Voices of Discontent
A Case Study of Gandaki Province

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Conceptualization Ideation:
Prem Darshan Sapkota
Srishti Adhikari
Tilak Pathak

Authors:
Anish Khatri
Nishu Ratna Bastakoti
Prakash Bhattarai, PhD
Shradha Khadka
Pawan Roy
Basanta Dahal
Kalpana Rana Magar

Report design and photos:
Pratima Chhetri

Executive Summary

The report *Voices of Discontent: A Case Study of Gandaki Province* examines the dimensions, manifestations, and consequences of citizen dissatisfaction in Gandaki Province of Nepal. Conducted across five districts (Mustang, Myagdi, Nawalpur, Kaski, and Gorkha), the study employed qualitative methods including focus group discussions and key informant interviews with a total of 156 respondents to capture diverse perspectives from urban and rural communities across the Terai, hilly and mountainous regions.

Public service delivery, evidently, has emerged as a critical area of citizen dissatisfaction. While citizens acknowledged improved accessibility of local government offices, they demonstrated frustration with the persistent bureaucratic inefficiencies and outdated manual processes. Citizens reported dissatisfactions with the imbalance in development priorities, with excessive focus on visible infrastructure projects at the expense of human development sectors like education, employment and healthcare. Geographic disparities in service distribution further exacerbated citizen dissatisfaction, as rural communities felt increasingly neglected compared to urban centers. These service delivery failures undermine public trust and reinforce perceptions of government ineffectiveness.

Citizens expressed discontent with excessive centralization of authority at the federal level and persistent ambiguity in jurisdictional boundaries between government tiers. Provincial governments are widely perceived as redundant "white elephants," while inequitable budget allocations favor politically influential regions. These structural issues are compounded by legislative delays at the federal level that hinder effective provincial and local governance. The study documents how these systemic failures contribute to growing public dissatisfaction with the federal system.

A sector-specific analysis reveals citizen discontent with the problems entrenched within the education and healthcare sectors. The former serves a curriculum disconnected from labor market demands and suffers from chronic teacher shortages and politicization of school management. Likewise, healthcare services face shortages of medical professionals and inadequate insurance coverage forcing citizens to rely on costly private alternatives. Eventually, such entrenched structural failures disproportionately affect vulnerable populations by widening existing social inequalities, thereby fueling discontent.

The economic landscape presents additional challenges for citizens and businesses alike. Overlapping taxation systems across government tiers create unnecessary burdens, while stringent regulations stifle local entrepreneurship. Agricultural producers struggle with limited market access, and political favoritism distorts economic opportunities. The tourism industry, a vital economic driver in regions like Mustang, faces disruption from unplanned infrastructure development that threatens traditional livelihoods. These economic pressures contribute to the province's troubling youth migration trends, as young people seek opportunities elsewhere.

The study documents diverse channels in which citizens express their dissatisfaction, ranging from formal complaints to social media activism and grassroots mobilization. However, significant barriers limit the effectiveness of these expressions, including fear of retaliation and the dominance of political cadres within formal grievance mechanisms. The consequences of unaddressed dissatisfaction are severe, including mass youth emigration, weakened social cohesion, and the erosion of democratic accountability. These trends threaten Nepal's long-term stability and development prospects.

Systemic challenges identified in the research include fundamental governance mechanism failures, structural economic issues, and the erosion of the social contract between citizens and their representatives. Overlapping responsibilities without clear accountability, politicization of public institutions, and weak intergovernmental coordination undermine effective governance. Economic challenges stem from the absence of industrial development and over-reliance on the inflow of remittances, while the breakdown of communication channels fuel public distrust in democratic processes.

The report concludes with comprehensive policy recommendations for reform. Governance improvements should focus on clarifying jurisdictional boundaries and strengthening coordination mechanisms. Service delivery can be enhanced through digitalization and performance-based evaluation systems. Economic revitalization requires streamlined regulations and targeted support for local businesses. Social cohesion measures should address favoritism and promote inclusive governance, while strategic migration management policies could help retain skilled youth. These interconnected reforms offer a pathway to restore public trust and strengthen Nepal's federal system.

We believe that policymakers and stakeholders who seek to realize the goal of the advancement of federalization in Nepal could gain valuable insights through this research. The findings underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms that address both structural deficiencies and citizen expectations. Implementation of the recommended measures with genuine political commitment, without a doubt, will transform Nepal's governance challenges into opportunities for more responsive, accountable, and effective public administration. The Centre for Social Change remains committed to supporting this transformation through evidence-based advocacy and continued research engagement.

