successful in convincing the municipality office to issue farmer identity cards. Farmers with ID card were entitled to receive seeds and chemical fertilisers from the municipality office at a subsidised rate. The LDAG also provided support to the municipality to collect details about landless people in the ward.¹⁰² Apart from these initiatives aimed at improving administrative practices as well as physical infrastructure, these coalitions have also been instrumental in preventing social ills such as child marriage and child labour. For instance, in Panauti Municipality in Kavre, an LDAG successfully collaborated with a local child network to prevent child marriage and child labour, and protect child rights.¹⁰³

In Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura, CS:MAP's partner in the Municipality has formed LDAGs which have functioned as a bridge between the local government and the people. For example, as a result of the effort made by one LDAGs, the municipal government appointed a female health worker at a birthing centre in the municipality where earlier there were no women.

CS:MAP-supported radio programmes have been very effective for public awareness in Gorkha Municipality as well. Radio programmes such as *Sajha Boli* (covering the developmental work of local governments), *Bhanchhin Aama* (covering child-health, women's health and nutrition) and *Rope Guna Fal* (covering best parenting practices, sexual reproductive health, child marriage, and other social issues) have been very effective in raising awareness among people.¹⁰⁴ Broadcasting of such programmes has helped raise the level of awareness, as one female LDAG members put it,

The broadcasting of health-related programmes through *Sajha Boli* radio programme has succeeded in ending the untouchability practised at the time of menstruation. We do not need to stay away from home during menstruation and are aware about measures required for good sanitation.

Problems related to health, agriculture, disaster and education are discussed in the CA. While some of these get resolved easily, others take time or are delayed. Community Reporters (CRs)¹⁰⁵ have created media content related to issues raised in LDAGs and aired them on the local FM.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, members of LDAG discuss and act on issues raised in the radio programme *Sajha Boli*.¹⁰⁷ For example, an FGD participant from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan

¹⁰¹ Interview with member (PF), Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021.

¹⁰² Interview with CAR, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 22082021.

¹⁰³ Interview with community reporter, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 22082021.

¹⁰⁴ FGD, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 24092021.

¹⁰⁵ Community reporters are EAI trained youths who are responsible for reporting on various local issues related to public resource use and service delivery. Meanwhile, these CRs also try to ensure that the voices of women and marginalized groups are raised. They are also responsible for holding local dialogues on social accountability, thus creating a link between civil society, media, government and community members. (USAID & FHI 360, Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project: Annual Work Plan [Year 1], 2016.)

¹⁰⁶ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021.

¹⁰⁷ *Sajha Boli* is a radio programme produced by Equal Access International (EAI) and ten other radio stations across the country on national as well as local issues pertaining to good governance and mutual accountability

City in Dang said that when the question of domestic violence is discussed, members of LDAG visit victims of domestic violence and provide them with some support.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, coalitions are also active in monitoring local governments and their activities. According to FGD participants from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, allowances (social security allowances and other allowances such as training allowance and meeting allowance) provided by the local government have been distributed on the basis of favouritism and nepotism. However, the situation changed after the CA monitored it and analysed the data received from the local government regarding allowances.¹⁰⁹

The coalitions are also found effective in advocating for the betterment of health facilities. An FGD participant from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya stated that once a woman was refused *sangini sui* contraceptive injection by someone in the health post since it was not unavailable. The LDAG raised the issue in its meeting and members of the coalition, along with staff from local FM and the local CSO, visited the health post. Following discussion, the health officials accepted some weakness on their part and assured improvement in health services. Additionally, participants of Panauti Municipality of Kavre district acknowledge the efforts made by CA and LDAG in improving health services in the municipality. In this connection, a participant said the local health post used to stay open only till two in the afternoon. The CA and LDAG drew the attention of the local government and demanded an increase in the opening hours of the health post by three hours. The local representatives took the demand positively and decided that the health post would remain open till five in the evening.¹¹⁰

A female FGD participant from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke said that the role of the CA in raising a voice on public issues (such as infrastructure development, cooperative formation, hygiene, public service delivery and so on) has brought positive change in her locality.¹¹¹

CA raised the voice against Bheri Distillery as it produced a lot of water pollution, affecting cattle, humans and plants. So, we had a discussion with the rural municipality. The smell from the factory is very bad and residents of Aamrauwa have to suffer a lot.¹¹² Though the distillery has given its commitment to address the matter, no action has been taken in this regard so far.

Similarly, an FGD participant from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke said that dumping of stones and pebbles near the community had been a problem and that the issue was raised in the CA and LDAG. One house in the area had been submerged due to blockage of flood water. Although the CA did raise the matter it is yet to be resolved.¹¹³

Additionally, coalitions hold discussion and activities on issues like maintenance of rural roads, effectiveness or problems in vaccination programmes, and functioning of public schools.¹¹⁴ In

between the government, CSOs and media. The radio programme is broadcasted by 39 radio stations across the country every week.

¹⁰⁸ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 22092021.

¹⁰⁹ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021.

¹¹⁰ FGD, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 27092021/28092021.

¹¹¹ FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021.

¹¹² Aamrauwa is a village in Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke.

¹¹³ FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021.

¹¹⁴ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 30092021.

Panauti Municipality in Kavre, the CA assisted by reorienting the scholarship for school children to targeted communities.¹¹⁵ FGD participants in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang lauded the activities carried out by an LDAG during the lockdown.¹¹⁶ The LDAG had conducted activities such as providing free tuition to the children during lockdown, distributing masks to school students, and conducting awareness programmes on health, hygiene, and cleanliness.

FGD participants across all the study sites held the opinion that CAs and LDAGs have empowered youths in their (rural) municipalities. As a result, people are now able to fearlessly ask for details about services and expenditure from the municipal and ward authorities. Being part of LDAGs, the youth population in all the sites covered in the study has come to know about good practices in governance in other parts of the country as well. Since most of the FGD participants have come to know about the importance of transparency and accountability in governance through radio programmes, they consider the media to be a powerful source of information to learn about FoA and FoE in detail. Respondents in FGDs in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap and Changuarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur, however, said that the idea of FoA and FoE were quite complex in that only politically and socially active people or those having affiliation with various organisations could understand what these actually meant.¹¹⁷

FGD participants from Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali and Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha were unanimous in their view about the need for CSOs should not be subjected to political influence.¹¹⁸ They said that CS:MAP-supported CSOs have been able to connect and empower people, primarily youths, in their municipalities through coalitions such as the CA and LDAG, enabling them to raise local concerns with local government authorities.

Government officials in all the study sites also reported that they, too, have benefitted from various training and technical assistance provided by CSOs in their municipalities. It is because these municipal authorities could work jointly with CSOs in the process of drafting various local level laws and policies that they acquired essential knowledge about law and policies and their importance. These officials have also come to learn about issues like transparency, accountability, and inclusion by participating in policy dialogue series and through capacity building workshops organised by CSOs. For instance, a government official from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that she learnt to think about the plans and policies from a human right perspective by participating in the workshop conducted by human rights experts who had come from Kathmandu.¹¹⁹ It was only after she had participated in the workshop that she could understand how important human rights-sensitive laws and policies could be in ensuring participation and inclusion in governance processes, and how effective laws and policies could compel authorities to set a minimum standard for participation, inclusion and transparency and accountability.

¹¹⁵ FGD, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 28092021.

¹¹⁶ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 27092021.

¹¹⁷ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021/04102021; FGD, Changuarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 30092021.

¹¹⁸ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021; FGD, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 01092021.

¹¹⁹ Interview with government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021.

Most of the FGD participants said that the perception and attitude of the local government towards the coalitions are positive. They said that local governments often listen to issues raised by the coalitions and express commitment to address them. Giving an example in this connection, an FGD participant from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang said that an LDAG was successful in managing drinking water in the area through their advocacy efforts.¹²⁰ The LDAG suggested using deep-boring technology to fulfil the demand of drinking water in the locality. The local government took the suggestions positively and allocated the budget of NPR 1.5 million for the same. Additionally, in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang, the LDAG collaborated with the local government to waive the admission fee in government school for orphans and the children abandoned by their parents.¹²¹

According to CSOs representative of Changuarayan Municipality of Bhaktapur, local government officials have benefitted from the advocacy effort of the coalition as they identify local concerns that need their attention, which when addressed also helps local government official to gain public trust.¹²²

In a few study sites, interviewees, mainly CSO workers, mentioned the challenges underpinning the smooth functioning of these coalitions. One of them, representing CS:MAP's local partner organisation in Bheriganga Municipality in Surkhet, said that there was difficulty in holding regular meetings of CAs and PFs mainly because of the busy schedule of government officials.¹²³ Similarly, in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rukum West, LDAGs could not be very effective as most of the areas in the rural municipality do not have good reception of the radio.¹²⁴ While most of the FGD participants said that the coalitions are inclusive in nature, a few participants from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap complained that coalitions are not inclusive as only government officials and civil servants are given priority while forming the coalition.¹²⁵ They said that youth, women and local activists are often left out of the coalitions. They believe the activities of CS:MAP are only limited to collaboration between government agencies and the CS:MAP partner with the general public left out.

In Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, a civil servant was unaware about CS:MAP led coalitions like CA, PF and LDAG even though he had attended meetings organised by CS:MAP's partner organisation in the municipality.¹²⁶ He did say that the people who participated in the meeting had raised various concerns about public services. That had helped circulate information about government services as well as contribute to maintaining good relations and trust between local people, government officials and civil servants.

FGD participants from all the study sites said that working in a team was a major opportunity provided by the coalition. They believe that questioning concerned authorities and piling pressure on them was easy when working as a team. They said that the concerned authorities pay more attention to issues raised by the coalition. Since the coalitions are inclusive in nature, opinions and contributions from diverse members are welcomed and valued. Coalition

¹²⁰ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 22092021.

¹²¹ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 22092021.

¹²² Interview with CSO representative, Changuarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

¹²³ Interview with CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 23082021.

¹²⁴ Interview with CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021.

¹²⁵ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021.

¹²⁶ Interview with civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021.

members also experienced the opportunity to build good personal rapport with government officials.¹²⁷ After working together with government officials in coalition multiple times, CA members of Kanchanpur feel that even after the CS:MAP is over, they would be able to work with them.

Although local governments in all the study sites reported using complaint boxes, official websites, telephone, social media and mobile applications to collect public grievances, not everyone was convinced that these mechanisms have been altogether effective since these tools are accessible by only a few people in these (rural) municipalities for various reasons, including unavailability of mobile phones, computers and the internet.¹²⁸

A journalist from Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading stated that only a few people in the municipality used the *Sajha Sabha* mobile application due to lack of internet in all the wards in the municipality.¹²⁹ At least one of the interviewees (a CA member from Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu) said she had no idea about any way of airing grievances other than going to the ward office or calling the ward representatives over the phone.¹³⁰

These means have not been proved effective either because people think that even if they did register their grievances, they will not be properly addressed. Referring to the usage of complaint boxes, a former president of FNJ Dolakha Chapter from Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha said,¹³¹

Most of the government offices in the municipality have complaint boxes but are never used. People do not have faith in the complaint box model of public grievances management approach. Instead, they inform responsible officers or government officials in person.

FGD participants in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali said that they have never used any complaint or suggestion box placed in government offices because they know none of these grievances they submit will be taken seriously.¹³² An official representing CS:MAP's implementing partner in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang and a civil servant from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that their municipal offices have been using toll-free numbers to collect grievances.¹³³ However, none of the FGD participants in these municipalities were found to be using the toll-free number service for register grievances or for

¹²⁷ Interview with head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura, 29082021.

¹²⁸ Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021; government official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021; journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021; government official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; government official, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 23082021; CSO official, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; CSO worker, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021; journalist, Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 25082021.

¹²⁹ Interview with journalist, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30082021.

¹³⁰ Interview with member (CA), Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 08112021.

¹³¹ Interview with Former President, FNJ Chapter Dolakha, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 03112021.

¹³² FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021.

¹³³ Interviews with civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021; CSO worker, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 27082021.

any other purposes as they seem to firmly believe that none will be addressed by the municipal authorities.¹³⁴

FGD participants in at least two FGDs, in Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality in Achham and Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap, said that they knew there were complaint boxes in their rural municipality offices but they themselves were very afraid to lodge complaints.¹³⁵ And, if they ever did, they suspected that they could be targeted by government officials in many ways. FGD participants in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that if somebody ever filed a complaint against government offices' decisions or activity, they are viewed as being affiliated with the party in opposition in the municipality and such complaints are discarded without even its merits being considered.¹³⁶ Grievances filed orally never ever receive priority from government officials and/or civil servants.¹³⁷

CSO representatives, government officials, civil servants from at least seven study sites mentioned that people prefer in-person meetings with their civil servants, government officials or political leaders they know if they have any difficulty while receiving services. People prefer to meet them in person primarily so that they do not have to go through the formal administrative procedure to register their grievances.¹³⁸ FGD participants in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali also mentioned that the formal means of filing grievance have been ineffective mainly because people prefer to talk to authorised bodies and representatives in the government offices in person.¹³⁹

A Dalit FGD participant from Gorkha Municipality said that it is not easy mainly for Dalits to openly express grievances.¹⁴⁰ He explained,

The people from my community [Dalit] are not able to express their views openly in public meetings. They are hesitant to speak in front of the masses and prefer not to speak. Hence, I strongly believe that there should be a separate way to register the voices and grievances from Dalits and other minority groups in our municipality.

Government officials in at least one study site (Bheriganga Municipality in Surkhet) admitted that they have been unable to proceed with the grievances filed by people on time mainly because of their workload, limited human resources, irregularity of staff, and biases in prioritising complaints.¹⁴¹

Almost all interviewees said that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the use of social accountability tools such as public audit, social audit and regular public hearings. Some

¹³⁴ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021/23092021.

¹³⁵ FGD, Bannigadhi Jaygadh Municipality, Achham, 21092021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021.

¹³⁶ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021.

¹³⁷ FGD, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30092021; FGD, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 24092021.

¹³⁸ Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021; government official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; government official, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 28082021; government official, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 23082021; CSO officials, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

¹³⁹ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 26082021.

¹⁴⁰ FGD, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 24092021.

¹⁴¹ Interview with government official, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 21082021.

interviewees said that was primarily due to restrictions in mobility and mass gatherings.¹⁴² Interviewees everywhere also reported a surge in the use of ICT by public institutions, including government offices after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These ICT tools were used particularly to hold virtual meetings and disseminate information to the general public, provide public services and also to enhance transparency and accountability of government and non-government organisations. At a time when social distancing was the norm, ICT tools allowed large-scale participation and mass collaborations between and among groups such as civil servants, government officials, CSOs and the general public for effective public service delivery. As a representative from CS:MAP's partner organisation in Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke and a government official from Gorkha Municipality in Gorkha noted, public engagement in virtual public gatherings increased tremendously after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as people could join these gatherings from their homes using online and social media platforms during the lockdown.¹⁴³ Further elucidating on the benefit of using ICT, a government official from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said,¹⁴⁴

Due to the use of ICT in public service delivery, nowadays people don't need to go to the municipality. One can simply write an email to the municipality office and they will receive the recommendation letter from the rural municipality or the ward office via email.

Likewise, a Ward chairperson from Gorkha Municipality in Gorkha said:¹⁴⁵

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we couldn't open our office and people were unable to take necessary services from the ward office. So, I started working from home. I prepared and sent recommendation letters (such as letters regarding proof of residence, letter for citizenship, marriage, among others), registered vital personal events,¹⁴⁶ listened to complaints and addressed and performed other necessary tasks with the help of Facebook and Messenger.

Apart from increased engagement of people in virtual public gatherings, in some places the use of ICT also contributed to enhance transparency and accountability, particularly in activities related to finances and public service delivery. CSO workers from Ghorahi Sub-metropolitan City in Dang and Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi as well as a government official from Panauti Municipality in Kavre believe that ICT contributes to quick public service delivery while maintaining accountability and increasing people's access to government services.¹⁴⁷ A

¹⁴² Interviews with community reporter, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 22082021; Civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021; government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021; civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 20082021; member (CA), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 30082021; government official, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 21082021.

¹⁴³ Interviews with CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; government official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with government official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with government official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021.

¹⁴⁶ Personal events refer to birth, marriage, divorce and migration. Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act, 1976, <https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/birth-death-and-other-personal-events-registration-act-2033-1976.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ Interviews with former CSO worker, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021; government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021; CSO worker, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021/22082021; government official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021.

journalist from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa provided an example of how that worked.¹⁴⁸

A few days ago, there was an issue of financial misappropriation in temple construction in our locality. My friends shared this information on Facebook and the issue was inspected by the concerned authority. Thus, I find online media an effective means in maintaining transparency. The government officials tend to accept their mistakes reported through social media and other online platforms.

CSO interviewees from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap and Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur mentioned that public institutions had used virtual mediums to conduct public hearings.¹⁴⁹ However, CSO workers from two of these study sites admitted that conducting social accountability meetings on virtual platforms was not very effective because only a few people could join these meetings due to constraints such as lack of internet and communication tools in these communities.¹⁵⁰

Despite the opportunities and advantages created by ICT, lack of access to internet connections and electricity, digital illiteracy, and lack of human resources have produced hindrance for its effective use across the study sites. Even in those places where these proved to be relatively more effective challenges remained. Some of the most cited reasons were unfamiliarity of government officials and civil servants in handling ICT tools.¹⁵¹ Although government offices have their own websites and Facebook pages through which they could provide services and disseminate information to the people, there is little to no use of ICT in service delivery. A Community Action Researcher (CAR) from Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading explained the issue succinctly¹⁵²

With the support from CS:MAP, a mobile application was developed targeting local people and organisations. Individuals and organisations in the municipality could register their grievances against the public institutions using the application. But part of the problem is that not even ward chairpersons are able to use the application. I think CS:MAP and its partner organisation need to orient the general public and government officials on the use of the application. Even the officials working at the IT [Information Technology] Department of the municipality office are unable to manage the application.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021.

¹⁴⁹ Interviews with CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO representatives, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021/31102021.

¹⁵⁰ Interviews with CSO officials, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021/31102021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

¹⁵¹ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 23092021; FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021; FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021; FGD, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur, 24092021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 01102021/04102021; FGD, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30092021; FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 24092021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CAR, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading; 20102021; journalist, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30082021.

¹⁵² Interview with CAR, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading; 20102021.

