

SNGP Bridging Phase

The Subnational Governance Program (SNGP) Bridging Phase, with the four-plus years* of carefully developed understanding of ground realities, remains well-positioned to continue its support in creating an enabling environment for a stable, effective, and inclusive subnational government in Nepal that addresses health and economic security of all, including women and marginalized groups. The Bridging Phase – operational from April 2021 till May 2022 – adopts a politically informed, adaptive, and flexible management approach, developed with a high degree of flexibility in response to Nepal's fluid and complex political environment.

SNGP Phase I: implemented from February 2017 till May 2021 by The Asia Foundation with funding from the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and in coordination with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration.

Community Mediation

The program conducted 12 basic mediation training for ten rural municipalities/municipalities of four districts: Surkhet, Syangja, Jhapa, and Kailali. Three hundred and thirty-two participants attended the training session; 174 (52.4%) were women, and 158 (47.6%) belonged to marginalized and indigenous communities.

In the new locations of Community Mediation, the program has also been coordinating with the local governments to enlist trained mediators in the respective judicial committees and wards. Once enrolled, mediation centers can be operated at the ward level. The trained mediators can support the judicial committees in resolving disputes through mediation, institutionalizing this aspect of service delivery in the local governments.

Under Community Mediation, in collaboration with the program partner Community Mediators Society Nepal (CMS-N), the program conducted 19 district-level practice sharing sessions. Members of judicial committees, mediators, and other stakeholders of the venue districts used these interactive sessions to share and learn from each other's work experiences and best practices.



STABILITY

Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

Under the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue program, nine contested issues have been effectively addressed this quarter.

- When festivals of both Hindu and Muslim faiths take place, there are always risks of communal tensions flaring up, especially in districts with prior instances of such conflict. The program-supported dialogue forum known as Sambad Samuha helped resolve three issues related to inter-community peacebuilding in Dhanusha, Rautahat, and Banke.
- Meanwhile, three conflicts related to the construction of key infrastructure projects such as compensation for the communities whose lands were acquired for the construction of the East-West Railway in Province 1, waste management in Sunsari, and delays in the construction of the postal highway in Kapilvastu were also resolved.

In addition, several Sambad Samuhas have also been facilitating dialogues with local governments in their districts to improve access to public services for women, the disabled, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups.

STABILITY

For Better Coordination in Natural Resources Management

With technical support from various implementing partners, the program carried out a few activities towards bringing clarity on roles and challenges related to the natural resource revenue management among the three tiers of government of Nepal. Two major activities:



A federal-level interaction on natural resources revenue management was organized to share the observations of the seven province-level interactions on the same topic. At the event, representatives from all three tiers of government and the National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission (NNRFC) deliberated on the existing overlaps in roles of the provincial and local levels in the collection of revenue from natural resources and the challenges faced by the three tiers of government due to unclear laws and procedures related to natural resource management. Organized by SNGP partner Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) in collaboration with NNRFC, the event was facilitated by Mr. Krishna Hari Baskota, former Secretary, Ministry of Finance, and attended by representatives from National Planning Commission (NPC), Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), Province and local governments, Association of District Coordination Committees (ADCCN) and National Associations of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN).

A draft Bill on the management and regulation (excavation and sales) of mining stone, pebble, and sand was finalized and submitted to MoFAGA by program partner Nepal Law Society (NLS). An important piece of legislation in clarifying the roles of the different tiers of the government for natural resource and construction material management, this Bill will help operationalize the distribution of revenue generated from those natural resources. The final draft was developed in association with the ministry.

Its drafting process included 20 different interactions and consultations with experts, stakeholders (federal, provincial and local levels), and beneficiaries – such as the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM), Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), Ministry of Home (MoH), Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supply (MoICS), Department of Mines and the National Assembly. As the next step, MoFAGA will present the Bill to the cabinet before registering it in the federal parliament for endorsement.



Five Federal Laws Reviewed for Delegatory Rights



The program, under its policy work support, in collaboration with partner NLS, assisted the Delegated Legislation Committee of the National Assembly to review five different federal laws, namely Nepal Central Bank Act 2058, Compulsory and Free Education Act 2075, Domestic Violence Act 2066, National Park and Wildlife Protection Act 2039, and VAT Act 2052. The review focused on issues such as delegatory rights provided by the acts, the status of rules, regulations, and directives provided with the delegatory rights, and the implication of delegatory rights across the three tiers of government regarding intergovernmental relations legislation. For this, NLS conducted four virtual and two in-person interactions with committee members to help implement the review report submitted to the committee earlier. Through this support, the program aims to improve the implementation status of crucial federal policies and help refine delegated legislations in line with federalism principles enshrined in the Constitution.

STABILITY

Other Highlights

- Program partner Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights Nepal (FPCRN) finalized a report on the demand-based Consumer Awareness Survey in Damak municipality. The major findings, which indicated an overall low level of consumer rights awareness among the municipality's people, were presented to the municipal stakeholders in an in-person meeting. The municipality plans to publish the report and present it to the municipal assembly.
- A model procedures/terms of reference (TOR) for four municipal committees to ensure efficient operation during the budgeting and planning process was developed by program partner NARMIN. The four municipal committees are the legislative, good governance, account, and sectoral committees. The TOR was formulated based on a study on 80 rural municipalities. The study focused on composition, jurisdictions, roles, and responsibilities of the respective committees. It included eight Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with representatives of municipal committees and eight interactions with federal and provincial level stakeholders. The draft TOR was submitted to MoFAGA for review.