Acknowledgment

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1. Introduction

Citizen dissatisfaction has become a persistent global concern, reflecting a sense of general discontent with the general performance of governments, public institutions, or the delivery of public services. Such grievances and expressions of dissatisfactions are critical indicators of the health of a society and its governance structures.[1] Recent global studies have shown that dissatisfaction with democracy reached an all-time high, with 57.5% of citizens globally expressing their dissatisfactions, marking a significant increase from 47.9% in the mid-1990s.[2] This reflects a greater trend of declining public trust in democratic institutions, especially within developed nations.

In recent years, many countries have witnessed a rise in public discontent that are often manifested through protests, social movements, and increased engagement in political discourse. Nepal has also jumped on this bandwagon. Citizen dissatisfaction in Nepal has historically been a catalyst for significant political and social transformations, almost an exercise of right of citizens to participate in decision-making processes to influence institutional actions. Stemming from a complex interplay of historical, political, economic, and social factors, this dissatisfaction has grown significantly since Nepalese public deserted its monarch in favor of a Federal Democratic Republic in 2008. While citizens initially held high expectations for the federal system, many now express frustrations with governance inefficiencies, corruption, lack of accountability, uneven development, and inadequate service delivery. This dissatisfaction is further exacerbated by economic challenges and political instability, leading to a growing sense of disillusionment with the new political culture among the people.

Studies show that citizens' ratings of public service delivery serve as a crucial indicator of their overall satisfaction with governmental performance. People quickly develop lasting opinions about governance based on their interactions and gradually accumulated experiences with these service[3] such as personal observations, societal discourses, and media influence, all of which contribute to build a collective sentiment that significantly influences how the government functions and the policies and programs it adopts. When public dissatisfaction with governmental actions or inactions becomes widespread, media outlets often amplify these concerns, influencing public discourse, shaping perceptions, and mobilizing collective action. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape public opinion is crucial, as it not only reinforces public sentiment, but also affects policy decisions, sometimes igniting various forms of expressions of such dissatisfaction through protest or resistance.

Furthermore, the expressions of public dissatisfactions range from a more personal and less visible forms of private discontent to large-scale civil resistances and protests-both violent and nonviolent that can have varying consequences on social cohesion and political stability.[4] While peaceful demonstrations can lead to constructive dialogues and

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1 Explaining Citizen Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Public Services | SpringerLink
2 Global dissatisfaction with democracy at a record high
3 Assessing public services from the citizen perspective: what can we learn from surveys?
4 Governance Conflicts And Cooperation In Federal Nepal | Report 2024 - CSC

reforms, violent uprisings often worsen the existing political atmosphere. In this scenario, empowering citizens to engage constructively and peacefully in governance processes is crucial for addressing their grievances and building a stable and inclusive society. Therefore, understanding the underlying causes of this discontent is essential to assessing its impact on the nation's future.

Hence, recognizing citizens' dissatisfaction as a powerful driver of political and social change, and understanding that it often stems from poor governance[5], this research mainly examines the discontents expressed by Nepali citizens regarding the governance of Nepal at the policy, institutional, and systemic levels. In the larger picture, a broader understanding of these sentiments can guide policymakers in developing strategies to tackle grievances at different levels, potentially preventing these issues from escalating into larger conflicts. In particular, this research is conducted with two objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the different types of citizen dissatisfactions and the key factors contributing to these grievances within the context of federal Nepal.
2. To provide actionable policy recommendations to mitigate grievances and enhance citizen satisfaction.

This report offers an analysis of qualitative findings gathered from the Gorkha, Nawalpur, Kaski, Myagdi, and Mustang districts from the Gandaki Province of Nepal, emphasizing the citizens' dissatisfaction in relation to the objectives and indicators set by the study. It further aims to identify and explore the different forms of discontent among Nepali citizens, their root causes, and the factors that contribute to these dissatisfactions in the identified areas. Furthermore, the report intends to propose some actionable policy recommendations intended to improve citizen satisfaction. Through targeted group discussions and qualitative interviews with respondents, this study illuminates the relationship between local governance, public expectations, and service delivery, providing a thorough perspective on the challenges and opportunities within Nepal's evolving federal framework.

The task of identifying causality underneath the concept of citizen dissatisfaction is complex; the widespread and shared feelings that significantly shape public opinions and influence political actions is often found to be rooted in personal experiences that once belonged to few individuals. Therefore, the importance of this study lies in its ability to shed light on the intricate dynamics of citizen dissatisfaction and its impact on the function of governance and ensuring social cohesion. By identifying the main factors that contribute to dissatisfaction, this research offers critical insights for policymakers, allowing them to develop targeted and effective strategies that tackle the underlying issues causing grievances. Moreover, the study provides insight into fostering social cohesion by addressing these grievances, which, left unattended, are bound to lead to polarization, thereby promoting a sense of community and a shared purpose. In addition, it adds depth to the academic discussion about citizen involvement and governance, providing a detailed understanding of the complexities of public dissatisfaction that can guide future studies. Overall, this research is both timely and significant in fostering effective governance, enhancing civic engagement, and ultimately in cultivating a fairer and more peaceful and socially cohesive society.

