



Centre for Social Change

सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

Fostering Civic Engagements and Vigilance Capacity for Strengthening  
the Federal Governance System in Nepal

# A Report on the Capacity Need Assessment of Local Citizens' Groups in Sunsari and Rupandehi Districts

**Work in Progress Version**

**31 December 2020**

## INTRODUCTION

In the transforming governance context of Nepal, Centre for Social Change (CSC) seeks to create a strong civil society space at the local level to strengthen the federal democratic system in the country. The project 'Fostering Civic Engagements and Vigilance Capacity for Strengthening The Federal Governance System in Nepal,' being implemented with the support of The Asia Foundation (TAF), aims to create an enabling environment and foster state-society relationship to ensure strong federal governance practices in Nepal. This report is an outcome of a preliminary assessment conducted by CSC between the months of November and December (2020) as an attempt to assess and understand the capacity and resource constraints of local citizen-led groups in four Local Government Units (LGUs) of Sunsari and Rupandehi districts of Nepal. This study mainly focuses on analyzing the key Resource and Capacity Gaps (RCGs) of local citizen-led groups in the declared study areas and further focuses on identifying the causes and effects of observed RCGs. Ultimately, the study suggests some concrete recommended actions to enhance the capacity of local CSOs and make them capable of demonstrating their strong presence and influence in the local governance affairs.

This report is based on a qualitative study that mainly relies on the analysis of primary and secondary information gathered from multiple sources. Information was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that were carried out with the representatives of citizens' organizations and local government representatives from four LGUs of Rupandehi and Sunsari district.

The four LGUs include Butwal sub-metropolitan city and Suddhodana Rural Municipality from Rupandehi district and Koshi Rural Municipality and Ramdhuni Municipality from Sunsari district. The study team conducted 42 KIIs and 1 FDG consisting of 47 individuals (Male - 30, Female - 16, and Third Gender - 1). Similarly, relevant information was collected through the review of literature and direct observation of the researchers in the field. All the information collected from the various sources were triangulated to validate the findings.

Major limitation of this study is the use of convenience sampling that includes interviewees who were available and accessible during the study period. Since this assessment is part of a continuous study in identification of the status, gaps, opportunities of the local citizen led group at the local level, follow up study is expected to balance the sampling mechanism. Also, the coverage of four local levels from two districts affects generalization of the findings, unless they are validated through multi stakeholders meetings and broader consultations with CSOs in various municipalities.

## KEY FINDINGS

This section provides a general overview of key gaps identified in CSO's engagement in the local level as reported by the respondents in the field. Presenting the causes and effects of those gaps the section further recommends some actions for addressing each of the gaps as mentioned.

The table presented below summarizes the main findings.

Gap 1: CSOs lack strategic plans and programs to operate them effectively at ground.	
<p><b>Causes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSOs lack to identify the importance of planning, goal setting, milestone tracking and theory of change for achieving a desired change.</li> <li>- CSOs lack a well-developed organizational structure.</li> <li>- CSOs lack financial resources and trained members or staff to develop strategic plans, advocacy campaigns, and negotiation strategies.</li> <li>- CSOs lack thematic understanding on the issues they are working with.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSOs are unable to negotiate and advocate on behalf of their organization at the local level.</li> <li>- CSOs are less effective to bring about long-term or sustainable change in the community.</li> <li>- an ad-hoc mode of operation of the CSOs.</li> <li>- CSOs lack trust from the local government as well as the community they are serving.</li> <li>- CSOs are unable to build trustworthy expertise on a particular thematic area.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommended Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhance skills of CSOs on strategic planning, goal setting, milestone tracking, and developing a theory of change.</li> <li>- Support local CSOs to carry out focused interventions.</li> </ul>	
Gap 2: CSOs lack information on government policies and regulations.	
<p><b>Causes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is no or limited participation of CSOs in the policy formulation process of the local, provincial, and federal government.</li> <li>- CSOs are not fully updated on the policies and regulations formed at the local, provincial, and federal level.</li> <li>- Government lacks wider dissemination of information regarding policy formulation.</li> <li>- Lack of uniformity in policy and procedures introduced by local governments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSOs are hesitant to take ownership to the implemented policies.</li> <li>- CSOs face administrative hassles and resource scarcity while coordinating with the local government.</li> <li>- CSOs are unable to design effective intervention strategies.</li> <li>- Contributes to increase the confrontation between CSOs and the local government.</li> <li>- Lacks clarity on the planning process of the government.</li> </ul>