HEALTH SECURITY

Inclusive Local Public Health Regulations Finalized

Three partner municipalities – Waling, Tansen, and Tikapur – have finalized their respective local public health regulations and completed their deliberations in the municipal assembly. The program, continuing with its technical assistance to the partner municipalities in strengthening public health governance, had held consultations with municipal stakeholders to vet the health regulations drafts. The regulations now include specific provisions to ensure inclusion, such as arrangements to provide free health care services to the citizens of a particular class, group, gender, or region as per the need and condition, disabled-friendly health infrastructure, mandatory women's representation in the monitoring committee of public health work, necessary arrangements to provide free and subsidized health care to the extremely poor, disabled persons. It also includes a provision where health facilities should provide treatment to poor, helpless, and needy citizens recommended by the municipality at 10 percent of the actual cost.

Representatives of legislation and social development committees, health in charge of the municipalities, and representatives from hospitals and pharmacies participated in the consultations conducted in collaboration with program partner Public Policy Pathshala.



Promoting Better Dissemination of Public Information



The program partnered with the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters -Nepal (ACORAB) to leverage radio, one of the most popular media among the public, especially in semi-urban and rural areas, to ensure wider dissemination of public information related to local government functioning. The program supported the production of episodes of the Hamro Palika program, broadcasted by 50 radios under the Community Information Network (CIN) across Nepal, to raise issues related to public health and the impact of Covid-19 on business and employment in partner municipalities. The radio program addressed the local government's public health policies, programs and initiatives by providing a platform to the elected representatives and public of partner municipalities and representatives/experts of various sectoral forums and organizations. It also explored the various initiatives and actions partner municipalities have adopted in the last two years to strengthen Covid-19 treatment, patient management, and their preparedness to face any further pandemic wave.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Enabling Local Industry Management at Partner Municipalities



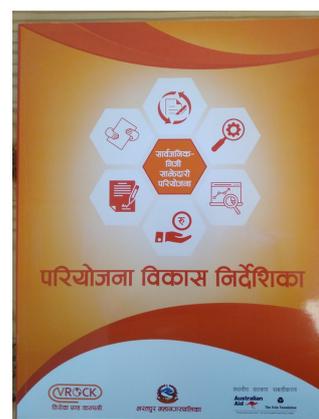
The program finalized the Local Industry Management Manual in collaboration with MoFAGA and with technical support from the program partner Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights Nepal (FPCRN). The manual contains all the laws, policies, and provisions related to local industry management and can be used as a reference document. The ministry has published the manual under its logo and will make it accessible to all 753 local governments through its website.

The program's support towards local industry management also included coaching and mentoring to four partner municipalities – Bhimeswor, Tansen, Tikapur, and Waling. A three-day workshop designed to provide hands-on support to facilitate effective rules towards implementing the Local Industry Management Act (initially designed and technically supported under SNGP Phase I) was organized in each municipality by FPCRN. The experts who facilitated the workshop visited the local industries within the municipality, held interactions to discuss the Local Industry Management Rules in detail, and collected feedback to finalize the rules by incorporating the suggestions from the stakeholders concerned. Bhimeswor has already approved the rules from its executive meeting, and Tansen has already formed a Local Industry Promotion Committee to look after the overall development of local industry in its constituency.

Public-Private Partnership for Local Economic Recovery



As part of its post-pandemic economic recovery interventions, SNGP has been promoting Public-Private Partnership (PPP) for financial sustainability at the local level. The first major PPP project led by program partner VRock in Bharatpur Metropolitan City reached its implementation stage recently. Continuing the support towards PPP, the Project Development Manual (PDM), developed by VRock, was launched in an event co-hosted by the partner with Bharatpur Metropolitan City. The manual includes processes pertaining to identifying bankable projects and getting them to the investment-ready level. A PPP orientation workshop was also part of the event, attended by mayors, deputy mayors, CAO, and PPP Unit heads from Damak, Bhimeswor, Bharatpur, Tansen, and Tikapur municipalities.



Other PPP related activities:

- Bhimeswor endorsed the Public-Private Partnership Act and Regulation, the program supported in its formulation. The municipality has also published an Expression of Interest (EOI) for a multi-purpose building and a Kiwi processing plant.
- Tikapur endorsed the Public-Private Partnership Act.
- Tansen signed an MoU with VRock to work on identified PPP initiatives.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Other Highlights

- Damak, Waling, Tansen, and Tikapur have developed their Mid-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) drafts -- an expenditure tracking tool developed under SNGP with support from the program partner Community Engagement and Outreach (CEO). The MTEF aids towards efficient allocation of resources and proper implementation of the comprehensive plans (also developed with SNGP support). To date, two partner municipalities Waling (during SNGP Phase I) and Damak, have adopted the tool; Damak reported its active implementation in the latest three-year budget forecast.
- Two surveys were conducted to assess the impact of Covid-19 on the economy in four partner municipalities: Damak, Waling, Tansen, and Tikapur. One focused on Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) entrepreneurs and gauged the impact on the supply of trading goods or raw materials, management and operation, sales and income, human resource management, and the existing mitigation measures. The second one was on migrant workers who have returned home due to the pandemic and aimed at understanding their plans in terms of willingness to start income-generating activities in Nepal or return to the previous country of employment.