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5 VdWalle_chapter_PalgraveHandbook_preprint (3).pdf

2. Methodology

This research draws on the perceptions, opinions and lived experiences of citizens across five districts in Gandaki province: Mustang, Myagdi, Nawalpur, Kaski and Gorkha. In each district, one municipality and one rural municipality were chosen to reflect an overall perspective; an exception was made for Mustang district, as all Local Government Units there are rural municipalities.

1. Mustang: Varagung Muktichhetra Rural Municipality and Gharpajhong Rural Municipality
2. Myagdi: Beni Municipality and Malika Rural Municipality
3. Kaski: Pokhara Metropolitan City and Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality
4. Gorkha: Gorkha Municipality and Sahid Lakhan Rural Municipality
5. Nawalpur: Kawasoti Municipality and Hupsekot Rural Municipality

The locations of the study area were carefully selected to capture the diverse terrains of Gandaki province- Mountain, Hill, and Terai.

The study employed a qualitative research design using a semi-structured questionnaire to explore citizens' perceptions, experiences, and observations of dissatisfaction.[6] This questionnaire delved into five core areas: citizens' overall perceptions of public institutions and governance, the factors contributing to dissatisfaction: spanning from public service delivery, governance system, and socio-cultural dynamics, to livelihood and economic well-being. It also consisted of questions related to the effects of civilian dissatisfaction, how it is expressed, and recommendations for addressing the identified issues.

In addition to the questionnaire, the study examined the formation of citizen dissatisfactions- investigating whether these opinions stem from the lived experiences of first-hand encounters with systemic failures, self-observed incompetencies such as corruption or mismanagement, or perceptions influenced by media and public discourses. The analytical framework of the study further analyzed the sources and dimensions of citizen dissatisfaction, the cycle of dissatisfaction and its consequences such as how persistent dissatisfaction can erode citizens' trust in government and affect their political engagement.

Qualitative data used in the report is collected through focused group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). A total of 20 FGDs were conducted with 132 respondents in the study locations. The numbers of FGD were kept uniform across the districts with 4 FGDs conducted per district to ensure full coverage of the diversity of contexts we intended to investigate. For covering all the perceptions, the target groups for the FGDs were divided into two categories:

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6 For this study, Citizen Dissatisfaction refers to feelings of displeasure either latent or expressed through formal and informal channels in public or private sphere, induced independently or through a set of interrelated interactions and interface with system of governance, leadership, public service delivery, financial opportunities, information flow, identity and representation.

1. Economic Group: Farmers, consumer groups, business owners, tourism industry, proprietors, and other private sector stakeholders.
2. Socio-Political Group: women, youth, persons with disabilities, marginalized groups, indigenous groups, community leaders, opposition party representatives, right activists, teachers, and media persons.

Participant selection for FGDs in some areas was also guided by the project team, as the process necessitated choosing specific groups for certain FGDs to ensure that diverse voices and perspectives were effectively captured. For example, in Nawalpur district, one FGD was held exclusively among youth, another for women, and another for farmers.

Likewise, a total of 24 KIIs were conducted, and the participants were selected to represent a wide range of stakeholders, including elected local representatives, government officials, political party leaders, community influencers, and provincial government officials, and media persons. In each district, 4-6 KIIs were conducted, with the exception in Kaski, where 8 KIIs were conducted as Pokhara being the provincial headquarters; provincial level interviews were also taken.

Limitations

Despite efforts to strengthen our methodological rigor, the following limitations should be acknowledged.

1. While the findings of this study provide valuable insights into citizen dissatisfaction, they cannot be fully generalized to encompass the national context, as it is based solely on qualitative data and is limited to 10 local government units from the five districts of Gandaki Province.
2. The composition of completely homogeneous and mixed FGD groups may have influenced participant responses. Hence, it might have impacted the overall applicability of the results to broader populations.
3. The findings of this study are an amalgamation of citizen's perceptions, observations, and lived experiences, which are subjective and context dependent. As a result, the study might not capture the full spectrum of perspectives or the complete reality of the situation.

3. Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study undertaken in Gandaki Province, focusing on areas of citizen dissatisfaction, how people express their concerns and the mechanisms available for addressing them. By capturing the most frequently expressed views in the study locations, this section aims to reflect the common sentiments of the respondents while recognizing the varying contexts that shape public perceptions.