While it was also the case that government officials and civil servants still consider paperwork to be the most authentic way of performing official tasks and keeping official records, there were also concerns among them that they would reveal confidential information while making use of ICT tools.¹⁵³ As a journalist from Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading said,¹⁵⁴

Government officials in the municipality think that using ICT for information dissemination and public service delivery might invite negative consequences. They believe that bringing out all the information regarding budgeting and other confidential issues into the public may invite added troubles. Therefore, being transparent with the public for them is something next to impossible.

FGD participants in three study sites said that the use of modern means of communication like social media and visiting websites is limited to youths and educated people living in the urban areas.¹⁵⁵ As an official from CS:MAP's partner organisation in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap put it,¹⁵⁶

While the majority of local people in the municipality aren't using smartphones, some others who have smartphones cannot properly use the application due to lack of digital literacy. Additionally, the service providers still prefer written complaints over mobile applications because they are not habituated to using the mobile applications and other means of ICT for complaint handling.

A CSO worker from Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali and a government official from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that the inaccessibility to these means of ICT is very much entrenched in the case of poor and ethnic minorities living in these municipalities.¹⁵⁷ The government added,

Marginalised groups (minorities, poor, backward class, women) in the community are not getting information through ICT because of their immobility and/or poor educational background, so the local governments authorities in the municipality resort to traditional means of information dissemination like *chaukidar*¹⁵⁸ and *badghar*¹⁵⁹.

An official with CS:MAP's implementing partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi suspected that service providers could be hiding their inefficiency by pointing to problems with ICT.¹⁶⁰ Respondents from the hill districts said that FM channels have been the only effective means to disseminate information due to the wider access of the general public to FM radio.

¹⁵³ Interviews with journalist, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30082021; CSO representative, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO official, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 23082021.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with journalist, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 30082021.

¹⁵⁵ FGD, Bannigadhi Jaygadh Municipality, Achham, 21092021; FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021; FGD, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021/16092021.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁵⁷ Interviews with Coordinator (LDAG), Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021; government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021.

¹⁵⁸ A watchman or a messenger responsible for calling meetings in the village. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=shss_dcar_etd.

¹⁵⁹ A village chief of the Tharu community in Western Nepal chosen to oversee judicial, administrative, development and planning duties. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=shss_dcar_etd.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 20082021.

2.2.2 Role of District-Level Networks

Although FGD participants, i.e., the indirect beneficiaries, from all the study sites denied having any experience of participating in civil society's district-level activities, the response from interviewees was that there were some initiatives that have been taken by civil society to rectify the discrepancies in the public sector and to make public service more efficient.

In many places, the existing networks of CSOs have also been designated as the HEAD coalition. While interviewing members of such pre-existing coalitions in Ramechhap and Dolakha, the coordinators were found comparatively more active and informed than the members regarding the CSOs' activities in the district, including that of CS:MAP. They appreciated CS:MAP's efforts in facilitating the HEAD coalition to advocate for improving public service and strengthening civil society and media.¹⁶¹ However, two HEAD coalition members from Dolakha district said that they have not received any training from CS:MAP, with one even expressing unfamiliarity with CS:MAP itself.¹⁶² According to them, their primary engagement in the HEAD coalition has been through participation in meetings and conducting civil monitoring.

In Gorkha Municipality, the *Nagarik Sajha Sabha*¹⁶³ has facilitated market monitoring in collaboration with the District Administration Office, resulting in legal action against some businessmen for their involvement in black marketing of chemical fertiliser. After the success of such monitoring there, some other municipalities also followed suit to ensure that the goods available in the market were of a certain quality.¹⁶⁴

The HEAD coalition in Gorkha district had also advocated for the restoration of cultural and historical heritage. Because the reconstruction of the historic Gorkha Durbar in Gorkha had been delayed for years after the 2015 earthquake, the coalition submitted a memorandum to the Department of Archaeology. After discussing the reasons for the delay and how to resolve them, work on the first phase of the palace was completed and preparations are on to award the contract for the second.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, in Ramechhap, the supplier immediately replaced the expired medicines in Manthali Hospital after the HEAD network raised the matter.¹⁶⁶ In Dolakha, an alliance of CSOs, which included members of HEAD, organised various creative campaigns to protest the long-stalled Khadichaur-Mude Road Enlargement Project.¹⁶⁷

Since coalitions involve people from different background such as local government officials, journalists, CSO representatives and common people, their strength lies in being able to provide different perspectives on any issue raised, leading the authorities also to heed such a united

¹⁶¹ Chairperson (HEAD), Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 03112021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

¹⁶² Interviews with members (HEAD), Dolakha, 03112021.

¹⁶³ The HEAD coalition in Gorkha has been functioning with the name *Nagarik Sajha Sabha* (Citizens' Common Assembly).

¹⁶⁴ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

¹⁶⁷ FGD, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 01092021; interview with journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021.

voice of the people.¹⁶⁸ An official working with CS:MAP's partner organisation in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi said,¹⁶⁹

There is open discussion in the coalitions and we are determined to implement the agenda of the discussion. There is a representation of professors, from the Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the President of the Federation of Nepali Journalists, and the President of the NGO Federation. The coalition convinces the local government to involve CSOs in planning, implementation, and good governance process along with government officials.

2.2.3 Actors and Institutions Influencing FoA, FoE and RTI

People across the study sites were said to have been exercising FoA, FoE and RTI, accessing information from government authorities has not been equally easy for all. Often, as stated by CSO workers and FGD participants, access to services and information depends largely on the applicant's political affiliation since it is easier for people from the same party as local government officials to get information from the public bodies and also to express their opinion openly in official meetings. In the words of a journalist from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke,¹⁷⁰

In most of the cases, only people who share similar political views with government officials and officials can receive information from local-level offices. If an outsider or a person from a different political party asks for information from the local government, government officials and civil servants hesitate to share those details.

Interviewees also mentioned that it is relatively easier for people affiliated with social and/or private organisations to get information from government offices than it is for common people.¹⁷¹ Civil servants provide information easily to individuals with institutional affiliation, particularly to journalists. However, as a journalist from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that even they are denied information and other details from government offices, citing confidentiality.¹⁷² As an example, he said that he had asked for information about COVID-19-related expenses from the municipality but when he received the document, it showed no details on how money had been spent. Interviewees from all study sites covered showed their dissatisfaction about the federal government's attempt to pass the Media Council Bill.¹⁷³ The Bill, the interviewees unanimously stated, could impinge existing press freedom in the country.

The political connections of the CSOs representatives also play a crucial role in the success or failure in drafting or making amendments in laws and policies at the local level.¹⁷⁴ Local

¹⁶⁸ Interviews with member of HEAD coalition, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 31102021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with journalist, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021.

¹⁷¹ Interviews with journalist, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 23082021; member (HEAD), Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 31102021; journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 23082021.

¹⁷² Interview with journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 23082021.

¹⁷³ Registered with the federal parliament in May 2019, the bill was widely criticised for its attempt to muzzle the press.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; FGD, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 01092021.

governments are found to prefer working with those CSOs that have maintained good relations with them and tend to ignore other CSOs.¹⁷⁵ A CSO worker with CS:MAP's partner in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang said that the city authorities did not show any interest in advancing the drafts of the governance policy and GESI Guidelines prepared by CSOs.¹⁷⁶ The political background and affiliation of government officials determine their interest to address public issues and sometimes government officials prefer to work on issues that have political benefit rather than the public concerns. A representative from CS:MAP's local partner organisation in Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur said,¹⁷⁷

With the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, many had expected that all of the administrative services would be delivered from the local level. Many had thought that government officials would be accountable to the public. However, against people's expectations, elected representatives have started to consider themselves 'kings' of the local level.

Regardless of challenges in coordination with government officials in drafting or amending laws, CSOs representatives in all of the study sites agreed on the need to constantly advocate for the need to improve public participation, accountability, and inclusion in the policy-drafting process. A representative from CS:MAP's implementing partner in Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that advocacy for policy making is difficult despite rounds of meetings, coordination, memoranda submitted, and delegations to local representatives.¹⁷⁸

Advocacy for policymaking is very difficult. I think, if we do not do such hard work, none of the other local levels will adopt the good governance policy... Without the pressure from civil society, the local level would never draft policies related to and ensuring good governance and GESI.

2.2.4 Public Participation and GESI in Public Space

Assessing the overall state of local governance, the state of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability seem to have improved with the implementation of federalism in the country in 2017. At the same time, it is clear that public access to public services has increased as well. However, according to some FGD participants and interviewees, there still exists inequality in terms of people's access to public services and inclusion in governance activities. This inequality seems to be particularly acute in the case of women, ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged groups. Female FGD participants everywhere were unanimous that exercising of rights of FoA and FoE is more difficult from women. As stated by FGD participants from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang, people from the minority groups such as Dalits, Tharus, Madhesis and Muslims hesitate to register their grievances and participate in community gatherings because civil servants in the municipality look down on people from these communities.¹⁷⁹ A female Tharu FGD participant from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang recalled,¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with head of a CSO, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

¹⁷⁹ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 16092021/22092021.

¹⁸⁰ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 16092021.

Once I was threatened by a civil servant working with the municipality office when I demanded details of the expenses in the construction of a canal. Since then, I do not feel confident enough to express my opinions in front of government authorities.

In the course of supporting local governments in drafting and amending laws, CS:MAP's partner organisations in all the study areas experienced lack of broader public participation, political biases, and absence of technical expertise hindering the processes of drafting and implementing laws and policies. More specifically, local governments, as mentioned by interviewees in five study sites, overlook the need to include civil society in the policy-drafting process.¹⁸¹ As such, the laws and policies drafted by local governments in their areas tend to ignore local needs.¹⁸² Most of these laws and policies were copied from laws and policies at the federal level or from other municipalities' without giving due consideration to the local context. As stated by a representative of the CS:MAP partner in Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu, these laws and policies have not been effective in terms of ensuring participation, accountability and transparency mainly because government officials are less concerned about strengthening laws and policies and more interested in infrastructure development since they believe that they can secure votes if they have something to show such as roads and hospitals.¹⁸³

Interviewees from five study sites, however, reported that peoples' participation in the public service delivery process have not been substantial.¹⁸⁴ An FGD participant in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali said that there was no meaningful participation because there was no coordination between local people and the representatives. He added that he had not been invited by civil society for any sort of interaction thus far.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, CSO officials from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya and Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali said that most of the people in the municipality do not give the required attention to the various social welfare programmes available at the municipality.¹⁸⁶ That, the CSO representatives added, was because people in the municipalities are under the false assumption that these programmes are not targeted at them.

Regarding public participation in planning and implementation of the budget, an FGD participant from Isma Rural Municipality said that the public do not get the amount of money demanded from the ward or rural municipality.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Interviews with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 20082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021; CSO official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; journalist, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021; head of a CSO, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021.

¹⁸² Interviews with CSO official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO representatives, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021/19082021; CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021.

¹⁸³ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021.

¹⁸⁴ Interviews with journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; Facilitator (LDAG), Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 20082021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

¹⁸⁵ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021.

¹⁸⁶ Interviews with Coordinator (CA), Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 23082021; FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021; CSO worker, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19082021.

¹⁸⁷ FGD, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021.

Small plans with less than 20 lakhs [2 million] are implemented through a users' committee while costing more than 20 lakhs are conducted through a tender process. During the committee formation process these locally formed committees are GESI sensitive. However, that is not very meaningful since there is that one active person who carries out all the tasks of managing paperwork and visiting different offices.

Some respondents questioned the existing forms of public participation. For example, a male farmer participant in FGD at Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said,¹⁸⁸

We, uneducated and farmers, are not invited to any of the meetings of our community. Only the educated and political leaders are invited. We are even kept uninformed as the local authorities might face protests if everyone in the society knew what they are doing. Only when they tell us to work as a daily wage labourer for a development project are we engaged in public activities, otherwise not. Who has concerns for common people?

Local government officials from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang and Bijaynagar Rural Municipality in Kapilvastu and CSO workers from CS:MAP's partners in Gorkha Municipality and in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that CSOs had been working to secure the inclusive participation of people by disseminating information to the public by sending invitations and ensuring their participation in these public hearings and public and social audits.¹⁸⁹ The two CSO officials said that they also assist local governments in preparing reports or following up for the implementation of the commitments made during public hearing and social audit.¹⁹⁰ Such a practice had succeeded in creating a compelling environment even for local governments to promote accountability and transparency through public hearings.

However, most of the participants across the research sites complained that the local government only invited the people close to them (either politically or personally) to such meetings/hearings where networks and connections are important to receive invitations. Budgeting, formation of users' groups and development plans are all political.¹⁹¹ Questions regarding existing forms of participation in the planning process and budgeting are not limited to class discrimination, but a more complex and age-old problem of caste-based discrimination and gender discrimination are still in existence.¹⁹² Though male participants from Bahun-Chhetri communities claimed that the meetings and activities at the local level are inclusive and participatory, the experience of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy is different. A Dalit journalist from Dolakha felt otherwise and believed that marginalised communities were invited by CSOs only to fulfil official requirements and to show that they are promoting gender equality and social inclusion in their programme activities.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 01102021.

¹⁸⁹ Interviews with government official, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 29082021; government official, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 23082021; CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁹⁰ Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁹¹ FGD, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 26092021; FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 24092021; FGD, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 02102021.

¹⁹² FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 30092021; FGD, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 30092021.

¹⁹³ Interview with journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021.

Engaging with women, Dalit, indigenous people in different mechanisms of the local governments for the sake of it does not produce inclusive governance. As a Dalit participant in an FGD in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said,¹⁹⁴

There are ten people in the municipal council and two in municipal executive from the Dalit community in Khandadevi Rural Municipality. Though Dalit representatives are expected to raise and promote the issues and welfare of our community, they have not able to do so. It is because those representatives do not have good education and lack leadership skills. It is like inclusion in theory, but not in practice.

CSO officials from CS:MAP's local partners in Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya and Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap as well as a journalist from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said that many people in these rural municipalities are also sceptical about social accountability programmes since most of those taking part in these gatherings would be people close to the ruling party in the municipalities.¹⁹⁵ The official from Ramechhap also said,¹⁹⁶

Although it is legally binding for government offices to implement social accountability tools, namely, public hearing, public audit and social audit, they normally do not conduct these activities, or conduct only for formality. Without third-party pressure from the CSOs, government offices normally do not implement the social accountability tools.

A CSO official in Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said the reluctance of the local government to use social accountability tools has resulted in a trust deficit among people with the local government.¹⁹⁷ Exercising the social accountability tools seems more effective when CSOs and the media give pressure to conduct social accountability tools or even collaborate with government agencies for the same.¹⁹⁸ However, CSO respondents from three study sites also mentioned the CSOs' efforts in social accountability is affected by financial constraints and also because local governments are reluctant to engage with CSOs because of perception that it could reveal shortcomings, irregularities and limitations of the local government.¹⁹⁹

On the other hand, FGD participants in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali, Krishnapur Municipality in Kanchanpur and Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura did not see any value in organising public hearings since they have not been able to bring about any substantive changes in the attitude of local government officials.²⁰⁰ And, because only a few people from these municipalities participate in these public hearing programmes, a large section of the population remain completely unaware about what goes on there. FGD participants in Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur and Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu

¹⁹⁴ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 30092021.

¹⁹⁵ Interviews with journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021; CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

¹⁹⁹ Interviews with CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO official, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021; CSO representative, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

²⁰⁰ FGD, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur, 24092021; FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19092021; FGD, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 22092021.

said that only males take part in the programmes like public hearing and public audit as women are either not informed about such programmes or are mostly busy in household chores that they do not get the time to attend.²⁰¹ A female FGD participant from Budhanilkantha even said that she had no idea what public hearing and public audit are and that did not know of any organisation working to ensure women's participation in such programmes.²⁰²

Additionally, an official from CS:MAP's implementing partner in Panauti Municipality in Kavre was of the view that inclusive participation of all groups of the community is not possible mainly because the people with low economic status have to sacrifice a day's income to take part in the public hearings or any other programmes.²⁰³ Similarly, FGD participants in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that none of the questions asked by participants during public hearings are answered and none of the concerns addressed by government officials and civil servants.²⁰⁴

The perceptions of service providers, i.e., government officials and civil servants who are primarily responsible for ensuring participation, and of CSO representatives regarding peoples' participation are quite different and contrarian as well. The former claimed that local governments ensure participation of all stakeholders, including women, Dalits, indigenous groups, people with disability, the backward classes and local intellectuals, in the process of drafting laws and policies at the local level and in meetings that discuss issues of public concern such as health, education and agriculture.²⁰⁵ CSO interviewees and FGD participants on the other hand maintained that peoples' meaningful participation is not ensured in government activities.²⁰⁶

A journalist from Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi and an official working with CS:MAP's partner organisation in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that there has been a tendency within government agencies to not disclose decisions and information either to conceal irregularities and corruption, or to avoid criticism on accountability and transparency on financial transactions and other decision-making processes.²⁰⁷ As a school principal in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi pointed out, although the municipality publishes various notices on a regular basis, it does not post information about its budget and plans in the official website even though people expect transparency most from it.²⁰⁸ Explaining why that is important, a representative from CS:MAP's partner organisation in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said that while accessing a website for such details is not easy for everyone in the municipality, he said that doing so indicates the municipality's commitment to the values of transparency and accountability.²⁰⁹

²⁰¹ FGD, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 30092021; FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 01102021.

²⁰² FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 01102021.

²⁰³ Interview with CSO official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021.

²⁰⁴ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 01102021.

²⁰⁵ Interviews with civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021; Ward Member, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 27082021; government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021; government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021.

²⁰⁶ Interviews with Coordinator (CA), Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 23082021; FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021; CSO worker, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19082021.

²⁰⁷ Interviews with journalist, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 23082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

²⁰⁸ Interview with School teacher, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 02102021.

²⁰⁹ Interview with member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 04112021.

The use of modern means of communication has tremendously increased across all the study sites. These technological means and means of communication like radio, toll-free phone numbers, website, short message service (SMS), Facebook have been the major means for information dissemination and maintaining transparency and accountability. An official working with CS:MAP's partner in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali said that they have a special section in the radio episode named *Prashna Sodhau Jawafdehita Khojau* (Let's ask questions for accountability) aired by a local FM station, consisting of vox pop from locals.²¹⁰ Similarly, a journalist from Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha said that the rural municipality office was working with a local FM station to air public hearing and public audit programmes.²¹¹

But there were limits, as noted by a government official from Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura that means like radio and Facebook could be used only by people in the urban areas and that the people in rural parts of the municipality could not access them.²¹² According to FGD participants in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali, there is a Facebook page called '#MaKhandina', which is accessible only to those with smartphones and users of Facebook, leaving a large section of the youth population unaware about it.²¹³

A government official from Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali agreed that none of the means used by the municipality like complaint boxes and Facebook has been effective in collecting grievances from people.²¹⁴ That was because most people in the municipality meet civil servants and government officials in person and share their concerns in person.