**Recommended Actions:**

- Train CSOs in convening policy dialogues, public hearing, social audit, civic engagement charter, planning processes, and policy monitoring.
- Enhance skills of CSOs in advocacy, negotiation, and communication in the changed governance context of the country.

### Gap 3: CSOs lack opportunities for knowledge and skills upgradation.

**Causes:**

- CSOs particularly from the local level lack mentorship opportunities that could contribute to enhance their knowledge and skills in the relevant field.
- CSOs lack familiarity and access to digital platforms where knowledge and skills building opportunities are accessible.
- Language barrier (English) as a contributing factor to the opportunity gap of the CSOs.

**Effects:**

- CSOs advocacy and negotiation with the concerned authorities at the local level is weakened.
- CSOs lack professionalism in dealing with the local government and other relevant stakeholders.
- CSOs are operating in a conventional manner due to their less familiarity with the digital platforms, new technologies and emerging trends seen in their field.

**Recommended Actions:**

- Enhance knowledge and skills of local CSOs to the best utilization of digital platforms and new technologies.
- Enhance communication and coordination skills of the local CSOs with like-minded actors.
- Enhance skills of CSOs in advocacy, negotiation, and communication in the changed governance context of the country.

### Gap 4: CSOs lack effective networking and coordination.

**Causes:**

- Lack of convening forums at the local level to bring relevant CSOs at one platform to the exchange of ideas, experience, and knowledge.
- Competitive attitudes between local CSOs working on the similar theme.
- CSOs undermining the essence of networking and coordination for achieving a desired objective.
- Government and CSOs have distrust towards each other.

**Effects:**

- CSOs has low or limited ideas regarding the work of CSOs duplicating the actions.
- Local CSOs lack collective action for effective advocacy and negotiation to generate a greater impact on their community.
- CSOs face hassle in dealing with the administrative work of the local government.

**Recommended Actions:**

- CSOs need to develop effective networking and communication skills.
- Mechanisms and initiatives to bring relevant CSOs in one platform for coordination, cooperation, and information sharing.
- Coordination with the media to disseminate information about the works of CSOs and the local government.

### Gap 5: CSOs lack resources or ineffective utilization of available resources.

<p><b>Cause:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Short-term and activity focused funding from the local government.</li> <li>- Shift of the budget from social priorities to physical infrastructures at the local level.</li> <li>- CSOs lacking negotiating skills and justification of the utilization of resources on a particular theme/issue.</li> <li>- Favoritism and nepotism-based resource distribution by the local government.</li> <li>- Limited presence of development partners and external funding agencies to support local CSOs.</li> <li>- CSOs have limited resource generations and mobilization capacity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSOs sustainability is endangered leading most of them to be shut down.</li> <li>- Resources are wasted whereas impacts are not achieved.</li> <li>- CSOs have to implement projects with very limited resources which also limits the impact they can have.</li> <li>- Handover of CSOs leadership to the next generation is becoming increasingly difficult.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommended Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop fundraising and resource mobilization plan to the sustainability of CSOs.</li> <li>- Develop fundraising and resource mobilization skill training to the local CSOs.</li> <li>- Internal human resource capacity enhancement program is required.</li> <li>- Enhance positive/productive relations and coordination with local governments and donors.</li> </ul>	

In brief, as explained by the table above, five major gaps were identified by the findings of the study that contributed to CSOs engagement and participation at the local level:

**Gap 1: CSOs lack strategic plans and programs to operate them effectively at the ground.**

Due to ill developed organizational structures, shortage of financial support and absence of trained and skilled resources, CSOs lacked a thematic understanding of the issues they worked with. Development of strategic plans and advocacy campaigns were sternly hindered by lack of planning, goal setting, milestone tracking and understanding of theory of change for achieving the desired change. As a result, CSOs faced difficulty in negotiating and advocating on their organization’s behalf at the local level. With an ad hoc mode of operation, CSOs lacked government and community’s trust to bring long-term sustainable changes in the community and build expertise on issue based thematic areas.