Citizen dissatisfaction in Gandaki Province is shaped by diverse factors, including geography, settlement types and socio-economic divisions. While some grievances such as governance inefficiencies, favoritism and lack of employment opportunities are common across all regions, other concerns vary significantly based on local realities. The challenges faced by residents in mountainous regions differ from those in the hills and terai, just as dissatisfaction in rural areas is distinct from urban-centric grievances. Additionally, economic and political factors further define how different groups experience dissatisfactions.

However, before examining these issues, it is equally important to explore areas where people reported satisfaction. Understanding what is perceived as satisfactory provides a more balanced perspective, helping to identify strengths within existing systems and the factors that contribute to positive experiences.

3.1 Areas of Citizen Satisfaction

Citizens of Gandaki Province, in general, expressed satisfaction with the increased proximity of the government to the public, noting that local governments are now more accessible and impactful compared to pre-federalization days. They highlighted improvements in administrative efficiency at local governments, particularly in essential services such as registration of births, marriages and deaths. Many also acknowledged a faster pace of local development, citing advancements in infrastructure like road, electricity, drinking water and healthcare facilities. Additionally, they appreciated the ability to elect their local representatives, though skeptical about their accountability and their claims of governance efficacy.

> *"The establishment of a new district has greatly benefited Nawalpur. Previously, people had to travel all the way to Parasi for administrative services, which was far from our homes."*
>
> – A FGD participant from Kawasoti, Nawalpur district.

The federal governance system has also displayed some flexibility for citizens to express and hold local governments accountable, with Ward Chairs facilitating citizen engagement, addressing community needs and ensuring smooth public service delivery. In addition, Wards Chairs or ward offices were reportedly the foremost and accessible channels for voicing complaints and concerns. Also, despite some functional weaknesses of the Judicial Committees formed in each local government unit, the public perceives its establishment has brought justice closer to communities than in the past.

> *"As a Ward Chair, I cannot ignore the needs of the people under my jurisdiction. I live in the same community as they do; I am one of them. I must remain accessible most of the time, providing services, meeting with residents and addressing their concerns daily."*
>
> – A ward chair from Kaski district.
>
> *"I often go door-to-door in remote areas, delivering official references for essential services such as citizenship documentation and certificates."*
>
> – A ward chair from Myagdi district.
>
> *"It's much easier to consult with ward chairs when conflicts or disputes arise within the community. Nowadays, the Ward Chairs and the Judicial Committee play a crucial role in resolving disputes- whether it's about development projects, public services or personal matters like family property division. I don't think there's any dispute where the Ward Chairs aren't involved."*
>
> – A municipal administrative officer from Kaski district.

Furthermore, respondents appreciated local governments' effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, for playing a vital role in crisis management. Also, instances of adjustments to taxation policies[7] in areas like Pokhara have reduced complaints from people, and service delivery continued to improve in such areas.

3.2. Areas of Citizen Dissatisfaction

The core areas of citizen dissatisfactions in Nepal reflect an interplay of governance challenges, unmet expectations, and systemic inefficiencies across federal, provincial and local levels. Citizens expressed widespread discontent with the centralization of power, lack of transparency, inequitable resource allocation, and the delays and inefficient public service delivery. Extant to some extent, these grievances are further amplified by inefficiencies in local governance, favoritism, and insufficient mechanisms for addressing public concerns. By examining these recurring themes, this section aims to delve into the dynamics of citizen dissatisfactions, providing insights into the broader implications for governance, policy-making, and public trust in Nepal's evolving federal structure.

3.2.1. Disconnected all Tiers of Governments with the Citizen

Nepal's governance system elicits diverse perceptions from its citizens of Gandaki Province, with significant dissatisfactions aimed at the Provincial and Federal levels. Provincial government is widely seen as disconnected from the grassroots' needs, raising questions about its relevance and effectiveness. Many perceived Gandaki Provincial government as overly bureaucratic, inefficient and focused more on political patronage than ensuring quality

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7 Budget Speech of 2079-080 Pokhara Municipality ; https://latestnepal.com/pokhara-metro-slashes-tax-rate-parking-set-to-be-free/

governance. This has led to the belief that the provincial government operates as costly and redundant entities, often referred to as "white elephant," with little independent impact in the province. They asserted that the provincial government was established primarily to accommodate political party cadres rather than to effectively serve the people.