When interviewees were asked about their participation in any kind of protests, sit-ins or rallies to advocate for their concerns, a large number of FGD participants across the research sites had no particular experience of peaceful protest. There were one group who had been involved in peaceful protests such as against a cement factory because its effect on the local environment and community.²¹⁵ Another said that they had been in negotiations with local government officials about the water pollution caused by a local distillery.²¹⁶

People in the earthquake-affected districts also raised a voice against the local government for providing the tents to the non-victims whereas the actual ones were being deprived of support.²¹⁷ Some pre-primary school teachers had organised a rally and sit-in programme in front of the municipality office and all pre-primary or early childhood development (ECD) teachers took part in that programme.²¹⁸ Female participants shared their experiences of taking part in a rally during the 16-days of activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV).²¹⁹ They stated that their awareness level increased due to their participation in the program. However, in Changunarayan Municipality the protest is more than peaceful, according to participants,

²¹⁰ Interview with Coordinator (LDAG), Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021.

²¹¹ Interview with journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021.

²¹² Interview with government official, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 28082021.

²¹³ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021.

²¹⁴ Interview with civil servant, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 27082021.

²¹⁵ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 16092021/22092021.

²¹⁶ FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021/19092021.

²¹⁷ FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 24092021; FGD, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 26092021.

²¹⁸ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021; FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021.

²¹⁹ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 04102021.

they have obstructed the vehicles on the road as the construction of the road got delayed. After that, municipality staff and government officials promise to pressurize the contractor and get the construction work done as soon as possible.²²⁰

Surprisingly, none of the FGD participants in a few research sites have any experience of their participation in media campaigns and programmes.²²¹ Despite being involved in peaceful protest and peaceful negotiation, the local people have no experience of involvement in media campaigns and programmes of any kind. A few FGD participants, who are also LDAG members, did have some experience taking part in the radio programme *Sajha Boli*, which had motivated them to take some initiatives on their own. For instance, one FGD participant from Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality in Achham said how she and her friends in the LDAG have been regularly performing street dramas against *chhaupadi*, the ritual discrimination against menstruating females.²²²

FGD participants in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that CS:MAP's local partner there had provided training to members of community-based organisations (CBOs) on project management and conducting monitoring and evaluation of user groups.²²³ This, most of the FGD participants argued, had ensured that those CBOs will carry on with the responsibility of ensuring transparency and accountability even when external support ended.

2.2.5 CS:MAP's Role in Ensuring Participation and Inclusion in Governance

Implementation of CS:MAP across all the study sites helped create an environment in which civil society could work together with local governments. In order to raise the level of engagement of the local government with the people, CSOs pushed for budget allocation through public participation and consultation. CSOs also assisted local governments in conducting activities such as joint monitoring of plans, formation of user groups with equal participation of all, holding public hearings to provide detailed information about plans, and placing hoarding boards at the planning sites.

One example that stood out is from Panauti Municipality in Kavre where the local government had launched a campaign called *Janatako Ghar Aaganmaa Sarkar*²²⁴ at the initiative of civil society.²²⁵ People's representatives went to every citizen's house to get information and to understand their problems. CSOs also launched orientation programme to make citizens aware of the planning process, and as a result, Panauti Municipality set aside funds to address the needs of the disabled. In Gorkha Municipality, CS:MAP's partner monitored development projects and made citizens aware besides conducting public hearings with mandatory presence of the media at such events and publishing the proceedings of those activities through various mass media.²²⁶

²²⁰ FGD, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 23092021.

²²¹ Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality and Ghorahi Sub-metropolitan City.

²²² FGD, Bannigadhi Jaygadh Municipality, Achham, 24082021.

²²³ FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 30092021.

²²⁴ Providing services to people their doorsteps.

²²⁵ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

²²⁶ Interview with CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 04112021.

To promote public participation in public service, CS:MAP's partner organisations in all the rural municipalities covered by the study organised training on leadership development and citizens' dialogue series besides helping local government authorities to formulate structures like user groups. Government officials in nearly half the research sites said that CS:MAP's partners have been working together with local government authorities to conduct citizens dialogue series, which has helped ensure the participation of women, Dalits, indigenous groups, the poor, and other marginalised and minority groups in the governance processes. That inclusivity extended to the formation of user groups as well. As a result, engagement between the government and public is reported to have increased tremendously.

Despite the misgivings mentioned in the previous sub-section, FGD participants in Gorkha Municipality said that, lately, ordinary people, too, have started participating in public gatherings and hearings and asking for information from public officials.²²⁷ This, they believe, not only keeps them informed and updated about the activities of the local government but also makes the government accountable and transparent. Previously, when there were no CSOs in the municipality to tell people about the importance of participating in these gatherings, only a few of used to attend public hearings. Acknowledging the role of CSOs, an FGD participant from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said, 'CSOs can make people understand what is wrong and what is right. People are easily convinced by CSOs on any issue'.²²⁸

FGD participants from Panauti Municipality in Kavre and Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said that public hearing programmes in the municipality are very inclusive.²²⁹ According to them, programmes like public hearing, public audit and social audit provide venues for people to raise their issues and concerns. As stated by interviewees in five study sites, the CS:MAP-supported coalitions and use of social accountability tools have together contributed to enhanced public participation in decision making and planning processes and transparency and accountability in public service delivery.²³⁰

A major objective of CS:MAP was to improve the legal and regulatory frameworks relevant to civil society and the media in the country besides developing and enforcing self-regulation mechanisms.²³¹ CS:MAP's local partner organisations also supported local governments with policies, plans and guidelines for education, GESI, agriculture, human rights, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and forest resources, among others.²³²

²²⁷ FGD, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 24092021.

²²⁸ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021.

²²⁹ FGD, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 27092021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 30092021.

²³⁰ Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021; CSO worker, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 27082021; journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 29082021; government official, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 28082021.

²³¹ USAID & FHI 360, Civil Society: Mutual Accountability Project: Annual Work Plan (Year 1), 2016.

²³² Interviews with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; CSO officials, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 2108202/24082021; journalist, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021; CSO worker, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; community reporter, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO official, Bannigadhi Jaygadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 25082021; CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 21082021.

CSO workers from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya and Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke said that municipalities have introduced some of the policies and guidelines with technical support from experts and financial support from CS:MAP's partners.²³³ Elaborating on the role of CSOs in drafting laws and aligning policies with international human rights standards, civil servants from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality explained that CS:MAP supported them in drafting the Human Rights Guidelines by providing expert guidance, conducting workshops and financial support to the municipality's Human Rights Committee.²³⁴

Pressure from CSOs in Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading on the local government to adopt a gender-sensitive policy, draft a gender-responsive budget, and increase inclusiveness has led to the municipality showing interest in incorporating GESI and human rights in their plan and policies.²³⁵ CS:MAP's partner in Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu collaborated with other CSOs such as Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) and Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj to initiate discussions on the GESI policy draft.²³⁶ A civil servant from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City in Dang said that following support from CS:MAP the local government has been able to come up with a GESI policy in Dang.²³⁷ As part of the support, the local government received orientation on GESI where the relevance and importance of GESI had been discussed and guidance provided on how to incorporate it into municipal activities.

A CSO official from Surkhet explained the process by way of which the local government formulated a good governance policy in Bheriganga Municipality.²³⁸ First, the necessity of a such a policy was identified through a CA meeting and the CSO forwarded the meeting memorandum to the municipality. Afterwards, the CSO representative drafted a policy for discussion with the executive committee of the municipality which was modified during discussions with various stakeholders and later put into practice. One of the major successes of the CSOs in the municipality was being able to mandate the provision of forming CAs in each ward of the municipality in the good governance policy.²³⁹ The policy also included compulsory involvement of user groups in planning and implementation and the provision of public hearings after completion of each activity.

There were other instances of similar support provided as well. A CSO in Isma Rural Municipality of Gulmi helped the local government draft a good governance policy even though it is yet to be approved.²⁴⁰ The CSO has a group of licensed lawyers who have provided legal consultation services in drafting and revising the policies and laws of the municipality

²³³ Interviews with CSO representatives, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021/22082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021.

²³⁴ Interviews with government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021; civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021. Human Rights Committee is the committee made inside the rural municipality having different stakeholders (including local intellectuals, women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and others) to look after the issues of human rights violations and the committee supports the draft of Human Rights Guidelines 2077 (BS). Furthermore, the committee advocated for human rights friendly plans and policies.

²³⁵ Interview with head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021.

²³⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 21082021.

²³⁷ Interview with civil servant, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 02112021.

²³⁸ Interview with CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 03112021.

²³⁹ Interviews with Coordinator (CA), Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 30102021; CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 03112021.

²⁴⁰ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

through a series of discussions and interactions. Likewise, officials from CS:MAP's partner in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap said support had been provided to draft news law and policies there.²⁴¹ That was corroborated by the municipality spokesperson not only with regard to drafting the education policy and regulations but also in supporting in the participatory planning process and monitoring of other branches of the municipality.²⁴²

2.2.6 CS:MAP's Role in Ensuring Accountability and Transparency in Governance

CSO officials from at least four study sites stated that public hearing programmes have helped government bodies to maintain accountability and transparency in different ways.²⁴³ This includes controlling government spending, checking absenteeism of officials in government offices, teachers in schools and health personnel in health posts, and above all have helped increase in the quality of government services and enhance transparency of the government budget and programmes.

On the other hand, a representative of CS:MAP's partner in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa applauded the rural municipality office for being transparent.²⁴⁴ He added that the rural municipality office has appointed an IT officer who updates details in the rural municipality office's website on a regular basis. One can access all kinds of notices and information from the official website of the rural municipality.

Civil servants and a government official from two study sites (Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya) said they have incorporated social accountability tools in their plans and programmes as it is mandatory for them to conduct public hearings and social audits of their activities.²⁴⁵ In the words of a civil servant from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality,²⁴⁶

Each development project at the local level is required to conduct public hearings at the ward level. In case if any project failed to organise public hearing on pre-scheduled time, the local government refrains from releasing the remaining budget to the contractor.

A CSO representative from Bijaynagar Rural Municipality in Kapilvastu said that local government provides due consideration to issues raised at social accountability meetings.²⁴⁷ CSO workers from two study sites (Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu and Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading) said that not only government bodies but CSOs have also been practicing social audit and public hearing of their programmes to maintain

²⁴¹ Interviews with CSO representatives, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

²⁴² Interview with government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 31102021.

²⁴³ Interviews with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; CSO representatives, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021/21082021; government official, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 21082021; CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021.

²⁴⁴ Interview with member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 04112021.

²⁴⁵ Interviews with civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021; government official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 30082021; civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021.

²⁴⁶ Interview with civil servant, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021.

²⁴⁷ Interview with community reporter, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021.

accountability and transparency.²⁴⁸ Using these tools has also helped these CSOs build trust with the local governments.

2.2.7 Impact of COVID-19 on Participation, Inclusion, Accountability and Transparency

Both service providers and CSOs representatives said that the COVID-19 pandemic had disturbed the participatory planning and decision-making process of local governments and government agencies as well as the activities of CSOs since in-person meetings, discussions or public programmes were prohibited for long periods everywhere.²⁴⁹ The pandemic has also affected other aspects as well, including service delivery particularly in health and education.²⁵⁰ A civil servant from Banke said,²⁵¹

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a deterioration of health and educational infrastructures in the district. A lot of people lost their lives and many others were seriously ill due to COVID-19. Hospitals in the district were flooded with COVID-19 patients. It was difficult for people to find beds in the hospitals at that time.

FGD participants in Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that health workers in community health institutions were not providing the medicines to people in the municipality during the pandemic.²⁵² Health workers resorted to telling people to buy medicines from private pharmacies. A CSO official from CS:MAP's partner in Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap and a civil servant from Banke said that because schools were shut down for a long time, students could not continue their studies well for more than a year.²⁵³ This, they said, will continue to affect children's academic performance for many years to come.

Many different reasons were given for local governments' inability to deliver services effectively during the pandemic. In at least five study sites, local governments were said to have been more focused on controlling and preventing the COVID-19 pandemic, and so were not able to invest sufficiently on other services.²⁵⁴ Similarly, CSO interviewees from three study sites mentioned that the already understaffed health centres in these (rural) municipalities had to serve a large population and the health workers had to work for extended hours without proper safety measures, affecting their ability to provide people with timely health services.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁸ Interviews with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021; head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021.

²⁴⁹ Interviews with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; Coordinator (CA), Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 25082021; CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 23082021; government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021.

²⁵⁰ Reported by interviewees and FGD participants across all the study sites.

²⁵¹ Interviews with Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021.

²⁵² FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 27082021.

²⁵³ Interviews with Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; civil servant, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 26082021.

²⁵⁴ Interviews with CSO official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; Coordinator (CA), Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 25082021; community reporter, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; head of a CSO, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021; journalist, Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 25082021.

²⁵⁵ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

A government official from Panauti Municipality in Kavre said that inefficiency in service delivery from public institutions during the pandemic was mainly because there were fewer civil servants delivering services at that time.²⁵⁶ In Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur, a representative of CS:MAP's partner said that government officials and civil servants in some areas of the municipality took the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse for not delivering quality public service delivery.²⁵⁷ A representative from CS:MAP's partner in Panauti Municipality in Kavre mentioned increasing irregularities during COVID-19 in the form of red-tapism, increased secrecy and misuse of governments' funds.²⁵⁸ The CSO representative added that since civil servants did not come to the office regularly because of the pandemic, it became easier for them to shirk their duties. He said that civil servants often denied information to people citing fewer staff on duty.

Interviewees from at least five study sites reported that the poor and marginalised, more particularly women, Dalits, the disabled, the poor, senior citizens, students, and wage labourers faced difficulties even meeting their daily expenses due to the pandemic.²⁵⁹

Although government officials in all of the study sites were reportedly disseminating public notices via online media platforms like websites and social media platforms, it was particularly difficult for people from remote areas to access the information. As a result, only a few people could receive services. A representative of CS:MAP's partner in Panauti Municipality in Kavre said that the digital divide that exists in the municipality meant only the rich, particularly those having internet connections in their homes, could inform themselves about government activities from their own homes.²⁶⁰

Although the majority of the interviewees mentioned the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on public service delivery, at least three (one from each site) pointed out how the pandemic introduced some good practices in public service delivery mechanisms. A representative of CS:MAP's partner in Kalika Rural Municipality in Rasuwa and a government official from Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu said that the government officials, civil servants as well as CSO members have learnt or enhanced their ICT skills and used various online meeting platforms for meetings, discussions and planning with government officials, CSOs, supporting organisations and other stakeholders during COVID-19.²⁶¹ According to them, the meetings were very fruitful and effective and that these skills of using ICT will continue to have a positive impact on their performances in the future as well.

A journalist from Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha said that the increased number of health institutions in the municipality since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to enhancing people's trust in their representatives.²⁶²

²⁵⁶ Interview with government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021.

²⁵⁷ Interview with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

²⁵⁸ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

²⁵⁹ Interviews with CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO officials, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021/22082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021.

²⁶⁰ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

²⁶¹ Interviews with CSO official, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 23082021; government official, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 23082021.

²⁶² Interview with journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid down newer opportunities in the health sector in our municipality. New hospitals and health centres have been established and the existing ones have been added more facilities. Relations between government officials and citizens have improved as the government distributed essential medicines and food items to the needy during the pandemic.

2.3 Strengthening Civil Society and Challenges

Following its theory of change that aims to address issues of legitimacy, accountability and resilience of the CSOs, CS:MAP provided technical and financial assistance such as training and grants to its partners in order to strengthen organisational capacity. Towards the objective, CS:MAP conducted organisational capacity assessment and advocacy readiness index assessment of its partner organisations and provided evidence-based advocacy (EBA) and other capacity-building training, including to coalitions formed under the project. CSO interviewees across the study sites mentioned that the training they have received as part of the CS:MAP's intervention have been helpful in strengthening internal governance of CSOs and enhance their organisational and advocacy capacities. However, the findings suggest that constraints related to human and financial resources, challenges to collaboration between local authorities and CSOs, and lack of a common understanding within coalitions continue to pose difficulties going into the future. This section is devoted to identifying aspects that could assist civil society actors in becoming more robust.

2.3.1 Advocacy

CSOs and the media provide oversight and conduct advocacy to improve public service delivery, which is often perceived by local governments as an obstacle in their work.²⁶³ This is partly the result of engaging in advocacy for the sake of it, without proper evidence or strategies for effective advocacy. There are indications though that the perception of local representatives and civil servants toward CSOs has undergone a shift with the latter using more EBA and also because of continuous engagement and dialogue between the two.²⁶⁴

To strengthen the advocacy capacity of partner CSOs, CS:MAP assessed the advocacy readiness index (ARI) of its partners and provided training on EBA. The ARI shows the actual status of an organisation in terms of its institutional strength, weaknesses and areas that require improvement.²⁶⁵ One of the CSO members from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke said:²⁶⁶

ARI has provided the whole idea of advocacy, from start to the expert level of advocacy and it has improved how advocacy is practised. Initially, in 2017, the result of the CSO advocacy was very poor but now it has improved very well. CSMAP always sends experts for the ARI to its

²⁶³ Interviews with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021; journalist, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021; head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021.

²⁶⁴ Interview with civil society member, Bijyanagar, Kapilvastu, 02112021.

²⁶⁵ Interviews with CSO representative, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; CSO representatives, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021.

²⁶⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

implementation partners. We, as a part of the organisation, are able to develop the plans and issues for advocacy along with its process and implementation.

A representative from CS:MAP's partner in Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading said that there has since been a significant change in CSOs' advocacy approach, resulting in the formulation of advocacy policy and strategic planning for advocacy.²⁶⁷ A CA member from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa had the following observation.²⁶⁸

We have learnt to get organised, plan about the steps, study the subject matter, determine possible cross-questions, and be prepared to answer them. We used to go for advocacy in a hurry and when we were questioned, we used to feel embarrassed.

CSO members also experienced improvement in their advocacy capacity since CS:MAP has oriented the staff involved with the programme about advocacy, coordination with local government and different stakeholders.²⁶⁹ A former official of CS:MAP's partner in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said,²⁷⁰

EBA training, in particular, has introduced me to the skills to carry out advocacy as a process. I no longer jump into advocacy immediately after I find an issue. I first invest time to collect evidence.

