

(Issue 6, May-July 2020)

The Subnational Governance Program in Nepal (SNGP) (स्थानीय सरकार सबलीकरण कार्यक्रम) is implemented through a strategic partnership between the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and The Asia Foundation, in coordination with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration. SNGP aims to promote an enabling environment for the development of strong, effective, and inclusive sub-national government in Nepal that benefits all, including women and marginalized groups.

Capacity building Support for Judicial Committee Members and Elected Women Leaders

The program - in association with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA) as well as local government associations - provided virtual platforms (via a series of seven provincial meetings) engaging more than 400 local governments to discuss challenges to access to justice. These interactions were designed to support elected women representatives and judicial committee members to build experience, increase understanding, and gain collective strength on judicial committee operations and functioning. Promoting usage of local language, these interactions were also envisioned to support building up networks that could potentially be used as a stepping-stone to elevate policy and practice-based reform agendas at the national level.

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues Help Manage Local Issues

The program-supported multi-stakeholder dialogue process continued to provide critical support to the local governments in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. With support from the program, Dialogue Forums, a representative body of diverse local stakeholders provided support and advice to the local governments in managing 66 local issues. As the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still rising in Nepal, support of Dialogue Forums will be even more crucial. Forum members also successfully addressed 79 contested issues related to service delivery; Covid-19 relief and recovery; governance and similar.



Figure 1: Participants of Capacity building Support for Judicial Committee Members and Elected Women Leaders Event

POLICY DIALOGUES

Policy Dialogue on Annual Plan and Budgeting for FY 2020/21

On 1 May 2020, the program hosted a timely high-level policy dialogue (virtually) between the National Planning Commission, seven Provincial Policy and Planning Commissions, local government associations, and the program's seven partner municipalities. The main objective of the discussion was to help the three spheres of government in bringing clarity and coherence to developing an annual plan and budget for the fiscal year 2020/21. In the discussion participants shared implementation status of this year's annual plan and discussed their priorities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and challenges ahead. The discussion helped forge agreement amongst the participants to prioritize health, education, agriculture, and employment generation for investment by all spheres of governments in their upcoming budget. Similarly, they recommended that local governments should be further promoted as the frontline service providers and fiscal transfers should be made accordingly, while the federal and provincial governments should refrain from allocating funds for small projects.

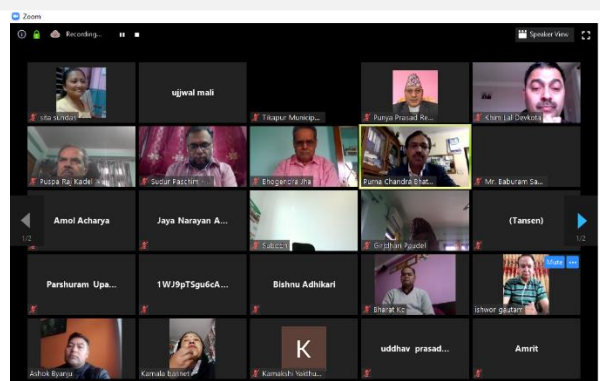


Figure 2: Snapshot of Policy Dialogue Program on Annual Plan and budgeting for FY 20/21

Promotion of Access to Information on Covid-19

To promote accountability and enhance civic engagement, the program in collaboration with Interface Nepal produced "TOUGH Talk with you", an interactive monthly TV talk show. The show provided audience-friendly platforms for public discourse on contemporary governance and Covid-19 issues through 23 episodes. Shifting to virtual interactions, the program has been able to bring in political leaders, thematic experts, government representatives, civil society stakeholders, and members of the public to create space for constructive conversations on contemporary socio-political and governance issues as well as to combat a wide and rapid spread of misinformation. In particular, the show featured 112 health experts, government representatives, and frontline service providers to cover the issues of long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the country's economic system, job markets, private business sectors and the status of frontline workers. The program can be found at <https://bit.ly/35vVymf>

Program Partners' Meeting

In the last week of July 2020, the program organized its second virtual quarterly meeting with implementing partners. Organized into six different sessions covering various thematic work areas and issues, the objectives of the meeting were to take stock of the last quarter's activities (May to July 2020), discuss the key learnings from implementing development programs during the pandemic, and inform the partners of the updated quarterly reporting templates. Among the 24 implementing partners, 23 partners enthusiastically joined the meeting; updated their progress and shared responses to the learning questions. The meeting also hosted respective program staff, field coordinators from the Foundation, and representation from DFAT.

Supporting Partner Municipalities on Annual Planning and Budgeting

On 1 June 2020, the program organized a virtual discussion among 40 municipal stakeholders of five partner municipalities (Damak, Bhimeshwar, Waling, Tansen, and Tikapur) to discuss programmatic priorities of local governments related to agriculture development and employment generation. The discussion was organized to respond to the needs of the local governments as they intensify their efforts in preparing their annual plan and budget for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2020/21. The main objective of the program was to discuss location, topography, and context-specific agricultural development programs that may be appropriate for each of the partner municipalities.

Support on Annual Planning and Budgeting for Local Government

The National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN), a program partner, organized a series of virtual discussions to promote coherent planning and budgeting across the government and to strengthen the leadership of rural municipalities to effectively perform their mandated roles in policy formulation and decision making. Involving the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA), province government representatives and more than 400 rural municipalities (out of the total 460) – the program hosted 1,280 government representatives (17% female) to participate in the budget planning and Covid-19 response discussions among the three spheres of government. This support was particularly timely as rural municipalities were overwhelmed by the attention required for Covid-19 responses. This limited their ability to focus on determining appropriate policies, institutions, and procedures at the nascent federalization stage.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS:

1. The Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) produced 19 investigative stories on local level governance, across multiple themes; and observed 10 positive/correctives measures taken by LGs.
2. The municipalities of Tikapur, Tansen, Waling and Bhimeshwar endorsed program-supported comprehensive plans.
3. MoFAGA has published a "*Sourcebook on local market management and consumer awareness*" with technical support from the program.
4. The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) produced 22 radio program episodes on topics related to local-level planning and budgeting; budget formulation and disbursement of budget for Covid-19 response; employment generation; and other local concerns.



Figure 3: Responses of Viewers on "Tough Talk Program"

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<https://asiafoundation.org/tag/np-subnational-governance-nepal/>