Citizens from the Gandaki province expressed concerns that the federal government retains excessive control, limiting the autonomy of the province as well as local governments. Delays in lawmaking at the Federal and Provincial levels heighten this view, as these delays hinder local governance practices and public service delivery. Citizens in the Gandaki province generally believe the financial and administrative support from the Federal government is inadequate, further undermining local development efforts. These views have created a perception among citizens that federalism is not being implemented in its truest form.

Local governments, in contrast, are generally viewed as more relevant and impactful because they address the immediate needs of citizens and are easily approachable. However, their potential is often seen as constrained by the lack of support from higher levels of government. Citizens from Gandaki province have placed higher expectations on local governments while perceiving Provincial and Federal governments as distant, ineffective, and less important in their daily lives.

Budget allocations at the Federal and Provincial levels are widely viewed as inequitable, favoring influential individuals or politically significant regions, such as Bagmati Province, while neglecting critical areas like job creation and productive industries in other provinces. This perceived favoritism has heightened public frustration and reinforced the belief that the Federal and Provincial governments lack transparency and fairness.

> *"The provincial capitals are expected to offer job and economic opportunities comparable to Kathmandu, but that's far from the reality. Many young people are compelled to either move abroad or head to Kathmandu for employment and education. This disparity underscores the imbalance between the central and provincial governments. Simply building a better airport doesn't create the conditions for equal and just opportunities."*
>
> – A student and youth leader from Pokhara.

3.2.2. Discontent with Public Services

This heading delves into the grievances expressed by citizens of Gandaki province regarding public services. Public services are further categorized into administrative services and development services, both of which have drawn significant criticism from the citizens in the study locations. While administrative services focus on governance and service delivery, development services encompass infrastructure projects and broader socio-economic initiatives.

Administrative Services

Although the public of Gandaki province generally appreciated the improved

proximity of administrative services that are available through local governments, many respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with how these services are delivered and the quality of the services provided. Delays, inefficiencies and bureaucratic hurdles remain persistent challenges, which respondents attributed to outdated systems, limited use of technology, and poor coordination among government institutions. For many, dealing with government offices is seen as a burdensome and frustrating ordeal- commonly referred to as "Jhamela" (hassle).

Compared to rural areas, respondents from urban areas like Pokhara and Kawasoti expressed greater dissatisfaction with the administrative processes at government institutions. Overcrowding, long queues, slow processing times, and high service fees were major complaints from these regions. Respondents reported that even basic administrative tasks require excessive time and effort, not to mention the exorbitant fees attached. The lack of digitalization forces citizens to navigate the same old manual processes, making service acquisition tedious and time-consuming.

A participant in a FGD session, who was also a local leader from the Dalit community in Gorkha district, shared their frustration over a case in which an individual was issued a citizenship certificate with an incorrect date of birth. Despite repeated attempts to correct the mistake, local authorities remained unresponsive, leaving the individual without a solution. Similar cases of bureaucratic negligence were repeatedly highlighted by respondents, many of whom reported having to visit government offices numerous times just to correct some minor mistakes in official documents, often facing delays and frustration in the process. Staff layoffs and absenteeism without any substitute staff have further strained citizens' dissatisfaction with the service quality.

In addition to bureaucratic inefficiencies, a resident from Malika Rural Municipality of Myagdi district pointed out the frequent absence of elected officials, which has forced the public to take extra steps to access essential services.

> *"Some Ward Chairs from the rural areas of this municipality often spend their time in urban centers like Beni and Pokhara because they own personal businesses there. As a result, service seekers are forced to either summon them back to the ward offices through various means or travel to Beni and Pokhara themselves to obtain signatures in official documents."*
>
> - A resident of Malika Rural Municipality, Mygadi district.

Development Services

Citizens of Gandaki Province have generally welcomed localized development efforts, however, many expressed dissatisfactions with the governments' overwhelming focus on infrastructure development at the expense of human or social development initiatives. Respondents criticized authorities for failing to prioritize critical areas such as quality education, employment generation, and public service enhancements. Respondents highlighted a disconnect between the government-led development initiatives and the actual needs of their communities. This disconnect is further aggravated by their exclusion from

decision-making processes. Respondents from FGDs, from all regions, reaffirmed that the local governments' overemphasis on infrastructure development is due to the involvement of the individuals, elected officials and government officials, who are financially benefited from these projects.

> "Visible works from the Municipality apart from roads are not seen yet. The asphalt roads are perceived to be the indicator of development at the local level. In most of the works, there lacks transparency."
>
> – A resident of Nawalpur district.