With the help of advocacy approaches like EBA, CSOs are better able to convince local authorities. A CSO representative from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said that EBA is a process of action research where one has to go to a particular location to collect evidence.²⁷¹ A CSO official from CS:MAP's partner in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali who has experience in advocacy, said that good evidence and research with the help of LDAGs and CA made it easier to convince local officials and members of the provincial parliament to resolve their problems in the school in Dhangadhi and Gadhimai. Although it took more than three months to collect the evidence, they were able to resolve those issues.²⁷² Likewise, in Panauti Municipality in Kavre, EBA has been instrumental in putting pressure on local government to formulate standard procedures to control violence against women and domestic alcohol production in the district.²⁷³

An official working with CS:MAP's partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi provided details about the strategy they follow for advocacy.²⁷⁴

First, we go to the community, understand people's problems, and identify the appropriate issues for advocacy. We even include local people in the advocacy team to draw the attention of the government authorities. This practice of participation of the concerned individuals in advocacy has been effective in resolving the problems.

²⁶⁷ Interview with CSO worker, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 27082021.

²⁶⁸ Interview with member (CA), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 30082021.

²⁶⁹ Interview with CSO official, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 10112021.

²⁷⁰ Interview with CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021.

²⁷¹ Interview with community reporter, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 22082021.

²⁷² Interview with CSO worker, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19082021.

²⁷³ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

²⁷⁴ Interview with CSO representative, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021.

Along with EBA, CS:MAP-supported CSOs in Surkhet and Dadeldhura said they advocate for public issues and concerns with regard to good governance, transparency, accountability, local participation in planning and implementation process based on the provisions in existing laws such as the Local Government Operation Act, 2017, Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2008, and Right to Information Act, 2007.²⁷⁵ Pointing out what the law has laid out helps strengthen the CSO workers in convincing local authorities. Similarly, a representative from CS:MAP's partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi stressed the importance of evidence and added that without proper research and review, advocacy efforts become weak.²⁷⁶ According to the same official, they also engage in sufficient consultations with other CSOs in the municipality before beginning advocacy.²⁷⁷

The head of CS:MAP's partner in Kalika Rural Municipality in Rasuwa provided examples of how they could bring about change in the municipality as a result of the EBA.²⁷⁸

We have arranged for health check-ups for the children at community schools. We've already solved the problem of waste management that existed in the municipality. In addition, the wildlife in the surrounding areas used to destroy the agriculture farming and the local government would not compensate the people, and we've had to lobby for that as well. As a result of our lobbying, people are now getting compensation from the municipal office.

Some of the major challenges to EBA, as outlined by CSO workers and journalists from all the study sites, arise from limited staff in the CSOs, lack of proper skills to carry out research, and insufficient funds to collect evidence. An official from CS:MAP's partner in Gorkha Municipality said that CSOs in the district are mostly urban-centric and they are neither capable nor always interested in raising issues affecting remote parts of the district.²⁷⁹ He also added that CSOs mostly do not want to reach remote areas alone as the initiative of a single CSO is not strong enough to draw the attention of concerned stakeholders and find solutions to the issues they raise.

Although advocacy based on evidence is a bottom-up approach and provides the opportunity to collect evidence from the field, according to an official working with CS:MAP's partner in Isma Municipality in Gulmi, people sometimes provide fake data since they have a lot of expectations from CSOs.²⁸⁰ It is also the case that people are afraid that any evidence they provide could disturb their relationship with the local officials.²⁸¹

Another challenge is that EBA is lengthy and complex as it involves many stages and stakeholders, and so CSOs may not always go through all the stages.²⁸² According to a representative from CS:MAP's partner in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali, it is difficult to

²⁷⁵ Interview with CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 03112021; CSO worker, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021.

²⁷⁶ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

²⁷⁷ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 20082021.

²⁷⁸ Interview with CSO official, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 23082021.

²⁷⁹ Interview with CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 26082021.

²⁸⁰ Interviews with CSO representatives, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; community reporter, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 22082021.

²⁸¹ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

²⁸² Interviews with journalist, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 27082021; CSO representative, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

put everything into practice since they require spending a lot of time and resources.²⁸³ A CSO official from Khandadevi Municipality at Ramechhap said the financial assistance provided by CS:MAP to the HEAD coalition for advocacy-related activities is not sufficient as it has to conduct interaction and monitoring activities regularly to find a resolution to any issue.²⁸⁴ One of the major challenges for effective implementation of ARI, EBA and PEAR, as highlighted by CSO officials of CS:MAP's partners in at least six study sites has been lack of sufficient funds and skilled human resources.²⁸⁵ A CSO official from Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura said,²⁸⁶

In Amargadhi Municipality the sustainability of tools like ARI, EBA and PEAR were challenged after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic because CS:MAP did not provide sufficient support to its partner organisation in the district, including access to the internet.

According to a representative of CS:MAP's partner in Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali, advocacy efforts could sometime widen the misunderstanding between CSOs and local authorities because government officials are suspicious how these tools could be used to their detriment.²⁸⁷ He added that locally influential people often interfere while information is being collected and concerned government offices tend to hide information. A way around, according to a CSO representative from Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi was to balance advocacy efforts and seek collaboration from local authorities not conflict.²⁸⁸ He said:

CSOs should be aware of and able to do advocacy based on research and evidence to make the advocacy weighty as well as effective. Either way, we are connected with the government institutions, so we have to think if we go complaining about their mistakes only it might be perceived as a tussle and we might not get any assistance from them in the future.

2.3.2 Enhancing Capacities of CSOs and Media

Using organisational capacity assessment (OCA) tools has helped CSOs to enhance their capacity by self-evaluating their organisational structure, plans and policies. The majority of the CSO members agreed that OCA has enhanced CSOs' capacity in planning, formulating strategic plans, reviewing those plans, devising different policies for self-regulation, and identifying own strengths and weaknesses, thereby enhancing the image and competitiveness of the organisations.²⁸⁹

CSOs have taken initiatives to incorporate social accountability tools in their programmes, develop GESI and other human resource policies, hold regular board and executive committee meetings, revise their organisation constitution, improve internal governance, financial

²⁸³ Interview with CSO worker, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 19082021.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

²⁸⁵ Interviews with CSO representatives, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO representatives, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021/20082021; CSO worker, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021; CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 20082021.

²⁸⁶ Interview with CSO worker, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021.

²⁸⁷ Interview with CSO official, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021.

²⁸⁸ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

²⁸⁹ Interviews with CSO representatives, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; CSO official, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura, 29082021.

transparency, and maintain proper documentation of their activities.²⁹⁰ CSO officials across all the study sites unequivocally agreed that internal governance of their organisations has improved after the partnership with CS:MAP. Since the CSOs have been working to make public service delivery transparent and accountable, these CSO officials feel that they have to initiate change from their own organisations. One of the CSO interviewees from Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke said:²⁹¹

We, as a CS:MAP partner organisation, are always aware that we need to set a good example for internal governance for all other CSOs in the district. It is necessary that we follow the standards of inclusivity and participation ourselves before we preach to others to do the same. Other CSOs look to us as an example of an inclusive and transparent organisation.

CSOs have followed certain measures to maintain good internal governance. As stated by CSO officials from four study sites (Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur, Panauti Municipality in Kavre and Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa), CSOs hold regular board meetings, properly document meeting minutes, conduct social and internal financial audits of their programmes, and have developed codes of conduct.²⁹² As a part of the continuous effort to improve internal governance, CS:MAP's partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi held regular virtual executive meetings even during the lockdown and made their activities public through social media platforms and website.²⁹³

In a bid to make their organisation inclusive and GESI- and human rights-friendly, CSOs in seven study sites have also formulated GESI Guidelines and CSO Operation Guideline and Human Resource Policy.²⁹⁴ For instance, the CSO official with CS:MAP's partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi said,²⁹⁵

To keep ourselves disciplined and transparent, we organise annual meetings, conduct capacity assessment of the staff and assess the internal capacity improvement in regular intervals. In the process, we assess personnel's behaviour as well as the organisation's legislation and, moving forward, we introduced a five-year strategic plan.

Similarly, CSO interviewees from Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu and Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading and CS:MAP's partners in Dhading and Kathmandu said

²⁹⁰ Interviews with head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021; CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO official, Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 23082021; CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021.

²⁹¹ Interview with CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021.

²⁹² Interviews with CSO representative, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 30082021; Interview with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021; Member, HEAD coalition, Rolpa, 04112021.

²⁹³ Interviews with journalist, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 23082021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021. In Nepal, a nationwide lockdown was imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning from 24 March 2020.

²⁹⁴ Interviews with CSO representative, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021; member (CA), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 30082021; CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 20082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; Interview with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021; CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021.

²⁹⁵ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

they have devised an index to monitor the organisational capacity, which, they said, has been very useful for their reference as well as to display evidence of the organisation's progress.²⁹⁶

CSOs representative claimed that their organisational structure has been inclusive of women, Dalit and other minority groups.²⁹⁷ For instance, an official with CS:MAP's partner in Gulmi said that the executive committee of the organisation comprised Dalits, ethnic communities with four of the nine members of the committee being women.²⁹⁸ Almost every CSO representative across the study sites was emphatic that the skills gained as a part of their involvement in CS:MAP will continue to influence their professional life thereafter. CSO officials representing CS:MAP's partner organisations in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi and Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya termed these skills 'soft skills' which will continue to influence their performance later in their career as well.²⁹⁹

CSOs in a few districts (Banke, Bardiya and Surkhet) have not only internalised the OCA in their organisation, but have also supported other non-CS:MAP CSOs conduct similar assessments, thus ensuring sustainability of these assessment tools and strengthening the internal governance of CSOs in the district.³⁰⁰ For instance, a former staff of CS:MAP's partner organisation in Surkhet said,³⁰¹

After local CSOs received training on OCA from Sundar Nepal,³⁰² they have learnt to draft a work plan with a tentative budget outline before implementing any programme. Previously, these CSOs would only do annual auditing and present the details at the annual board meeting and general assembly. Now, ever since these organisations received OCA training, they have started to conduct board meetings every three months and present a progress report to the board.

Similarly, an official with CS:MAP's partner in Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya said,³⁰³

Information and Human Rights Research Centre³⁰⁴ has been encouraging local CSOs in the district to adopt OCA. CSOs in the district have benefitted from using OCA in many different ways. These CSOs have learnt the significance of holding periodic social and public audits and the importance of involving minority groups like women, Dalits and other indigenous people in decision-making processes as well.

Not only has the practice of OCA increased competitiveness of partner CSOs of CS:MAP while bidding for project grants,³⁰⁵ but it has also been helpful in building trust between CSOs, local

²⁹⁶ Interviews with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021; head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 29082021.

²⁹⁷ CSO representatives from all twenty study sites.

²⁹⁸ Interview with CSO representative, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021.

²⁹⁹ Interviews with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 22082021.

³⁰⁰ Interviews with CSO representative, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021; CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 20082021.

³⁰¹ Interview with CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 03112021.

³⁰² Sundar Nepal is CS:MAP's partner in Surkhet.

³⁰³ Interview with CSO official, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20082021.

³⁰⁴ Information and Human Rights Research Centre is CS:MAP's partner in Bardiya.

³⁰⁵ Interview with CSO official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021.

people and government bodies. Further highlighting its significance, an official from CS:MAP's partner in Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu said:³⁰⁶

Since our organisation started advocacy to practice social accountability tools in local government plans and programmes, by practising them in our own organisation as well, we were able to build trust with the local government.

Some interviewees, however, questioned the impartiality of CSOs. This included CSO workers from Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa and Triveni Rural Municipality in Rukum West who believed that CSOs served to fulfil vested political interests.³⁰⁷ They said that the practice of government officials giving political appointments to civil society leaders has also called into question the impartiality of CSOs. Likewise, a civil servant from Ramechhap was also critical of the CSOs, arguing that CSOs themselves need to ensure transparency and accountability before expecting the same from government authorities.³⁰⁸

In a few other places CSOs were reportedly ineffective because they mostly prefer to work from urban centres while people from the rural areas remain uninformed about their activities.³⁰⁹ A government official from Krishnapur Municipality in Kanchanpur was rather harsh in her assessment:³¹⁰

There are many women in rural areas of the municipality who have been the victim of domestic violence. CSOs haven't been to those places to protect these women. Most of the time, these CSOs representatives work from cities. They have only been reaching people in the urban areas where there is easy access to motorable roads. These women in rural areas, who need help, are unaware about these CSOs.

Referring to the urban-centric nature of CSOs, an official with CS:MAP's partner in Bijaynagar Rural Municipality in Kapilvastu admitted,³¹¹

CSOs have not been able to serve the underserved population such as Dalits, Muslims, Madhesis and Pattharkatta³¹², most of whom live in the rural areas of the district. Although there are many CSOs active in the municipality supposedly working to uplift the lives of these marginalised groups, their efforts have not brought any substantive changes in the lives of people in need.

An interviewee from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap and FGD participants in three study sites (Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality in Bardiya and Budhanilkantha Municipality in Kathmandu) pointed out that most of the CSO projects are temporary in nature and that they show no interest in continuing along the same

³⁰⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 19082021.

³⁰⁷ Interviews with member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 28082021; CSO representative, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 29082021.

³⁰⁸ Interview with civil servant, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 31102021.

³⁰⁹ Interviews with community reporter, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021; FGD, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 03102021; government official, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur, 15092021.

³¹⁰ Interview with government official, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur, 15092021.

³¹¹ Interview with community reporter, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 20082021.

³¹² A small Dalit group living mostly in the Tarai, Pattharkattas make a living through stone carving.

line if and when they funding ends.³¹³ As an FGD participant from Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality put it,³¹⁴

CSOs conduct programmes mostly in and around the places where their organisations are located, or in selected areas of their [CSOs'] convenience. These projects are mostly time bound. These are some of the reasons I believe CSOs are not effective in the long run. CSOs continue their programme only so long as they receive funds from donor agencies.

Further critiquing the donor dependency nature of CSOs, a CSO representative from a minority community with CS:MAP's partner in Gorkha Municipality viewed the inclusion of women and other marginalised communities in CSO's board as a formality to fulfil the legal obligation and comply with donor requirements to secure funding from donors.³¹⁵ He argued that that there had not been any substantial improvement in the lives of these minority groups as a result of this inclusion.

2.3.3 Learning Culture and Capacity for Building Networks and Coalitions

Coalition members have begun working as part of a coalition because it provides for a wider civic space to engage authorities and citizens to discuss and resolve issues and concerns. Coalitions have been found to be effective in providing people with a forum for raising their concerns. Additionally, capacity-building activities from CS:MAP targeted at coalition facilitators has enhanced their coordination, facilitation and advocacy strength.³¹⁶ FGD participants across the study sites said that advocacy based on coalitions puts pressure on local governments to address concerns more effectively mainly because coalitions are representative of different societal groups and interests.³¹⁷

Considering the positive impact of such coalitions on identification and advocacy of local issues and concerns, most FGD participants stressed the need to give continuity to such groupings even after the completion of the project. At one FGD, participants even said that coalitions like the LDAG can run on self-funding as its members are very active and they are committed to continuing it in the long run.³¹⁸ One of them said that if the members of the LDAG can contribute their time and effort in the same manner then it can continue at the same pace even after the end of the project. An official from a CS:MAP's partner in Isma Rural Municipality in Gulmi said that CSOs could sustain the coalition even without CS:MAP since they have become habituated to working together; they can contribute through their organisation or even personally if they have the dedication to give back to society despite a

³¹³ Interviews with member (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021; FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 19092021; FGD, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 01102021; FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021.

³¹⁴ FGD, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 20092021.

³¹⁵ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

³¹⁶ Interviews with Coordinator (CA), Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 30102021; government official, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 31112021.

³¹⁷ Interviews with member of HEAD coalition, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 31102021; CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021.

³¹⁸ FGD, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 16092021.

shortage of funds.³¹⁹ A former official who had worked with the CS:MAP partner in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said:³²⁰

We have to remember that it is our responsibility. There should be uniformity in the understanding of all the bodies involved in the coalition. If this is our need then continuity can be given even without resources.

In Surkhet, Kapilvastu, Kavre and Bhaktapur, local governments were planning to support or even adopt some coalitions after the CS:MAP programme.³²¹ Yet, the effectiveness and existence of the coalitions after CS:MAP is also largely questioned by study participants because of the absence of funding and technical backstopping.³²² CSO and local government officials expressed concerns over donor dependency.³²³ A civil servant from Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap and an official representing CS:MAP's partner in Tamakoshi Rural Municipality in Dolakha said that the local government alone cannot sustain these coalitions.³²⁴ They believed that sustainability was possible only by cost-sharing between the local government and concerned CSOs. Encouragingly, a government official from Panauti Municipality said that the local government will always play a supportive role in making the alliance sustainable.³²⁵ However, she expressed concern that the coalition would not be as effective as it is now, as local governments will not be able to focus on the same issues as donors.

Interviewees from all of the study sites unequivocally stated that sustainability is the primary challenge for these coalitions. These coalitions are informal in nature and are a loose network of different groups or organisations without any regular and guaranteed sources of income.³²⁶ Their advocacy activities are often impeded by the lack of budget to finance even the minimum logistical expenses required for such activities.

With regard to the functioning of LDAGs, the major factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of these coalitions are different in urban and rural areas. In urban areas like Kathmandu, given their busy schedules, people are reported to be unwilling to participate in these coalitions.³²⁷ In rural areas the problem is somewhat different since a large number of youths have left their villages in search of education and employment elsewhere, resulting in a fewer members in the LDAGs.³²⁸ A CSO official representing CS:MAP's partner in Kanchanpur reported that male

³¹⁹ Interview with CSO official, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021.

³²⁰ Interview with CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021.

³²¹ Interviews with CSO worker, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 20082021; community reporter, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 22082021; community reporter, Bijaynagar Rural Municipality, Kapilvastu, 22082021; CSO official, Changuarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

³²² Interviews with CSO representative, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 19082021; member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 28082021; CSO representative, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 21082021; journalist, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 27082021.

³²³ Interviews with journalist, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 23082021; CSO official, Changuarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 26082021.

³²⁴ Interviews with civil servant, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 31102021; CSO representative, Tamakoshi Rural Municipality, Dolakha, 21082021.

³²⁵ Interview with government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 02112021.

³²⁶ Interviews with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 20082021; Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

³²⁷ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 21082021.