GEDSI

Dalit Women Participation in Local Elections



The program organized a federal-level policy dialogue focused on Dalit Women Representatives (DWRs) issues and upcoming elections with support from the program partner Centre for Dalit Women Nepal (CDWN). At the event, the Undersecretary of the Election Commission (EC), Mr. Surya Prashad Gautam, highlighted the current provisions and role of the EC in the meaningful participation of women in the upcoming elections. At the same time, National Assembly member Hon'ble Bimala Rai Poudel shared her experience and discussed the role of political parties and the social sector in enhancing women's participation in all three tiers of government and decision-making positions. Seven DWRs from the partner municipalities, who are part of the capacity enhancement and mentoring program of SNGP, presented their individual and collective action plan to participants of the event, which included political party leaders, members of the provincial and federal parliament, representatives of the EC and various international organizations. The political party leaders at the event expressed their commitments to advocate for the representation of women and Dalit women in the upcoming elections.



Mainstreaming GEDSI

To strengthen the GEDSI mainstreaming process, SNGP organized two different virtual events. The program conducted a disability inclusion orientation for the SNGP team, which NFDN facilitated. Thirty-three staff participated in the orientation, which focused on conceptual clarity on different models/perspectives of understanding disability, such as philanthropic to socio-environmental, and as a health condition.

Similarly, the program facilitated a coordination meeting among partner organizations implementing targeted GEDSI activities and other partner organizations implementing health, economic recovery, and local judicial committee programs. The meeting helped identify a few coordination possibilities, especially around finalizing and reviewing policies from the GEDSI lens. Since GEDSI is integrated into every project under SNGP, most of the partners shared their concerns with the GEDSI partners, who helped them identify the areas where they could enforce disability inclusion perspectives. The event aimed at establishing better synergy and coordination among the organizations.

DI Advocacy at Partner Municipalities

The DI advocacy forums formed at three partner municipalities are working to ensure the inclusion of issues/concerns of People with Disabilities (PwDs) in various areas of local governance.

The forum in Damak advocated prioritizing PwD's access to Covid-19 vaccines and making the vaccination centers accessible. The forum is striving to incorporate and ensure disability-inclusive agendas in health, education, and employment plans, and will be meeting with the policy draft committee of the municipality.

In Tansen, the forum successfully facilitated the establishment of a disability coordination committee formed after the orientation provided by NFDN to the municipality officials.

The forum in Bhimeshwor is continuously advocating for access to education for children with disabilities. The forum is working toward holding several networking meetings with stakeholders from the health, education, and employment sectors to increase and improve coordination.

Mentorship for Dalit Women Representatives

Other Highlights

- Program partner CDWN completed need assessments on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) to evaluate three partner municipalities' existing plans and policies. During the assessment, municipal officials identified the need for technical support to prepare guiding documents like GESI policy and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) guidelines. Mithila, Tikapur, and Bhimeswar have requested support to prepare GRB guidelines, while Damak, Waling, Birendranagar, and Tansen have requested support for the GESI policy.
- The program completed two sign language interpreters' recruitment and selection process to make the SNGP events and programs more accessible to people with hearing impairment. This service has been extended to the partner organization as well.

Program partner CDWN also organized a three-day training for 21 DWRs from the seven partner municipalities to further the mentorship and capacity enhancement program. The 21 mentees discussed, identified, and shared their political career plan during the training. As part of the training, the participants had prepared individual, and collective action plans they have been following and advocating at the municipal level. Most DWRs expressed their interest in vying for a higher position in the upcoming local election.



Similarly, CDWN also started a distance mentorship for the DWRs. The first round of the virtual mentoring focused on introduction and rapport building between the mentors and mentees. The mentors include senior political party leaders such as Mr. Min Bishwokarma, Ms. Asha BK, and Ms. Gaura Nepali. They have experience in advocacy for the rights of minority and marginalized groups.

SNGP Quarterly Partners' Meeting



The program organized its second quarterly partners' meeting in person on December 6, 2021, after an almost two-year hiatus owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent closures. The event was organized following required safety protocols and mandatory antigen testing.

Representatives from 17 partner organizations under the SNGP Bridging Phase, Field Coordinators and Fellows from seven partner municipalities, the Foundation representatives, and Ms. Kamakshi Yakthumba from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) participated in the meeting. During the event, the program reflected on the key accomplishments, highlights, & challenges from the last quarter and explored the space for coordination and linkages amongst SNGP partner organizations. The program also solicited input and suggestions from partners to design a sustainability framework for SNGP.