Contrasting to the previous concern, respondents also cited their dissatisfaction about the inadequate development of infrastructures, particularly in remote and hilly areas. A major grievance was the unequal distribution of development projects. Respondents from Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality of Kaski district stated that urban centers such as Pokhara receive consistent investment in roads, healthcare and education, while rural hill settlements remain neglected. In Hupsekot Rural Municipality of Nawalpur district, for example, road development has been slow, making it difficult for farmers and small business owners to transport goods to markets. The lack of proper infrastructure restricts opportunities for economic growth, contributing to dissatisfaction. Furthermore, essential services including affordable drinking water, reliable electricity, dependable healthcare and quality education remained insufficient, leaving many rural communities underserved despite election-season promises by political candidates.

> "The recent road connection to Darbang has significantly improved our lives and opened up many opportunities. However, the road is highly prone to landslides, and when it goes, so is the electricity. It often takes several days and sometimes up to a week to restore both the road and the power supply. This lack of timely response from the government severely impacts local businesses, most of which are small-scale cottage industries like bakeries and furniture workshops. Meanwhile, municipal offices, hospitals and other government facilities continue to operate seamlessly with the aid of generators."
>
> - A resident and business owner from Darbang, Malika Rural Municipality.

Citizen dissatisfaction was also directed towards the lack of accountability and oversight of development projects. Poor road conditions and frequent delays in major projects, such as the Narayangadh-Butwal road expansion, have severely hindered provincial connectivity and economic growth. Respondents believe that governments often fail to conduct periodic reviews of their initiatives, leading to delays, mismanagement of resources and incomplete or poorly executed projects. While administrative services were generally well received, frustrations primarily stemmed from developmental shortcomings and the authorities responsible for their execution.

> "This morning, I noticed a section of road in front of the municipal office had been freshly blacktopped. However, I was both puzzled and dismayed

to see that nearby potholes remained untouched during the process. This glaring oversight raises questions about the inefficiency of our government in addressing basic infrastructure issues. Such actions inevitably contribute to growing public dissatisfaction and erode trust in the authorities."

– A journalist from Beni Municipality, Myagdi District

Case Example:

The representative of a Drinking Water User's Group in Beni Municipality expressed significant dissatisfaction with how drinking water services are managed under Nepal's federal structure. The water supply system in Beni was constructed before federalism and relies on a source located in Annapurna Rural Municipality, a neighboring administrative area. This has led to disputes and complications that were not anticipated when the system was originally established. The representative highlighted how the government has neglected its responsibility to ensure basic needs like drinking water and shifted the burden onto consumer groups, creating multiple layers of challenges.

Initially governed by the Water Resource Act of 2049,[8] under which consumer groups were exempt from paying taxes. However, after the introduction of federalism, the local government required consumer groups to register and comply with tax obligations to operate, for which they were asked to pay 25 percent income tax on their savings. Additionally, 2081 amendments of Income Tax Act 2002[9], have removed the drinking water consumer groups from the tax exemption. Another pressing concern is the demand by Annapurna municipal for a share of the profits (dividends) from the consumer group. Despite ongoing dialogue, no resolution has been reached, and the Users' group representative criticized the lack of active involvement by local, Provincial and Federal governments in addressing this cross-municipality dispute. This demand for dividends, coupled with the new tax and registration policies, is placing additional financial pressure on the User's group and driving up water tariffs for the public, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction.

Beni also faces recurring challenges in maintaining a stable water supply. During the dry season, the municipality often experiences water shortages, while in the monsoon season, landslides and development activities, such as road construction, frequently damage pipelines, disrupting supply. These issues exacerbate public frustration, which is often directed at the User's Group rather than at the government. The representative also noted that the residents of municipality has experienced long-standing conflicts over water sources, such as disputes between the residents of Ratnechaur in Beni and Baglung Municipality, which escalated into physical clash as seen in March 2023.[10]

Overall, the representative underscored the broader challenges faced by consumer groups throughout Nepal. The lack of clear and cohesive policies and the shifting responsibilities across governments brought about by federalism have left essential services

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8   https://dwssm.gov.np/content/8/water-resources-act--2049--1992/
9   https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/content/13432/income-tax-act-2002/
10 https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/23888

like drinking water in a state of mismanagement. These issues are not only affecting the sustainability of water systems but are also increasing the financial burden on both consumer groups and the public.

Within development services, education, health, and the lack of employment opportunities remain three major areas of public dissatisfaction. Among these, education and health issues are discussed in detail below. The issue around the lack of employment opportunities is discussed under the themes of Education, Youth Migration and Perception of Favoritism.