³²⁸ Interview with head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura, 29082021.

youths in the municipality migrate to India in search of jobs while females migrate after marriage, so he doubted the sustainability of LDAGs in Kanchanpur.³²⁹ Although LDAGs have been formed by the CS:MAP targeting youths who would listen to radio programmes such as *Sajha Boli* and *Sathi Sanga Manka Kura* and lead a series of discussion on issues pertinent to governance and public services, most of the youth in rural areas lack equipment like FM radio and mobile phones to listen to the programmes.³³⁰ On the contrary, youths with access to such devices, especially from urban areas, spend most of their time on popular social media sites, they are not interested in listening to the radio programmes.³³¹ Listening to the radio is an out-dated idea for them. In Surkhet, FGD participants said that in order to sustain LDAGs in the long run, they are planning to merge two LDAGs and form a youth club, and register it in the municipality office.³³²

The effectiveness of these coalitions is gravely challenged when government officials and other members in the coalition represent different political parties. In most of the cases, government officials refrain from taking action on any issue raised by the coalition if it is considered going against their political allies.³³³ An FGD participant from Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali and an interviewee from Bheriganga Municipality in Surkhet mentioned that the participation of the government officials is very limited at meetings or programmes organised by the coalitions and the CSOs.³³⁴ Most of the time, the government officials only verbally commit to resolved concerns raised by the coalitions. One of the reasons for this reluctance, according to the CS:MAP partner official from Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur could be due to lack of proper understanding on the part of government officials and civil servants about CS:MAP's aims and activities.³³⁵ An FGD participant of the same municipality said that bringing together government officials of those wards that do not lie in the intervention area of CS:MAP was a major challenge.³³⁶

We attempt to bring the government officials of all of the wards to the meeting of the CA so that a variety of issues can be raised and addressed. However, apart from the six wards where CS:MAP has its programme, other ward chairs are reluctant come to the CA meeting. They always make excuses.

Apart from above mentioned reasons, in situations where coalition members do not have a common understanding of the agenda the coalitions are not effective to advance local issues.³³⁷ Teamwork is considered the key ingredient to a successful coalition initiative.³³⁸ In Gauriganga Municipality in Kailali, the CA has not been able to work effectively because there is lack of unity between different members in the CA. Almost every member has his or her own political

³²⁹ Interview with head of CS:MAP partner organisation, Krishnapur Municipality, Kanchanpur and Dadeldhura, 29082021.

³³⁰ Interview with community reporter, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 22082021.

³³¹ Interview with CSO representative, Budhanilkantha Municipality, Kathmandu, 21082021.

³³² FGD, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 18092021.

³³³ Interview with former CSO worker, Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Dang, 28082021.

³³⁴ FGD, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 23082021; government official, Bheriganga Municipality, Surkhet, 31102021.

³³⁵ Interview with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 27082021.

³³⁶ FGD, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 18092021.

³³⁷ Interview with journalist, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021.

³³⁸ Interview with member (HEAD), Bhaktapur, 17112021.

affiliation.³³⁹ As a result, there are cases when coalition members do not engage with issues of advocacy issue and focus on something else.³⁴⁰

Highlighting some other challenges of working in a team, a representative with CS:MAP's partner in Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading said,³⁴¹

The challenge with the coalition is that coalition members participate in coalition meetings as per their availability but are not willing to take ownership of the programme. Since there are people of similar status, some members are unwilling to follow the leadership of anyone else nor do they wish to take lead.

A HEAD coordinator from Kavre district said there was no justification for the coalition to continue in the district.³⁴² According to him, members have only used this alliance to facilitate the operation of their own projects as people from different fields join the HEAD alliance and information from all sectors are obtained from the same forum. The civil society representative of Panauti Municipality has also expressed similar views that the HEAD coalition is not effective in Kavre district as the people involved in the HEAD alliance are the ones who priorities their own work first over the common issues raised by civil society.³⁴³

Despite coalitions being active in CS:MAP's project intervention areas, they do not have the capacity to work on several issues of interest to the people such as physical development, emergency support in a natural disaster or in any crisis due to lack of financial and human resources.³⁴⁴ CSO officials across all the study sites said that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the overall functioning of the CS:MAP-supported activities. Many activities such as LDAG and CA meetings were affected due to the prohibition in mobility and gathering across the country. Although in at least seven (rural) municipalities, coalition meetings were held virtually, most meetings were irregular while many coalition members did not have internet access at home.³⁴⁵ An official with CS:MAP's partner in Gorkha Municipality said:³⁴⁶

When we did not find a physical space for the coalition meetings, we tried to have a discussion through a virtual medium due to which the number of participants in the programme increased significantly but most of them lacked active participation. Therefore, we could not come to a definite conclusion through these virtual meetings.

Similarly, an official with CS:MAP's partner in Panauti Municipality in Kavre said:³⁴⁷

³³⁹ Interview with CSO official, Gauriganga Municipality, Kailali, 21082021.

³⁴⁰ Interview with CSO worker, Changanarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 31102021.

³⁴¹ Interview with CSO official, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 10112021.

³⁴² Interview with Coordinator (HEAD), Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 31102021.

³⁴³ Interview with CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Coordinator (HEAD), Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 27082021.

³⁴⁵ Interviews with member (CA), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 20082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 03112021; member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 04112021; CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021; CS:MAP partner CSO officials, Isma Rural Municipality, Gulmi, 14092021/22082021; CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021; CSO official, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading, 10112021; community reporter, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 22082021; CSO representative, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 19082021; community reporter, Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality, Bardiya, 22082021.

³⁴⁶ Interview with CSO representative, Gorkha Municipality, Gorkha, 25082021.

³⁴⁷ Interview with community reporter, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 22082021.

LDAG members in the municipality tried to use the virtual medium for their meetings and discussions, but were not successful as many LDAG members did not have proper access to internet and electricity in their homes and communities.

In at least one study site (Bannigadhi Jayagadh Rural Municipality in Achham), the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown meant reduced fund flow to the CS:MAP partner. As a result, the partner was forced to reduce the number of LDAGs in the district from three to just one.³⁴⁸

Despite the fact that COVID-19 had restricted coalitions meetings, in Duduwa Rural Municipality in Banke, the CA and LDAG were successful in having the rural municipality office set up a help desk at the rural municipality office at the time of COVID-19.³⁴⁹ These coalitions in the municipality also facilitated the rural municipality office in distributing soap in the municipality during the pandemic.

4.3.1 Other Challenges

Despite the improvement in the organisational and advocacy capacity of CSOs in the study sites, there are a few other challenges that hinder the role of CSOs and effective engagement of CSOs with public authorities. An official from CS:MAP's partner in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rolpa said that people's participation in development activities has not been as effective and visible as it had to be.³⁵⁰ This is because the municipal government conducts development activities through contractors, which has resulted in reduced participation of civil society in such activities.

In the case of Khandadevi Rural Municipality in Ramechhap, since CS:MAP's intervention was limited to a small area, even those within the same municipality but outside CS:MAP project coverage do not participate actively in the advocacy.³⁵¹

A community action researcher (CAR) from Neelakantha Municipality in Dhading said that CS:MAP and its local partner have not invested sufficiently in helping build the capacity of backward communities.³⁵²

As a community action researcher, I have the huge responsibility of bringing together the people in the coalition to meetings and keeping record of issues that emerge during discussion so that I can continuously lobby with the government. In the course of my work, I've realised that people from the backward communities need to be capacitated further so that they also can have equal access to public services in the municipality. I would suggest that CS:MAP and its local partner in the municipality invest more resources aimed at uplifting these backward communities here.

Some of the other challenges for the engagement of CSOs for better public service delivery, participation and sustainability of initiatives highlighted by the interviewees are administrative limitations, lack of budget, and people's lack of access to the internet, particularly in remote areas. Interviewees across the study sites mentioned these challenges based on their own

³⁴⁸ Interview with CSO official, Bannigadhi Jaygadh Rural Municipality, Achham, 21082021.

³⁴⁹ FGD, Duduwa Rural Municipality, Banke, 17092021.

³⁵⁰ Interview with member (HEAD), Triveni Rural Municipality, Rolpa, 04112021.

³⁵¹ Interview with government official, Khandadevi Rural Municipality, Ramechhap, 24082021.

³⁵² Interview with CAR, Neelakantha Municipality, Dhading; 20102021.

experiences. Besides, as CSO officials from Changunarayan Municipality in Bhaktapur and Kalika Rural Municipality in Rasuwa said, the frequent changes in the information officer in government offices, delay in service delivery due to the busy schedules of government officials, and bureaucratic obstacles pose a challenge to effective civic engagement with public authorities.³⁵³

An official from CS:MAP's partner in Amargadhi Municipality in Dadeldhura pointed out that the CSOs in the municipality have not been able to reach the remotest parts of the district due to lack of funds.³⁵⁴ Whereas in Triveni Rural Municipality in Rukum West, it is mainly poor internet and mobile connections that have posed challenging in disseminating public service messages through websites and mobile applications, and the CSO has had to use FM radio.³⁵⁵ Despite the efforts of CSOs to improve overall governance through enhanced public access to services, transparency and accountability, a government official from Panauti Municipality in Kavre said that sometimes issues raised by the media and CSOs are driven by the vested interests of journalists, political leaders and CSOs representatives.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ Interviews with CSO official, Changunarayan Municipality, Bhaktapur, 29082021; Facilitator (LDAG), Kalika Rural Municipality, Rasuwa, 20082021.

³⁵⁴ Interview with community reporter, Amargadhi Municipality, Dadeldhura, 27082021.

³⁵⁵ Interview with CSO official, Triveni Rural Municipality, Rukum West, 28082021.

³⁵⁶ Interview with government official, Panauti Municipality, Kavre, 24082021.

3 SSB'S OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Civil Society's Engagement and Interactions with Government Authorities

The findings from this study indicate that civil society plays a complementary role to the government. As mentioned above, civil society has undertaken several initiatives to improve the overall governance system through technical and other types of assistance to the government, most particularly at a time when the role of the government was relatively weaker. As a service provider, civil society has helped general people particularly in the time of disasters and during the earlier Maoist insurgency.

Civil society organisations appear to have played a coordinating role between the government and local people by providing assistance to those in distress at the local level between 2000 and 2017, when there were no elected local governments across the country. During the period of the insurgency, village development committee (VDC) officials had moved to the district headquarters or nearby towns for reasons of security. CSOs worked closely with local communities and communicated their problems to government authorities.

Similarly, civil society seems to have responsibly exposed various anomalies overlooked by the local governments. CSOs have been largely successful in removing some of the irregularities associated with public service and public service delivery. In most of the study areas, civil society has been accepted as an integral part of democratic governance and has been included in the governance process. Public bodies have also gradually become more accountable and transparent due to constant monitoring by civil society. Local governments seem to be involving civil society in the budgeting and planning processes while also ensuring public participation in the policy-making processes as a result of lobbying by CSOs. Civil society also had a significant role to play in providing technical and financial assistance to local governments formed not only after a long hiatus in Nepal but also under a federal political system. In particular, the technical assistance received by local governments under the CS:MAP in drafting laws and policies has greatly helped officials understand the law-making process.

While civil society has worked with local governments to ensure greater public participation through legislation, there still persists confusion mainly among government officials and the general public about civil society and its roles. In some places, with the election of local governments and the direct contact with officials by the people, there seems to be a view that civil society has lost its relevance as the interlocutor between the two sides.

Yet, there is no denying that CS:MAP and its approach have significantly contributed to changing the perception about civil society among local government representatives and people to a large extent. Government authorities, who were initially hesitant to engage with civil society, now ask for different kinds of help from CSOs. The CS:MAP initiatives have been welcomed by local government authorities particularly because they encourage collaboration between civil society and local government authorities to work together to make the governance processes more efficient, accountable, inclusive, participatory and transparent.

SSB agrees with CS:MAP that there is a need for a more sustained and healthy relationship between local government authorities and civil society where both can work hand-in-hand to

craft an effective governance system. SSB also distinguishes between the various roles that civil society actors play, from service delivery to advocacy to specific forms of technical support as and when requested by local leaders. Each role—and the overlap between them—carries with it a distinct set of implications for how civil society engages with governments.

Certain conditions appear necessary to bring about a more sustainable outcome though. These include: i) the responsiveness of CS:MAP to concrete, specific, time-bound and urgent needs of municipal authorities; ii) the skills used by CS:MAP partners to engage in persuasion as opposed to resorting only to criticism and the starting assumptions under which processes of persuasion began; iii) the degree of learning that occurred through this engagement about the respective roles, responsibilities and limitations, leading to a shared understanding between civic leaders and local authorities about the nature and scope of their mutual engagement; and iv) the results, that is, the tangible benefits of this engagement.

The Government of Nepal has recognised the role and significance of civil society in the governance system through various other laws and policies, including the Social Welfare Act, 1992 and the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA), 2017. The involvement of civil society in the governance processes has not yet been fully materialised though. This study attributes three main reasons contributing to this state of affairs particularly at the local level: i) a deficit of trust between government officials and civil society, with the former viewing the latter to be serving the interest of donors and the latter considering the former driven by politically vested interests; ii) the urban-centric nature of civil society; and iii) the flawed understanding among government officials and the general public about civil society that the latter has only a temporary function. SSB believes the need for more sustained support from programmes like CS:MAP to the local governments at least until government authorities and the citizenry at large understand and appreciate the never-ending role of CSOs (along with the media) in playing the role of permanent watchdog over government functions.

3.2 Inclusion and Participation

This study found significant improvements at the local level in terms of inclusion in public service and the policy-making process. Government bodies seem to be gradually becoming aware about the importance of including people of all socio-economic backgrounds in the decision-making and planning process, which is both a constitutional and legal requirement as well. Yet, not everyone has been participating in planning and decision-making processes equally. Unequal access to information, geographical inconvenience, economic deprivation, and pre-existing hierarchical relations between different classes, genders and communities in the society have emerged as major factors hindering adequate and equal participation in the governance process.

The findings clearly show that many people are not able to be take part in the governance processes due to the lack of access to timely notices and information about the activities. This has been exacerbated lately with use of ICT tools to disseminate notices and information. Significant sections of the population, most particularly those from the remote parts of the (rural) municipalities, fail to keep themselves informed since they lack access to ICT tools such as computers, television and mobile phones, or because they do not have internet access.

In a few instances, inclusion and participation have not been materialised because most of these governance-related activities take place in the municipal office and it takes considerable time and effort for people from far-flung areas to reach it. Two other important factors for self-exclusion are poverty and existing caste- and gender-based hierarchical relations. For the poor, the opportunity cost of losing a day's wages is not worth their taking part in meetings while women and those from minority communities often find themselves ignored for various reasons, including not being articulate enough but also because of their social background. Participation of such groups has sometimes been mere tokenism. Despite CS:MAP's broader objective of ensuring inclusion and participation of all historically marginalised groups in all governance processes, findings show that it has been less successful in fulfilling this goal.

3.3 Public Sphere

CS:MAP has had considerable success in establishing public forums to discuss issues of common concern, most particularly those related to local level governance. CS:MAP approaches like HEAD, PF and CA have been very effective in raising issues and pointing out anomalies pertaining to local level governance as these coalitions involve a range of stakeholders representing the public sector, private sector and civil society.

CS:MAP has also made remarkable strides towards establishing a relationship between the media and civil society, primarily with an objective of ensuring that the reporting and advocacy are evidence driven. Evidence-based advocacy is essential also to bring the voices that had long been unheard by the public authorities to the fore so that the issues and concerns of those marginalised groups can also be resolved. Towards this end, the media has been instrumental not only in helping civil society in the process of acquiring evidence, but also in taking matters of public concern to a mass audience.

Although collaboration between civil society and the media has successfully resolved various discrepancies related to public service delivery, there persists a scepticism that this partnership will endure after CS:MAP ceases operation. A range of factors reinforce this suspicion, including the fact that collecting evidence requires a long time and a lot of resources which many CSOs and media houses cannot afford.

Among the different CS:MAP initiatives, LDAG has been successful in achieving the goal of increased civic engagement, particularly among the youth population. If some of these successful practices by the LDAGs can be continued, it can certainly contribute to establishing good governance by increasing the participation of the youth in the field of public affairs and public service. This approach, too, is not free of challenges. Besides the question of resources, the high mobility of the youth from rural areas to urban centres in search of opportunities is a major one.

3.4 Incentive Structures

CS:MAP has undertaken the arduous task of promoting civic engagement in an interesting time in Nepal's political evolution. The past few years have been considerably more dynamic in Nepal's governance history for two main reasons: i) Nepal finally adopted federalism after years of dithering, and ii) Nepal held local level elections in 2017 after nearly two decades.

In a context where the country had just operationalised federalism and the newly formed local governments did not have a clear knowledge or understanding of their rights and responsibilities, the project faced many obstacles. But it also provided CS:MAP a wider avenue to meaningfully engage with local governments to inform the latter on various issues pertaining to local governance and public service delivery. The new federal dispensation is geared towards more devolved governance whereby local governments gradually become directly accountable to the populations they serve. Although, in the past few years, there have been attempts from the federal government to squeeze the role of civil society and the media by through stronger regulation, findings from the study indicate that such moves will not have the same impact as local governments begin to ensure civic engagement in governance processes as a matter of course.

Some elected local officials have happily welcomed CS:MAP's approaches aimed at promoting civic engagement and have expressed their continued willingness to work with civil society towards the goal of more inclusive, participatory, accountable and transparent governance at the local level. There will always be government officials less keen on partnering with civil society actors since either their personal interests outweigh consideration of the general good or they believe CSOs are driven only by donor interest. In a few instances, the study found that some local government officials shift from one position to another—willing to cooperate when their interests coincide with the issues raised by civil society, and ready to repudiate when they diverge.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

For the government

- Bearing in mind the contributions made by CS:MAP-led coalitions (such as HEAD, PF, CA and LDAG) in widening civic space and improved engagement and interactions between state and other stakeholders, it is recommended that local governments take ownership of these coalitions/forums or partner with local CSOs to sustain these platforms. Activities carried out under HEAD coalitions and Partnership Forums could be carried out also at the ward level periodically.
- It is crucial that government bodies make targeted efforts at making their programmes and activities more transparent and engage with the general public, CSOs and the media in identifying local needs, and during decision-making and implementation processes.
- In line with the mandates and responsibilities provided for in the Constitution of Nepal and other laws, the governments should be proactive in ensuring participation of people from all socio-economic and geographic backgrounds in the planning and decision-making process.
- As the use of ICT in governance continues to increase, the government can use modern technologies and social media platforms to disseminate information about public services, plans and policies and decisions concerning public matters in a more user-friendly way but also for regular interactions and discussions with stakeholders and general public. It can also set up a dynamic online grievance registration and handling system, which can not only contribute to transparency and accountability but also gain more public legitimacy and trust in the government. Local governments need to strengthen the technical capacity of the staff to manage such a system while acknowledging that many of the people will not have the facilities or knowledge to engage electronically.
- Registration of CSOs and their reporting procedures to government agencies should be simplified, without requiring the CSOs deal with multiple government agencies at different levels of government. This will also call for a uniform/single legal framework in place. It is recommended that most of these procedures be digitized and managed through an online system.
- Local government should allocate necessary budget to conduct awareness programmes aimed at familiarising lawmakers and the members of the Judicial Committee at the municipal level about their roles and responsibilities as well as conduct capacity-building exercises to enhance their skills required to strengthen good governance as well as improve policy-making and public service delivery.
- There is a growing need to formulate and enforce comprehensive guidelines to mobilise CSOs during times of crisis—such as conflicts, pandemic, and other natural calamities—to address the specific needs of population groups that are most impacted, including women, Dalits, Janajatis and other marginalised and minority groups.