**Gap 2: CSOs lack information on government policies and regulations.**

Inconsistency in introduction and dissemination of policy and procedure updates by the government discouraged CSOs from participating in policy formulation processes of the local, provincial and federal government. Lack of government coordination, administrative hassle and resource scarcity further created ambiguity in CSO’s clarity on the government’s planning processes and increased conflict between the two bodies.

**Gap 3: CSOs lack opportunities for knowledge and skills upgradation.**

Language barrier, lack of familiarity and access to digital platforms and lack of mentorship on relevant issues were major contributing factors to opportunity gaps for the local level CSOs.

As a consequence, CSOs showed weak advocacy, negotiation and professionalism when dealing with the concerned authorities at the local level.

**Gap 4: CSOs lack effective networking and coordination.**

Local level CSOs lacked a common and healthy platform to exchange their ideas, experiences and knowledge. Undermining the essence of networking and coordination, CSOs working in similar themes showed competitive attitudes and distrust towards each other and the government bodies. As a result, collective actions were discouraged that otherwise would have brought a greater impact on the community and duplication of actions were prevalent due to lack of communication. CSOs also faced a great deal of hassle dealing with the administrative work of the local government.

**Gap 5: CSOs lack resources or ineffective utilization of available resources.**

Short term funding, greater budget priority to physical infrastructures than social issues, lack of accountability and transparency in resource utilization that was highly affected by favoritism and nepotism, scarce presence of funding agencies worsened the already limited resource generation and mobilization capacity of the CSOs. Their survival, sustainability and continuity by next generation leaders were threatened as a result by the impact of resource wastage, project implementation with less than sufficient resources and underachieved project goals.

**Recommended actions for identified gaps**

**Recommended actions for Gap 1:**

- Enhance skills of CSOs on strategic planning, goal setting, milestone tracking, and developing a theory of change.
- Support local CSOs to carry out focused interventions.

**Recommended actions for Gap 2:**

- Train CSOs in convening policy dialogues, public hearing, social audit, civic engagement charter, planning processes, and policy monitoring.
- Enhance skills of CSOs in advocacy, negotiation, and communication in the changed governance context of the country.

**Recommended actions for Gap 3:**

- Enhance knowledge and skills of local CSOs to the best utilization of digital platforms and new technologies.
- Enhance communication and coordination skills of the local CSOs with like-minded actors.
- Enhance skills of CSOs in advocacy, negotiation, and communication in the changed governance context of the country.

**Recommended actions for Gap 4:**

- CSOs need to develop effective networking and communication skills.
- Mechanisms and initiatives to bring relevant CSOs in one platform for coordination, cooperation, and information sharing.
- Coordination with the media to disseminate information about the works of CSOs and the local government.

### **Recommended actions for Gap 5:**

- Develop fundraising and resource mobilization plan to the sustainability of CSOs.
- Develop fundraising and resource mobilization skill training to the local CSOs.
- Internal human resource capacity enhancement program is required.
- Enhance positive/productive relations and coordination with local governments and donors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The issues identified between the CSOs and local government and within the CSOs themselves suggest a greater need in recognizing and strengthening their capacities. Barely functioning amidst lack of training regarding goal setting, milestone tracking and theory of change to move with the changing waves of Nepal's federal governance, the local CSOs need to reinforce sustainable strategies, update with current technologies and gather advocacy and negotiation skills in order to build a prominent civic presence.