Education

Widespread dissatisfaction with Nepal's education system has become increasingly apparent throughout the country; Gandaki province remains no exception. Students and young people of this province frequently highlight the significant gap between the education they receive and the skills demanded by the job market. This disconnect is further magnified by the lack of qualified educators/teachers, particularly in rural areas such as Malika, Sahid Lakhan and Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipalities, where access to quality education is limited. As one of the respondents highlighted-

> *"There is a shortage of teachers for critical subjects like science and mathematics. Many skilled educators leave for jobs abroad due to inadequate compensation in government positions. Additionally, there is a lack of skill development training, and the education system places too much emphasis on rote learning, which doesn't benefit us in the long run. Many of my friends have either moved to Kathmandu for higher education or gone abroad for studies and work."*
>
> - A student from Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality, Kaski district.

In all study areas, unemployment and the absence of income generation opportunities were closely tied to the education system's inadequacies. The interactions with youth revealed a critical gap between educational curricula and real-world skills. Respondents highlighted the disparity between what the local educational institutions teach and what the job market demands has contributed to a growing skills mismatch, leaving many young people ill-prepared to transition from education to employment. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the rapidly evolving digital economy, where the workforce increasingly requires specialized skills that Nepal's education system falls short to provide.

A youth respondent from Kawasoti Municipality, Nawalpur District pointed out another troubling issue:

> *"The provision of quality education is heavily influenced by the politicization of the education system. Political parties prioritize their own agendas instead of focusing on creating a healthy and effective educational environment."*

One of the most significant sources of dissatisfaction with Nepal's education system was the current conditions of government schools. Respondents cited, while a few community schools serve as exemplary models, the majority suffer from heavy political influence, particularly in areas like teacher recruitment and the formation of school management committees. CSO representatives citied that, educational institutions have increasingly become hubs for political appointments and activities, detracting from their primary purpose of providing quality education.

A CSO leader from Mustang District highlighted this concern:

"Private schools operate on limited budgets yet they are still delivering good results. Meanwhile, community schools, despite receiving significantly more resources, budgets, and additional investments from INGOs and bilateral agencies for teacher training, fail to create meaningful impact. This is largely due to politicization- nobody questions the allocation of budgets or the outcomes in community schools. People perceive community schools as being for the poor, while the wealthy and well-off, including political leaders and civil servants, send their children to private schools. Where is the accountability?"

This disconnect between the education system and youth aspirations is closely tied to the high influx of youth emigration in the most recent years. Almost all youth respondents believed they can access better education and job opportunities abroad, in countries like Japan, Australia, Canada, the United States, and across Europe, compared to Nepal. They emphasized the limited employment prospects both during and after their studies, with many expressing frustrations over the lack of part-time work opportunities locally. This starkly contrasts with the abundance of such opportunities overseas.

"I don't trust that government colleges in Nepal provide quality, skill-based education, and private institutions are too expensive relative to the economic opportunities they offer after graduation. Abroad, we can earn while studying and even support our families. The investment is worthwhile. My friends who have gone abroad are studying, earning and enjoying a better standard of living compared to us here in Nepal."

- A student from Pokhara, Kaski district.

Health

Citizen dissatisfaction with government healthcare services was a recurring concern among respondents throughout the study areas of Gandaki Province, citing poor management, lack of specialized services and financial barriers as major issues. Many expressed that they prefer to go to public hospitals due to the high cost of private healthcare. Yet, they find the government-owned facilities understaffed and lacking essential services, particularly in rural areas such as Malika, Varagung Muktichhetra, Hupsekot and Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipalities. Even in larger hospitals like those in urban areas- Beni, Pokhara and Jomsom, the absence of specialist medical professionals has forced patients to seek treatment elsewhere,

often at great expense. Since health posts offer only minor check-ups and basic medicines, and district hospitals lack specialized care, respondents from rural areas shared, they travel to regional or provincial hospitals, and sometimes even to Kathmandu or India for treatment, significantly increasing costs. Low-income families are particularly affected, as major health services require substantial financial resources. Additionally, inefficiencies in Nepal's health insurance system further burden patients, with many medicines either unavailable at hospital pharmacies or only accessible at full price from private clinics. These systemic shortcomings have led to widespread frustration, particularly among those in remote areas who struggle to access even basic medical care.

> *"Health services in Malika Municipality face numerous challenges. Firstly, there is a shortage of medical professionals at the hospital. In emergencies, we are often required to call doctors or specialists ourselves. While an able person might manage this, what about those from remote areas who have no idea how to contact medical professionals? Another pressing issue is the lack of medicines covered by insurance. Pharmacies claim they don't stock all the necessary medications, forcing us to purchase them at full price from private clinics. What is the point of having medical insurance if we end up spending more? This situation is both frustrating and unfair,"* remarked a resident of Malika Municipality."*

> – A resident of Malika Rural municipality.