For the CS:MAP team

- It is necessary that CSMAP interventions are also implemented in rural areas of the municipalities while ensuring the *meaningful* participation of CBOs, local communities, socio-economically, politically marginalised and vulnerable groups.
- The programme should consider providing additional livelihood support to the people from poor, marginalised communities, women and other minority groups so that they also can participate and voice their concerns in public events and contribute to civic engagement.
- Implementing partners of CS:MAP should ensure rotational participation of different individuals and representatives of organisations and groups in forums such as the Common Assembly. There should be flexibility and space for adaptation of new strategies as per the lessons learnt from the current phase.
- CS:MAP should invest some technical and financial resources on building the capacity of local FM stations so that they can continue with their own iterations of radio programmes such as *Sajha Boli* and *Sathi Sanga Manka Kura*.
- During the partner selection process, priority should also be given to the local CSO or CBOs. This can contribute to legitimacy at the local level. It is important to be aware of the partnership contribute directly or indirectly to reinforcing existing power structures rather than transforming those in the favour of the general public and those living in the margins. Future programmes of CS:MAP can also consider organising and building networks of marginalised and vulnerable groups for engagement with the project.

For CS:MAP partners/CSOs

- To carry out advocacy and lobbying activities for GESI with more public legitimacy and effectiveness, it is essential that CSOs also ensure inclusive organisational structures and decision-making process.
- Acknowledging the fact that the difficulties of socio-economic minorities like women, Dalit, indigenous and other marginalised and minority groups are more entrenched during periods of crisis, there needs to be separate guideline on mobilisation of CSOs during crises like pandemic, conflict and other natural calamities.
- It should be a precondition that CSOs as an organisation should not engage in partisan politics in order to help improve public trust in CSOs.
- CSOs need to expand their activities to more rural areas.
- Since evidence-based advocacy has provided to be an effective means of lobbying for change, advocacy-oriented CSOs should continue to advocate public issues and concerns based on evidence, which will also improve the legitimacy of CSOs and generate public trust.

- Partner organisations need to be careful and vigilant about potential risks that some of the members in coalitions like HEAD could steer the body for their vested interest and thereby weaken its influence and legitimacy.
- To strengthen the advocacy agenda, disseminate information about programmes and activities and maintain public confidence, CSOs should mobilise and collaborate with the media, primarily local media, to produce programmes to reach the rural parts as well.
- Increased use of mobile applications and other ICT tools can prove effective in strengthening public service delivery, grievance registration and information dissemination for the urban public as a majority of the urban population is equipped with internet access. CSOs and media should also focus on more use of social media tools and modern technologies to not only sensitize the public but also to hold the authorities accountable to their activities.

For the media

- Local media working in good governance can make their radio programmes effective and transformative at the grassroots by encourage the formation of radio listening groups at the community level or by making use of social media interactively.
- Radio programmes such as *Sajha Boli* and coalitions such as LDAG have proved effective in information dissemination and have encouraged public discourse on various issues, thus institutionalising participatory practices. Such initiatives can be replicated in other districts through local community FM stations.

On potential areas for further research

- A comparative study of CS:MAP intervention and non-intervention municipalities would serve to distinguish the relative impacts of CS:MAP has on good governance and, specifically, on participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency, and capacity enhancement.
- Given the fact that the access to different means of technology is disproportionate among different groups of people, it is necessary for CS:MAP to conduct a study to identify whether and what kind of technology can be a more effective means of citizen engagement.
- It is very important that CSOs conduct a needs assessment of communities and groups before launching any programmes and focus mostly on those areas that require support.
- The impact of CS:MAP's technical support to local governments in drafting policy and laws and its effect in advancing good governance has not been sufficiently captured by this study. It is recommended that an assessment be commissioned to understand the different factors that were at play during the drafting and adoption process.
- There is a need for a separate study to understand the politico-socio-economic factors restraining participation of people, particularly from socio-economically and politically

marginalised groups, in the overall governance processes. Such a study would best be undertaken through an ethnographic approach complemented by a quantitative survey.

- Studies focused on identifying issues related to compliance and enforcement of existing legal and constitutional provisions related to accountability, transparency, public participation, and GESI, among others, would be crucial for future advocacy efforts all around.

ANNEX I: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

All the checklists have been revised for clarity and brevity following multiple rounds of consultations with the CS:MAP team, and also incorporate feedback received during the four-day long orientation training for researchers.

1. Checklist for In-depth Interviews (IDIs) [to be conducted with CS:MAP implementation team, including officials from local partner organisations]

1. How do you assess the role of civil society? (**Probe:** *any change in the role of civil society before and after the local level elections were held in 2017? If yes, what led to the change? If no, why?*)
2. Whether and how much do you know about FoA, FoE and independence of civil society? If and why is it important?
3. Knowledge about the provision (legal and policy) regarding FoA, FoE and independence of civil society.
4. Contribution of the CS:MAP in the process of drafting/amendment/withdrawal of laws and policies affecting FoA, FoE and various media related laws at federal and provincial levels? What were the outputs? (**Probe categorically:** *1. Laws/policies CS:MAP's partners' involvement prevented from being tabled at the parliament/enacted (for e.g. National Integrity Policy and the Directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs); 2. Substantive change in the law (for e.g. Media Council Bill and Information Technology Bill); 3. Assist in drafting model law and policies (for e.g. Social Development Act in coordination with Nepal Law Commission) and; 4. Several other laws and policies at the federal and provincial laws that contradicted FoA and FoE and constricted enabling environment for the civil society have been halted as a result of CS:MAP's initiatives. Local level?}*)
5. Your involvement in the drafting/reviewing/amendment process of the laws and policies at the federal level (**Probe:** *stakeholders who were involved in the process; what was your role? things that were incorporated/revised as a part of your effort; challenges/limitations?*)
6. Drafting/review process of the laws, policies, plans and programmes at the local level (**Probe:** *stakeholders who involved; support provided/received in instituting different committees at the local level, such as Legislative Committee and Good Governance Committee*)
7. Attitude/perception of policy makers (*ministries, parliamentarians and government officials at provincial and local levels*) towards freedom of association (FoA), freedom of expression (FoE) and enabling environment for civil society. (**Probe:** *willingness in*

governments/government officials to accept the advice/suggestions in regard to draft and/or amend laws and policies towards a more congenial environment for FoA, FoE?)

8. CSOs' knowledge about advocacy approach (evidence based advocacy), advocacy strategy and advocacy cycle (**issue identification, analysis, strategy formulation, action plan, execution, M&E**) (**Probe:** *support from CS:MAP on the approach; steps of advocacy cycle, whether and how have they been able to replicate the acquired knowledge in promoting good governance?*)
9. How much do you know about the coalitions (*CS:MAP led coalitions such as HEAD coalition, PF, CA and LDAG*)? Whether and how the collaboration between different stakeholders (*local government, CSOs, media and citizens*) through these coalitions has facilitated participation, inclusion, accountability, transparency, effective and timely public service delivery, advocacy initiatives? (**Probe:** *membership/involvement in these coalitions; opportunities and challenges of these coalitions; sustainability of these forums without external support, such as support from CS:MAP; experience of working in these forums/coalitions (challenges and opportunities)*)
10. Whether and how have these coalitions contributed to capacity building of CSOs, increased engagement of CSOs with local governments, effective usage and monitoring of public resources and effective public service delivery?
11. Whether and how have these coalitions contributed to better advocacy efforts?
12. Support from CS:MAP in advancing your organisational capacity and advocacy readiness (**Probe:** *what kind? What specific aspects of organisational/institutional capacity were strengthened the most? whether and how beneficial was the support? What kind of support would have made your performance better and why? Sustainability of the skills after the support from CS:MAP is over?*)
13. Effectiveness and contribution of social accountability tools, such as social audit and public hearing as means of public oversight (**Probe:** *issues discussed as a part of these tools; whether and how effective have these tools been in ensuring participation, inclusion, accountability, transparency and broader civic engagement at the local level? Limitations with these tools?*)
14. **ISOs** experience about Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI)/Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) and various other social accountability tools, such as public auditing, social auditing and public hearing. (**Probe:** *it's significance? Gaps identified in CSOs' ability in advocacy; whether and how was ARI tailored to Nepali/local context? Initiatives taken for advocacy capacity building for CSOs?*)
15. CSOs learning from ARI, OCA and other social accountability tools (**Probe:** *Whether and how did they improve their capacity for advocacy? Whether and how did the use*

of these instruments help to ensure better access of people to public services and transparency and accountability? If not improved, why?)

16. Using ICT for better service delivery/accessibility (**Probe:** *purpose for using ICT? any assistance to government agencies on ICT? If yes, whether and how did that help in public service delivery/accessibility and transparency? Challenges attached to using such means and tools of ICT as a part of delivering/accessing public services? how helpful have these means/tools been in ensuring accountability and transparency*)
17. Opportunities and challenges of EBA and participatory evidence based action research (PEAR) at all three levels of governments {**Probe:** *CS:MAP's support on EBA and PEAR; resources and skills required in conducting EBA and PEAR; sustainability of these resources and skills; difficulties in generating information (evidence); sources of threats*}
18. Experience of conducting research to gather evidence/information to back up advocacy agendas with evidence (**Probe:** *process of collecting evidence/information; how were those evidence/information used for advocacy purpose? What were the outputs of such evidence-based advocacy? Whether and how the EBA brings any changes in the role of civil society; any changes in the role of the public service delivery mechanism?*)
19. Transparency, accountability, inclusion and participation in government service delivery in sub-national governments (**Probe:** *identifying public dissatisfaction related to public service delivery; lobbying the government to address the dissatisfaction related to public service delivery; grievance hearing mechanism(s) of local governments; willingness of the government to listen to suggestions/advices from local CSOs*)
20. Activities carried out to enhance transparency, accountability and to ensure broader public participation in decision making at the local level (**Probe:** *Whether and how effective are those strategies? Results/changes brought?*)
21. Internal governance and self-regulation mechanisms (**internal auditing and its disclosure, internal governance practices and adoption of self-regulation tools/mechanisms**) of CSOs {**Probe:** *board composition (women and members of other minority communities); decision making process; whether and how do these CSOs share details about their decisions and expenses to the public? What mechanisms exist, how has it been implemented? Whether and how has it improved after you've received support from CS:MAP?*}
22. Whether and how you benefited from CS:MAP's support related to advancing right based approach (human rights related interventions) {**Probe:** *whether and to what extent have you been able to influence governments so that they are ready to importance and considering the issues related to minority groups, including Dalit, women, LGBTIQ and other ethnic minorities among others?*}

23. Impact on advocacy initiatives/efforts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
24. Impact of COVID-19 on public service delivery (**Probe:** the most affected, why?)
25. Impact of COVID-19 on conducting/handling/using tools, such as Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI) and Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) and other social accountability tools, such as social audit, public audit and public hearing.
26. COVID-19 and its impact on coalitions (national level coalition, HEAD coalition, PF, CA and LDAG)
27. Recommendations for improved and strengthened coalitions between stakeholders at different levels.
28. Suggestions regarding use of ICT for improving democratic and participatory and transparent governance and public engagement.
29. What would have made your assignment/role more effective?

2. Checklist for Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) [to be conducted with Intermediary Service Organisations (ISOs), government officials, local stakeholders, human rights defenders, journalists]

I. Checklist for interviews with government officials and civil servants

1. How do you assess the role of civil society? (**Probe:** *whether and how helpful have CSOs been in ensuring FoA, FoE, participation, accountability, inclusion, transparency and effective public service delivery? any change in the role of civil society before and after the local level elections were held in 2017? If yes, what led to the change? If no, why?*)
2. Dissemination of information related to public service delivery, budget, planning (**Probe:** *medium? process?*)
3. Using social accountability tools, such as public audit and public hearing? (**Probe:** *Process? Participants? Dissemination of information/sharing the details with the public?*) Any support from the non-government sector in using any of these tools? (**Probe:** *Who supported? What was the support like?*)
4. Grievance hearing mechanism of the government (**Probe:** *Effectiveness? Process? Opportunities/challenges?*)
5. Whether and how have CS:MAP and their implementing partners facilitated/supported the government in drafting laws/policies at the federal, provincial and a local level? (**Probe:** *Kind of support (technical support and/or advocacy)*)
6. Experiences and learnings from providing/receiving technical assistance/expertise to review laws and policies related to civil society and media [**on conducting right to information (RTI) campaigns, public expenditure tracking (PET) survey, using**

community score cards, citizen report card survey, palika level public hearings, conduct RTI and other outreach campaigns and using good governance barometer (GGB)], (*Probe: whether and how that helped in improving your performance and quality of public service delivery and ensure participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability*)

7. Using ICT for better service delivery/accessibility (*Probe: accessing/providing information using ICT; challenges attached to using such means and tools of ICT as a part of delivering/accessing public services; whether and how helpful have these means/tools been in ensuring participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency; capability of local governments to make sustained use of those ICT means and tools without any external support.*)
8. Whether and how have governments shared their plans and policies and budget online; use of ICT to share government's plans, policies and budget
9. Whether and how have coalitions between CSOs and CSOs and media contributed to capacity building of CSOs, increased engagement of CSOs with local governments, effective monitoring of use of public resources, effective public service delivery, better advocacy efforts from the civil society and media and using social accountability tools, such as public audit and public hearing?
10. Your involvement in the coalition (*PF at the municipal level and CA at the ward level*) (*Probe: Role and responsibility of the government official in the forum? Whether and how have these coalitions contributed to increased engagement of CSOs with local governments, effective monitoring of use of public resources, effective public service delivery, better advocacy efforts from the civil society and media and using social accountability tools, such as public audit and public hearing?*)
11. Experience of public service delivery after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic? (*Probe: challenges and opportunities; changes in the method and tools of public service delivery*)
12. Strategic recommendations to CSOs and media, coalitions and forums for improving civic engagement including GESI and governance of public service delivery
13. Recommendations for improved and strengthened coalitions between stakeholders at different levels.
14. Suggestions regarding use of ICT for improving democratic and participatory and transparent governance and public engagement.

II. Checklist for interviews with media personnel

1. How do you assess the role of the media in your area? (*Probe: any change in the role of media before and after the local level elections were held in 2017*)

2. Whether and how facilitating the laws and policies of governments is in enabling freedom of association (FoA) and freedom of expression (FoE)? (**Probe:** *constricting actors/factors*)
3. Relevance of the skills learnt as a part of the (Equal Access and Freedom Forum) CS:MAP intervention. (**Probe:** *What kind of support did you receive as a part of the CS:MAP project?*); How did you make use of that? Or, what do you think about the usefulness of such activities? strengths/adequacy/limitations of the activity/intervention. How have the skills/knowledge acquired have facilitated their performance?
4. Experience of working in coalitions with the civil society, government and citizens at all levels of government.
5. Influence on media and its impartial coverage of events (**Probe:** *actors influencing media*)
6. Media's consideration for human rights (**Probe:** *How sensitive/careful are media coverage regarding respect for fundamentals of human rights? Whether and how the media ensure that the government's laws and policies align with the values of human rights, more specifically GESI issues and rights)? Whether and how has the media addressed these issues?*)
7. Media dissemination of information related to government service delivery and budget; Improvements over time [**Probe:** *role of media (supported by CS:MAP) in disseminating information about service delivery, participation, transparency, accountability, planning, utilisation of resources*]
8. Whether and how the collaboration between different stakeholders (local government, CSOs, media and citizens) through coalitions (HEAD coalition, PF, CA, and LDAG) has facilitated participation, inclusion, accountability, transparency, effective and timely public service delivery, advocacy initiatives (**Probe:** *knowledge about these coalitions; membership/involvement in these coalitions; experiences (opportunities and challenges) of working in these coalitions; sustainability of these forums without external support, such as support from CS:MAP*)
9. Experience of working in coalitions (coalitions between and among different CS:MAP implementing partners and coalitions between different CS:MAP implementing partners and non-CS:MAP partners). How have these coalitions helped to ensure participation, inclusion, transparency, accountability and effective public service delivery? (**Probe:** *opportunities and challenges*)
10. Opportunities and challenges of using social media and online platforms for citizens' engagement on public issues [*YouTube, Mero Report, Facebook (#MaBolchhu #MaNagarikSamaj #MaKhaandina) and Twitter*]

11. Recommendations related to improving the roles, capacity building and sustainable engagement of CSOs and media
12. Impact of the pandemic (COVID-19 context, lockdown) on media's performance and role

3. Checklist for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) [to be conducted with general public (indirect beneficiaries) of the CS:MAP]

1. Knowledge about civil society and media and their roles in enhancing civic engagement
2. Public service delivery mechanism and public institution (**Probe:** *how comfortable it is in accessing public services? Convenience? Satisfaction? GESI sensitive? Barriers in receiving services?*)
3. Experience about FoA and FoE (**Probe:** *any constriction? Threats?*) Experience of organizing peaceful protests; experience of being involved in sit-ins, protests and rallies (**Probe:** *Purpose? Threats/Challenges?*)
4. CSOs and media's role (**Probe:** *their accountability towards public concern, advancing public concern, advocacy*)
5. CSOs consultation/collaboration with the public; how transparent and inclusive are these CSOs about their internal activities and programmes? (**Probe:** *planning and implementation of CSOs activities; sensitivity towards GESI and human rights*)
6. Whether and how media and media coverage matter? (**Probe:** *impartiality/promptness*) Whether and how sensitive are the media coverages about fundamental human rights issues and GESI?
7. Role of CSOs for advancing public cause (**Probe:** *independent of influence from donors, government and other interest groups*)
8. Membership in coalitions/forums (*HEAD coalition, PF, CA, and LDAG*). (**Probe:** *how inclusive? How effective have these groups been in advancing public causes?*) Whether and how have these coalitions benefited in terms of ensuring participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency? Whether and how sustainable these forums are without any external support, such as support from CS: MAP?
9. Have these groups/coalitions been effective in advancing better public service delivery? In what ways? How willing is the local government to listen to advice/suggestions /recommendations from these forums and assemblies?
10. Holding *meetings of these forums in the COVID context* (**Probe:** *existence? opportunities/challenges; alternatives*)
11. Membership in other community level groups/organisations (registered/unregistered cooperatives, users' groups), membership of CSOs (*kind of membership*)? *Responsibility? Working with a media organisation (position)? Experiences?*

12. Experience of involvement in local forums, planning, budgeting and public hearing, (Social/public audits/meetings) (*Probe: How inclusive are these groups? Its importance in improving public services?*)
13. Participation in media campaigns and programmes, including in social media [YouTube, Facebook (#MaBolchhu #MaNagarikSamaj #MaKhaandina) and Twitter] (*Probe: Access to media? On what issues? Whether and how did that benefit for better public service delivery by ensuring accountability, inclusion, participation and transparency? Understanding of the messages disseminated? Barriers?*)
14. Citizens' grievance hearing mechanism; experience of grievance filing; use of ICT in grievance registration (*Hint: mobile application of CIAA*)
15. Experience of using ICT to access services from public institutions
16. Any instances of changes experienced/evidenced due to the intervention of CSOs [*knowledge towards civic engagement, meaningful participation, involvement in policies and planning at local level, public/community interaction, formation of (local) groups being facilitated as a part of CSOs 's intervention*]
17. Recommendations related to improving the roles and engagement, capacity building and constructive engagement of CSOs and media

Research Instruments (in Nepali)

1. बिस्तृत अन्तर्वार्ता: CS:MAP परियोजनालाई लागू गर्ने संघ संस्थाका प्रतिनिधिहरु संग सोधिने प्रश्नावली

1. हाल नागरिक समाज संस्थाको भूमिकालाई कसरी मुल्यांकन गर्नुहुन्छ? (*थप सोधनुहोस्: बि.सं. २०७४ मा नेपालमा स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन पछि नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको भूमिकामा केहि परिवर्तन आएको छ? आएको भए परिवर्तनका कारण? नआएको भए, नआउनुका कारण?*)
2. तपाईंलाई अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता (FoE), संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रता (FoA) तथा नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको स्वतन्त्रता कतिको र किन महत्वपूर्ण छन्?
3. संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रता (FoA) र अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता (FoE) तथा नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको स्वतन्त्रता सम्बन्धी कानुनी व्यवस्थाका बारेमा तपाईंको जानकारी |
4. संघीय र प्रादेशिक स्तरमा अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता तथा संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रतालाई प्रभावित गर्ने कानून र नीतिहरु र विभिन्न मिडिया सम्बन्धी कानूनहरु को मस्यौदा/संशोधन/फिर्ता लिने प्रक्रियामा CS:MAP को भूमिका? यसका परिणामहरु के थिए? (*थप सोधनुहोस्: CS: MAP का साझेदारहरुको संलग्नतामा संसदमा कानून/नीति प्रस्तुत हुन/लागू हुनबाट रोकिएको*)

(उदाहरणका लागि राष्ट्रिय अखण्डता नीति र गृह मन्त्रालयले जारी गरेको निर्देशन); २. कानूनमा ठोस परिवर्तन (जस्तै मिडिया काउन्सिल विधेयक र सूचना प्रविधि विधेयकको लागी); ३. नमुना कानून र नीतिहरूको मस्यौदा तयार गर्नमा सहयोग (उदाहरण को लागी नेपाल कानून आयोग संगको समन्वयमा सामाजिक विकास ऐन) र ४. CS:MAP को पहल स्वरुप संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रता र अभिव्यक्ति स्वतन्त्रतासंग बाझिने र नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको लागी सहज वातावरण निर्माण गर्न बाधा पुग्ने बिभिन्न संघिय र प्रादेशिक कानूनहरूको स्थगन)

5. संघीय स्तरमा कानून र नीतिहरूको मस्यौदा/समीक्षा/संशोधन र त्यसमा CS:MAP को साझेदार संस्थाबाट भएका प्रयासहरू (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** प्रक्रियामा संलग्न सरोकारवालाहरू; तपाईंको प्रयासमा कानून वा नीतिमा समेटिएका/संशोधित गरीएको अनुभव; तपाईंको संलग्नता संग सम्बन्धित चुनौती)
6. स्थानीय तहमा कानून, नीति, योजना र कार्यक्रमको मस्यौदा निर्माण/समीक्षा प्रक्रिया (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** संलग्न भएका सरोकारवालाहरू; स्थानीय स्तरमा विभिन्न समितिहरू जस्तै विधान समिति र सुशासन समिति गठन गर्न गरेको सहयोग; प्रक्रियामा समावेश हुँदा अनुभव गरेका समस्या तथा चुनौतीहरू)
7. नीति निर्माताहरूको (मन्त्रालय, सांसद, कर्मचारी तथा केन्द्र र स्थानीय जनप्रतिनिधि) अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता (FoE) तथा संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रता (FoA) तथा नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको स्वतन्त्रता सम्बन्धि धारणा तथा बुझाई के कस्तो पाउनु भयो ? (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता तथा संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रताका लागी अनुकूल वातावरण बनाउन, कानून र नीतिहरू को मस्यौदा र/वा संशोधन गर्न सरकार/सरकारी प्रतिनिधिहरूमा सल्लाह/सुझावहरू स्वीकार गर्ने चाहना)
8. बहस/पैरवी के कसरी गर्ने भन्नेबारे जानकारी (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** बहस/पैरवी अवधारणासंग सम्बन्धित CS:MAP बाट सहयोग; पैरवी चक्रको चरणहरू; सिकिएका कुराहरूलाई प्रयोग गरेर सुशासन कायम गर्न के र कस्तो सहयोग गर्न सक्नुभयो?)
9. तपाईंलाई HEAD गठबन्धन, साझेदारी मञ्च, स्थानिय सभा र LDAGs का बारेमा कतिको थाहा छ? (सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहलाई प्रभावकारी बनाउन, सार्वजनिक सेवालाई पारदर्शी बनाउने, तथा सार्वजनिक सेवामा सबैको समान पहुँच बृद्धि गर्ने उद्देश्य स्वरुप गठन गरिएका गठबन्धन) (विभिन्न सरोकारवालाहरू स्थानीय सरकार, नागरिक समाज संस्था, मिडिया र नागरिकहरूको

सहकार्यबाट निर्मित) यस्ता गठबन्धनले जनसहभागिता, समावेशीकरण, उत्तरदायित्व, पारदर्शिता, प्रभावकारी र सार्वजनिक सेवाको वितरण तथा बहस/पैरवीको पहल गर्ने जस्ता कुरामा के र कतिको सहयोग गरेको छ? {थप सोधनुहोस्: यस्ता गठबन्धनका सम्भावना र चुनौतिहरू; यी गठबन्धन (फोरम) को दिगोपन वा स्थिरता, जस्तै: CS:MAP बाट सहयोग; यी र यस्ता गठबन्धनमा रहेर काम गर्दाको अनुभव (सहजता र असहता?)}

10. यी र यस्ता गठबन्धनले नागरीक समाजको क्षमता अभिवृद्धि, स्थानीय सरकारहरूसंग नागरीक समाजको संलग्नतामा वृद्धि, सार्वजनिक स्रोतहरूको उपयोग र त्यसको प्रभावकारी नियमन, प्रभावकारी सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरणमा के कसरी सहयोग पुर्याएका छन्?
11. यस्ता गठबन्धनले बहस/पैरवीको प्रभावकारितालाई के कसरि सहयोग पुर्याएका छन्?
12. संस्थागत क्षमता र पैरवी गर्ने क्षमता अभिवृद्धि गर्न CS:MAP को सहयोग (थप सोधनुहोस्: कस्तो प्रकारको? संगठनात्मक/संस्थागत क्षमताको कुन विशेष पक्षहरूलाई सबभन्दा बलियो बनाइएको थियो? सहयोग कतिको लाभदायक थियो र कसरी? कस्तो प्रकारको सहयोगले तपाइको क्षमतालाई अझ राम्रो बनाउन सक्थ्यो र किन? CS:MAP बाट सिकेको शिपलाई भाबिस्यमा के कसरी प्रयोग गर्न सकिन्छ जस्तो लाग्छ? किन उपयोगी हुन्छ होला?)
13. सामाजिक जवाफदेहिता साधनहरू (जस्तै सामाजिक/सार्वजनिक लेखा परिक्षण तथा सार्वजनिक सुनुवाई आदि) को प्रभावकारिता र योगदान (थप सोधनुहोस्: यी साधनहरूको वारेमा छलफल गरिएका मुद्दाहरू; ति साधनहरू स्थानीय स्तरमा सहभागिता, समावेशीता, जवाबदेहिता, पारदर्शिता र नागरिक संलग्नता सुनिश्चित गर्न ती कतिको प्रभावकारी रह्यो, तीनका चुनौती र सिमितताहरू)
14. Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI), Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) र सामाजिक परिक्षण, सार्वजनिक लेखा परिक्षण तथा सार्वजनिक सुनुवाईका बारे मा ISOs को अनुभव। (थप सोधनुहोस्: ARI, OCA तथा अन्य सामाजिक जवाफदेहिताका संयन्त्र को महत्व? CSOs को बहस/पैरवी गर्ने क्षमता; ARI रणनीति को नेपालीकरण/स्थानीयकरण? CSOs को लागी बहस/पैरवी गर्ने क्षमता निर्माण को लागी गरिएका पहल)
15. ARI, OCA तथा अन्य सामाजिक जवाफदेहिता सम्बन्धि संयन्त्रको प्रयोगबाट नागरिक समाजसंस्थाहरूको सिकाई। (थप सोधनुहोस्: के र कसरि तपाइको आफ्नो क्षमता बृद्धि गरे? ति

- संयन्त्रले आम जनताको सार्वजनिक सेवा सम्मको पहुँचमा बृद्धि गर्न, सार्वजनिक सेवामा पारदर्शिता कायम गर्न/गराउन के कसरि सहयोग गरे? यदि गरेन भने, किन?)
16. गुणस्तरीय सेवा प्रवाह/पहुँचका लागि आईसीटीको (ICT) उपयोग र महत्व । (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** ICT को प्रयोग के र के उद्देश्यका लागि गरेको? ICT प्रयोगसम्बन्धि कुनै सार्वजनिक निकायलाई सहयोग प्रदान गरेको वा नगरेको? प्रदान गरेको भए, त्यसले सार्वजनिक सेवाहरूको वितरण तथा पहुँचकोमा कस्तो सहयोग गरेको? आईसीटी उपकरणको प्रयोगसंग जोडिएका चुनौतिहरू? यी साधनहरू/उपकरणहरू जवाफदेहिता र पारदर्शिता सुनिश्चित गर्न कतिको उपयोगी भए/छन्?)
17. तीन तहका सरकारमा तथ्यमा आधारित पैरवी (Evidence Based Advocacy) र Participatory Evidence based Action Research (PEAR) का अबसर तथा चुनौतीहरू (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** CS: MAP ले EBA र PEAR मा गरेको सहयोग; EBA र PEAR सञ्चालन गर्नकालागि आवश्यक श्रोत-साधन र सीपको उपलब्धता; यी श्रोत-साधनहरू र सीपको स्थायित्व/दिगोपन; सूचना (प्रमाण) को संकलनमा कठिनाइहरू; कुनै श्रोतबाट जोखिम)
18. Evidence Based Advocacy का लागि तथ्य संकलन गर्दाको अनुभव (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** जानकारी/प्रमाण संकलनको प्रक्रिया; कसरी ती प्रमाण/जानकारीहरू बहस/पैरवीका लागि प्रयोग भए; संकलन गरिएका तथ्यांक/जानकारी बहस/पैरवीका लागि के कसरी प्रयोग गरियो; नगरेको भए किन नगरेको? त्यस्तो प्रमाणमा आधारित बहस/पैरवीका परिणाम के-के भए? तथ्य सहित गरिएको बहस पैरवीले सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहमा तथा समयमा नागरिक समाजसँस्थाको भूमिकामा के कस्ता परिवर्तन आए?)
19. संघिय, प्रादेशिक र स्थानीय सरकार मार्फत प्रवाह गर्ने सेवाहरूमा पारदर्शिता, उत्तरदायित्व, समावेशीकरण र सहभागिताको लागि नागरिक समाज सँस्था र सञ्चार माध्यमको भूमिका (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण सम्बन्धी सार्वजनिक असन्तुष्टिको पहिचान के र कसरि गरिन्छ?; सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरणसंग सम्बन्धित असन्तुष्टि सम्बोधन गर्न सरकार समक्ष बहस/पैरवीको अनुभव; स्थानीय सरकारहरूको गुनासो सुन्ने संयन्त्र(हरू) र त्यसको प्रभावकारीता ; स्थानीय नागरिक तथा नागरिक समाजसँस्थाबाट प्राप्त सुझाव/सल्लाह सरकारले के र कसरि लिन्छ?)
20. स्थानीय स्तरमा पारदर्शिता, जवाफदेहिता बृद्धि गर्न र निर्णय प्रकृत्यामा व्यापक जनसहभागिता सुनिश्चित गर्नकालागी अबलम्बन गरिएका अन्य रणनीतिहरू/गतिविधिहरू

(थप सोधनुहोस्: ती रणनीतिहरू के-कति र कसरी प्रभावकारी छन्? त्यसले ल्याएका परिणाम/परिवर्तनहरू?)

21. नागरिक समाज सँस्थाको आन्तरिक सुशासनको अवस्था र संचालनका संयन्त्र त्यसमा आएको परिवर्तन [आन्तरिक लेखापरिक्षण र त्यसको सार्वजनिकीकरण, आन्तरिक शासनका अभ्यास तथा स्व-संचालनका संयन्त्रको (self-regulation tools/mechanisms) प्रयोग] {थप सोधनुहोस्: संचालक समितिको संरचना (महिला तथा अन्य अल्पसंख्यक समुदायहरू); निर्णय प्रक्रिया; के र कसरी यी नागरिक समाज सँस्था सँस्थाहरूले नागरिकलाई आफ्नो निर्णय र खर्चको विवरणका बारेमा सार्वजनिक गर्छन्? के कस्ता संयन्त्र क्रियाशील/संचालन मा छन्? ति संयन्त्र के र कसरी लागु गरिएका छन्? CS:MAP ले यस प्रक्रियामा के कसरी सहयोग गर्यो? त्यो सहयोग पश्चात के कस्ता सुधारहरू भए?}
22. CS:MAP को सहयोगबाट तपाईंले मानव अधिकारका मुल्य मान्यतालाई अघि बढाउन के र कसरी भूमिका खेल्नु भयो ? [थप सोधनुहोस्: कसरी र कुन हदसम्म तपाईं सरकारहरूलाई प्रभावित गर्न सक्षम हुनुभयो; दलित, महिला, यौनिक तथा लैंगिक अल्पसंख्यक (LGBTIQ) र अन्य जातीय अल्पसंख्यक समूहहरूसँग सम्बन्धित मुद्दाहरू सरकारको कानून, नीति तथा योजनाहरूमा के कसरी परिवर्तन आएका]
23. कोभिड-१९ महामारीको कारण बहस/पैरवी पहल/प्रयास कार्यक्रममा पारेको प्रभाव
24. COVID-१९ को सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहमा प्रभाव (थप सोधनुहोस्: सबैभन्दा बढी प्रभावित समूह/वर्ग/क्षेत्र)
25. COVID-१९ को Advocacy Readiness Index (ARI), Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) र सामाजिक परिक्षण, सार्वजनिक लेखा परिक्षण तथा सार्वजनिक सुनुवाईको संचालनमा पारेको प्रभाव/असर
26. COVID-१९ को गठबन्धनमा (राष्ट्रिय स्तरका गठबन्धन, HEAD coalitions, साझेदारी मंच, साझा सभा तथा LDAGs) पारेको असर/प्रभाव
27. विभिन्न तहमा सरोकारवाला समूहहरू बीचको सुदृढ र बलियो सहकार्यको लागि सुझावहरू

28. लोकतान्त्रिक, सहभागितामूलक सुशासन र नागरिक संलग्नता सुधार गर्न आईसीटीको उपयोग सम्बन्धी सुझावहरु

29. तपाईंहरुलाई के के भई दिएको भए कामहरु प्रभावकारी हुन्थ्यो होला ?

2. प्रमुख सूचनादाताहरूसंग सोधिने प्रश्नावली

1. स्थानीय जनप्रतिनिधि तथा सरकारी निकायका प्रतिनीधिहरु संग सोधिने प्रश्नावली

1. हाल नागरिक समाज संस्थाको भूमिकालाई कसरी मुल्यांकन गर्नुहुन्छ? (थप सोधनुहोस्: बि.सं. २०७४ मा नेपालमा स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन पछि नागरिक समाज संस्थाको भूमिकामा केहि परिवर्तन आएको छ? आएको भए परिवर्तनका कारण? नआएको भए, नआउनुका कारण?)
2. सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाह, बजेट निर्माण तथा योजना निर्माण सम्बन्धी सूचना सम्प्रेषण (थप सोधनुहोस्: माध्यम, प्रक्रिया)
3. सामाजिक जवाफदेहिताका साधन जस्तै, सार्वजनिक लेखा परिक्षण सार्वजनिक सुनुवाईको अभ्यास? (थप सोधनुहोस्: प्रक्रिया? सहभागीहरु? यसबाट आएका विवरणहरुको सार्वजनिकीकरण) यी संयन्त्र/पद्धति प्रयोगमा कुनै गैर सरकारी संघ/संस्थाको सहयोग? यदि सहयोग थियो भने, कस्तो खालको सहयोग प्राप्त भयो?
4. सार्वजनिक चासोका बिषय संग सम्बन्धित जनगुनासो सुनुवाईको लागि के र कस्तो सरकारी संयन्त्र छन् ? (थप सोधनुहोस्: कतिको प्रभावकारी छ? सुनुवाईको प्रक्रिया? गुनासो सुनुवाईका लागि प्रयोग गरिएको पद्धतिका अवसर/जटिलता?)
5. संघ, प्रदेश र स्थानीय तहका मस्यौदा कानून/नीति बनाउन र परिमार्जन गर्न तपाईंहरुलाई CS:MAP र CS:MAP कार्यक्रम कार्यान्वयन साझेदारहरुले के र कसरी सहजिकरण/सहयोग गर्नुभयो/गरिरहनु भएको छ? (थप सोधनुहोस्: प्राविधिक सहयोग वा पैरवी)
6. नागरिक समाज संस्था र मिडियासंग सम्बन्धित कानून र नीतिहरुको समीक्षा गर्न प्राविधिक अथवा विशेषज्ञता सहायता प्राप्त गर्दाको अनुभव र सिकाई (अवसर र चुनौतिहरु)। [सूचनाको अधिकार (RTI), सार्वजनिक खर्च ट्र्याकिङ्ग (PET), सामुदायिक स्कोर कार्ड को प्रयोग , नागरिक रिपोर्ट कार्ड सर्वेक्षण, पालिका स्तरको सार्वजनिक सुनुवाई, RTI सञ्चालन र सुशासन ब्यारोमीटर (GGB) को प्रयोग] (थप सोधनुहोस्: यी तालिम र सहायताले तपाइको क्षमता विकास गर्न ,

सार्वजनिक सेवाको गुणस्तरमा सुधार गर्न र सहभागिता, समावेशीकरण, पारदर्शिता र जवाबदेहिता सुनिश्चित गर्नमा के र कसरी मद्दत गरे?

7. गुणस्तरीय सेवा प्रवाह/पहुँचका लागि सूचना प्रविधि (ICT) को उपयोग र महत्व। (थप सोधनुहोस्: सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोग के र के उद्देश्यका लागि गरेको? सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोगसम्बन्धि कुनै सार्वजनिक निकायलाई सहयोग प्रदान गरेको वा नगरेको? प्रदान गरेको भए, त्यसले सार्वजनिक सेवाहरूको वितरण तथा पहुँचकोमा कस्तो सहयोग गरेको? आईसीटी उपकरणको प्रयोगसंग जोडिएका चुनौतिहरू? यी साधनहरू/उपकरणहरू जवाफदेहिता र पारदर्शिता सुनिश्चित गर्न कतिको उपयोगी भए/छन्?)
8. सरकारले आफ्नो योजना, नीति र बजेट अनलाइन मार्फत कसरी सार्वजनिक गर्दै आएको छ? सरकारको योजनाहरू, नीतिहरू र बजेट सार्वजनिक गर्नका लागि सूचना प्रविधि (ICT) को उपयोग के र कसरी भएको छ?
9. नागरिक समाज सँस्थाहरू बीच तथा नागरिक समाजसँस्था र मिडियाबीचको गठबन्धनले नागरिक समाजसँस्थाको क्षमता अभिवृद्धि गर्न, स्थानीय सरकारहरूसंग नागरिक समाजको संलग्नता बढाउन, सार्वजनिक स्रोतको उपयोगको प्रभावकारी निगरानी, प्रभावकारी सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण, नागरिक समाज सँस्था र मिडियाद्वारा प्रभावकारी पैरवी प्रयास गर्न र सार्वजनिक लेखा परीक्षा र सार्वजनिक सुनुवाई जस्ता सामाजिक उत्तरदायित्वका साधनहरूको प्रयोग गर्न के कस्तो योगदान पुर्याएको छ?
10. गठबन्धनमा (नगरपालिका स्तरमा साझेदारी मञ्च तथा वार्ड तहमा स्थानीय सभा) तपाईंको संलग्नता/भूमिका के र कस्तो छ? (थप सोधनुहोस्: फोरममा सरकारी प्रतिनिधिको भूमिका र जिम्मेवारी? के र कसरी यी गठबन्धन स्थानीय सरकारहरूसंग नागरिक समाजसँस्थाको संलग्नता बढाउन योगदान गरेको छ, सार्वजनिक संसाधन को उपयोग को प्रभावकारी अनुगमन, प्रभावकारी सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण, नागरिक समाज सँस्था र मिडियाबाट उपयोक्ता पैरवीको प्रयास र सार्वजनिक लेखा परीक्षा र सार्वजनिक सुनुवाईको रूपमा सामाजिक उत्तरदायित्व उपकरणहरूको प्रयोग?)
11. COVID-19 महामारीको प्रकोप पछि सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण को अनुभव कस्तो रहयो? (थप सोधनुहोस्: अवसर र चुनौतिहरू; परिवर्तन; सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाह गर्ने पद्धति र संयन्त्रमा COVID-19 का कारणले आएको/ल्याउनुपरेको परिवर्तन)

12. सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरणको सुशासन र GESI लगाएत नागरिक संलग्नता अभिवृद्धिको लागी CSOs र मिडियालाई रणनीतिक सुझावहरु
13. विभिन्न तहमा सरोकारवाला समूहहरु बीचको सुदृढ र बलियो सहकार्यकोलागि सुझावहरु
14. लोकतान्त्रिक, सहभागितामूलक सुशासन र नागरिक संलग्नता सुधार गर्न सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोग सम्बन्धी सुझावहरु

II. संचारकर्मी संग सोधिने प्रश्नावली

1. तपाइँले आफ्नो क्षेत्रमा मिडियाको भूमिकालाई कसरी मूल्यांकन गर्नु भएको छ ? *(थप सोधनुहोस्: बि.सं. २०७४ मा नेपालमा स्थानीय तहको निर्वाचन पछि मिडियाको भूमिकामा केहि परिवर्तन आएको छ? आएको भए परिवर्तनका कारण? नआएको भए, नआउनुका कारण?)*
2. आमनागरिकहरुले आफुलाई लागेको कुरा राख्ने (स्वतन्त्रता पूर्वक आफ्ना कुरा राख्न पाउने अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता) तथा संगठित भएर कामहरु गर्ने (संगठित हुने स्वतन्त्रताको अधिकार) कार्यलाई के र कसरी विभिन्न तहका सरकारको कानून र नीतिहरुले कसरी सहज बनाएको छ? *(थप सोधनुहोस्: सीमित कर्ता/कारकहरु)*
3. आफ्नो भूमिका प्रभावकारी बनाउन CS:MAP मार्फत हासिल गर्नु भएको शिप कतिको सान्दर्भिक छ? *{थप सोधनुहोस्: तपाइँले CS: MAP परियोजनाबाट कस्तो खालको सहयोग प्राप्त गर्नुभयो?}; तपाइँले यसलाई कसरी प्रयोग गर्नुभयो? यस्तो गतिविधिहरुको उपयोगिताको बारे तपाइँको धारणा कस्तो छ? (वलियो पक्ष/पर्याप्तता/गतिविधिका सीमाहरु/हस्तक्षेप)}*
4. सबै तहका सरकारहरुमा नागरिक समाज संस्था, सरकार र आम नागरिकहरुको गठबन्धनसंग काम गर्दाको अनुभव। (यसमा उनीहरुको मिडिया प्रतिको धारणा र छाप कस्तो छ?)
5. मिडियाको निष्पक्षतामा प्रभाव पार्ने कुराहरु *(थप सोधनुहोस्: मिडियालाई प्रभावित गर्ने सरोकारवालाहरु, मिडिया निष्पक्ष रुपमा काम गर्न सकेको छ? छैन भने किन र के कुराले प्रभाव पारेको छ?)*
6. मानव अधिकारको सन्दर्भमा मिडिया कतिको सम्बेदनशिल रहेको छ ? *(थप सोधनुहोस्: मानव अधिकारको आधारभूत सिद्धान्तहरुप्रति मिडियाले कतिको समेट्न सकेको छ ? यी कुराहरुमा मिडिया कतिको संवेदनशील छन् ? मिडियाले के र कसरी सरकारको कानून र नीतिहरु मानव*

अधिकार, विशेष गरी लैङ्गिक समानता र सामाजिक समावेशीकरणका सवालहरु तथा अधिकारहरुको सम्बोधनको लागि सुनिश्चित गर्दछ?

7. सरकारी सेवा र बजेटसंग सम्बन्धित जानकारीको प्रचार प्रसार कसरी हुदै आएको छ ; समयसंगै यसमा के कस्तो सुधार तथा परिवर्तन भएका छन् (थप सोधनुहोस्: सरकारी सेवा प्रवाह , सहभागिता, समावेशीकरण, पारदर्शिता, जवाफदेहिता, योजना निर्माण , स्रोतहरुको प्रयोग र वितरणबारे जानकारीको प्रचार प्रसार गर्न CS:MAP द्वारा सहयोग पाएका मिडियाको भूमिका कस्तो छ?)
8. गठबन्धनको माध्यमबाट विभिन्न सरोकारबालाहरु (स्थानीय सरकार, नागरीक समाज, मिडिया र नागरिकहरु) बीचको साझेदारीले (HEAD गठबन्धन, साझेदारी मञ्च, स्थानीय सभा र LDAGs) सहभागिता, समावेशीकरण, उत्तरदायित्व, पारदर्शिता, प्रभावकारी र समयमै सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण, पैरबीको पहललाई के र कसरी सहजीकरण गरेको छ / (थप सोधनुहोस्: यी गठबन्धनहरु को बारे मा जानकारी; सदस्यता/गठबन्धन मा संलग्नता; अनुभव (अवसर र चुनौती) यी गठबन्धन मा काम गर्ने; बाहिरी सहायता बिना यी फोरमहरु को दिगोपना, जस्तै CS:MAP बाट सहायता)
9. गठबन्धनमा काम गर्दाको अनुभव (CS:MAP कार्यान्वयन साझेदारहरु र विभिन्न CS:MAP कार्यान्वयन साझेदारहरु र गैर-CS:MAP साझेदारहरु बीचको गठबन्धन)। यी गठबन्धनले कसरी सहभागिता, समावेशीकरण, पारदर्शिता, उत्तरदायित्व र प्रभावकारी सार्वजनिक सेवा वितरण सुनिश्चित गर्न मद्दत गरेको छ? (थप सोधनुहोस्: अवसर र चुनौतिहरु)
10. सार्वजनिक मुद्दाहरुमा नागरिक संलग्नताको लागी अनलाइन प्लेटफार्महरु उपयोग गर्दाको अवसर तथा चुनौतीहरु [YouTube, Mero Report, Facebook (#MaBolchhu #MaNagarikSamaj #MaKhaandina) and Twitter]
11. नागरीक समाज संस्था र मिडियाको भूमिका, क्षमता बिकास र दिगो संलग्नतामा सुधारका लागी सुझावहरु
12. कोभिड -१९ महामारीले मिडियाको भूमिका र प्रभावकारितामा पारेको प्रभाव

3. लक्षित समुह छलफलका लागि प्रश्नावली

1. नागरिक समाज संस्था र मिडियाको समग्र स्थिति बारेमा जानकारी तथा नागरिक सहभागिता तथा सुशासन को अवस्थामा सुधार गर्नमा नागरिक समाज संस्था र मिडियाको भूमिका
2. सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहका संयन्त्र तथा सार्वजनिक निकाय (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** सार्वजनिक सेवा पहुँचमा कतिको सहजता वा असहजता छ? सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहको बिध्यमान व्यवस्थाप्रति कतिको सन्तुष्ट/असन्तुष्ट के हुनुहुन्छ? सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहमा GESI सम्बन्धि मुद्दाहरुलाई कतिको ख्याल राखिएको छ? सार्वजनिक सेवाको पहुँचमा देखिएका अवरोध?)
3. अभिव्यक्तिको स्वतन्त्रता (FoE) तथा सङ्गठित हुने स्वतन्त्रता (FoA) को बिषय लाई लिएर धारणा (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** कुनै बाधा व्यवधान, खतरा भए, खतराका श्रोतहरु?) सार्वजनिक सरोकारका बिषयलाई लिएर कुनै बिरोध, धर्ना तथा घेराउमा सहभागी भएको भए सहभागी हुँदाको अनुभव (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** के का लागि सहभागी हुनु भएको? यसरी बिरोध, धर्ना तथा घेराउमा सहभागी हुँदा आइपरेका चुनौती/समस्या)
4. सार्वजनिक सरोकारका बिषयहरुलाई लिएर नागरिक समाज संस्था तथा मिडियाको भूमिका (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** सार्वजनिक सरोकारका बिषयहरुलाई लिएर उनीहरुको चासो; सार्वजनिक चासोका बिषयलाई लिएर उनीहरुको क्रियाशीलता, कतिको बहस पैरवी गर्ने गरेका छन्?)
5. नागरिक समाज संस्थाको आम जनता संगको सहकार्य; नागरिक समाजको आन्तरिक क्रियाकलाप तथा कार्यक्रमको पारदर्शिता (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको योजना निर्माण तथा कार्यान्वयन प्रक्रिया; ति क्रियाकलाप GESI तथा मानब अधिकारका मूल्य मान्यताप्रति कतिको सम्बेदनशील छन्?)
6. मिडियाका प्रसारणले आम जनतामाझ कतिको अर्थ राख्छन्? राख्छन् भने वा राख्दैनन् भने, के कति कारणले? (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** कतिको छिटो छरितो र कतिको यथार्थपरक?) मिडियाका प्रसारण GESI तथा मानब अधिकारका मूल्य मान्यताप्रति कतिको सम्बेदनशील छन्?
7. आम जनचासोका बिषयलाई अघि बढाउनमा नागरिक समाजसंस्थाको भूमिका (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** दाता, सरकार तथा अन्य स्वार्थ समूहहरुको नागरिक समाज संस्था माथिको प्रभाव)
8. कुनै गठबन्धनमा सदस्यता (HEAD गठबन्धन, साझेदारी मंच, साझा सभा तथा LDAGs) [**थप सोधनुहोस्:** गठबन्धनका सदस्य; यी समूहहरु कतिको समाबेसी छन्? गठबन्धनमा तपाईंको भूमिका? आम जनचासोका बिषयबस्तु सम्बोधन गर्ने हकमा यी गठबन्धन कतिको प्रभावकारी

छन्?] तपाईंलाई यस गठबन्धनले पारदर्शिता, सहभागीता तथा समबेशिता जस्ता बिषयलाई कसरि सम्बोधन गरिरहेको जस्तो लाग्छ? कुनै बाहिरी श्रोतको सहायता बिना यी गठबन्धन संचालन हुन सक्ने सम्भावना कतिको छ?

9. यी नागरिक समाज सँस्था र यिनका गठबन्धन/मञ्च/सभा ले के र कसरी सार्वजनिक सेवा प्रवाहमा सुधार ल्याउन सहयोग गरेका छन्? यो गठबन्धन/मञ्च/सभाबाट आउने सल्लाह र सुझाव लाई स्थानीय सरकारले कतिको सुनेर ति बिषयबस्तुलाई कार्यान्वयनमा लैजान्छ?
10. COVID-१९ को अवस्थामा यस्ता गठबन्धन, मंच तथा सभाका बैठक तथा भेला संचालन गर्ने के कसरी सहज तथा अप्ठेरो भएको छ? (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** बैकल्पिक माध्यम अवलम्बन गरिएको भए, के कस्तो माध्यम अवलम्बन गरिएको छ? किन? सहभागीको संख्या बढेको वा घटेको के कस्तो छ?)
11. अन्य कुनै समुदाय तहको समूह/संस्थामा सदस्यता (दर्ता भएको/दर्ता नभएको सहकारी वा बचत समूह, उपभोक्ता समूह)? गैर सरकारी संघ संस्थामा सदस्यता (सदस्यताको प्रकार); जिम्मेवारी; मिडियामा आवद्ध भए /नभएको र आवद्ध हुदाको अनुभव?
12. स्थानीय फोरम, योजना निर्माण प्रक्रिया, बजेट निर्माण प्रक्रिया तथा सार्वजनिक सुनुवाई तथा सार्वजनिक लेखा परिक्षण तथा अन्य बैठकमा सहभागी हुँदाको अनुभव (**थप सोधनुहोस्:** यस्ता फोरम/समूह/भेला/बैठक कतिको समाबेसी तथा पारदर्शी हुन्छन्? यस्ता फोरमसमूह/भेला/बैठकले सार्वजनिक सेवाको वितरण तथा नियमनमा के कसरि सहयोग प्रयार्इरहेका छन्?)
13. मिडियाद्वारा (सामाजिक संजालमा पनि) संचालन गरिएका अभियान तथा कार्यक्रममा सहभागिता (YouTube, Facebook (#MaBolchhu #MaNagarikSamaj #MaKhaandina) and Twitter) [**थप सोधनुहोस्:** मिडियामा पहुँच, यस्ता अभियान र/वा कार्यक्रमले सहभागितामूलक सुशासन र पारदर्शितामा के र कसरी सहयोग पुग्यो? यसरी सम्प्रेषण गरिएको सूचना कतिको बुझिने खालको थियो? थिएन भने, के कारणले बुझिएन?]
14. नागरिकको गुनासो सुनुवाई गर्ने संयन्त्र; गुनासो दर्ता गर्दाको अनुभव; गुनासो दर्ता गर्दा सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोगको अवस्था? सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोग भएको भए, यसले कसरी गुनासो दर्ताको प्रक्रियालाई सहज वा असहज बनाएको छ?

15. सार्वजनिक निकायबाट सूचना प्रविधिको प्रयोग गरि सेवा प्राप्त गर्दाको अनुभव
16. नागरिक समाज सँस्थाको भूमिकाका कारणले सार्वजनिक सेवाका क्षेत्रमा के कस्तो परिवर्तन को अनुभूति गरेको [थप सोधनुहोस्: जनसहभागिताका बारेमा जानकारी/ज्ञान, अर्थपूर्ण सहभागिता, स्थानीय स्तरमा नीति तथा योजना निर्माण प्रक्रियामा सहभागिता, सार्वजनिक/सामुदायिक छलफल, नागरिक समाज सँस्थाको पहलमा कुनै स्थानीय समूह(हरु)को गठन]
17. नागरिक समाज सँस्था र मिडियाको भूमिका बिस्तार तथा सार्वजनिक सेवा सुधार गर्न नागरिक समाज सँस्था र मिडियाले खेल्न सक्ने भूमिकाका सम्बन्धमा सल्लाह तथा सुझाव