Responding to similar concerns from the public, a Hospital Management Officer in Jomsom stated:

> *"The hospital and health post pharmacies primarily stock medicines that are in high demand. As a result, many types of medicines may not be available. This approach is intended to minimize the risk of medicines expiring unused and to manage the financial burden associated with maintaining a broader inventory."*

3.2.3. Taxation- Tax burden and Tax utilization

FGDs with economic group highlighted, many local businesses perceive the taxation system as overly burdensome and inefficient. Respondents argued that taxes are excessive and unrealistic, with multiple registrations and fees at various departments and levels of government. At the federal level, businesses must register with the Office of the Company Registrar (OCR), paying fees based on authorized capital. They also need to obtain a Permanent Account Number (PAN) and register for Value Added Tax (VAT) if their annual turnover exceeds NPR 5 million. The federal government imposes corporate income tax, VAT, excise duty and customs duties where applicable. Beyond federal taxes such as corporate income tax and VAT, businesses also face provincial business taxes, industry-specific levies and professional license fees. Local governments impose business registration fees, operating license fees and periodic renewal charges. Additionally, some municipalities levy local business taxes, service taxes and advertisement taxes. Furthermore, inconsistencies in tax rates and rules

across local governments create confusion, as businesses operating in multiple jurisdictions must comply with different local tax structures. A hotel operator in Mustang district shared,

> *"The local government frequently monitors hotels by posing as guests to assess our room capacity. They do this to ensure we are paying the correct taxes and not evading any obligations in operating our hotels."*

The financial demands of federalism have also raised concerns. The system requires significant revenue to function, which is primarily collected through taxes levied on the public. Many respondents across all the study areas of Gandaki Province argued that instead of focusing solely on taxation, governments should prioritize developing productive sectors that can generate sustainable revenue.

> *"I feel like everything is taxed nowadays; every year, governments come up with new ways to collect more taxes. Local governments have their taxes, provincial governments have theirs, and the federal government has its own."*
>
> – A respondent from Mustang District.

In response to public concerns, municipal Chair from Mustang district justified the taxation policies, which were shared by most of the elected officials and government officials interviewed during field study.

> *"People were used to paying little to no taxes in the past, so it's natural for them to feel burdened now. But local governments need tax revenue, how else are we supposed to function and carry out development projects?"*

However, beyond taxation itself, one of the most pressing concerns among the public was the perceived misuse of tax revenue. As taxes have increased, so has the scrutiny over how funds are utilized. Many respondents across the Gandaki Province believe that their taxes are not being properly utilized, citing examples of elected officials enjoying luxurious lifestyles, such as expensive motorbikes and four-wheel vehicles, while development efforts appear to lag. This dissatisfaction is rooted in the belief that the government prioritizes maintaining the comfort and luxury of leaders and administrative officials over investing in meaningful development projects. A growing sentiment among the public encapsulates this frustration:

> *"We abolished one king, only to create many more under federalism. Elected officials have become kings instead of humble servants of the people."*

Another significant concern was the misallocation and ineffective use of budgets. Funds are often spent on projects and activities with little to no tangible benefit for the public, further fueling discontent.

A businessman from Mustang District remarked:

> *"I am perplexed by the priorities of local governments, such as constructing unnecessary view towers and monuments."*

CSOs across Gandaki Province voiced strong dissatisfaction over tax misallocation, criticizing local governments for their lack of financial support and perceived efforts to undermine their work. They emphasized that local CSOs and NGOs play a crucial role in assisting underprivileged and marginalized communities, yet their funding is often misdirected.

A CSO representative from Kaski District shared:

"The budgets meant for women, social and marginalized groups never reach them. Instead, they are spent on irrelevant activities like picnics, token capacity-building training and unproductive meetings. These funds, which should be allocated to local CSOs working for these groups, are either squandered on such activities or given to people with close ties to power holders. We feel increasingly neglected."

3.2.4. Discouraging Environment for Local Businesses

According to the FGDs with economic groups, poor business environment was a significant issue expressed by the local business communities of Gandaki Province. As stated earlier, multi-tiered taxation across the three levels of government and redundant registration requirements placed undue financial and documentation burdens on local entrepreneurs. Furthermore, small-scale industries and agricultural producers also reported a multitude of challenges, including restricted market access, unfairly low prices for their products and inadequate support from the local authorities. Many respondents highlighted the harmful competitiveness among local businesses, as replicated products and shop items saturated the market, reducing authenticity of ideas and profitability. Also, the influx of imported agricultural goods lessened the value and demands of local products, weakening the viability of domestic markets.

"As a furniture business owner in Beni Municipality, I am deeply dissatisfied with the local government's actions. They claim to support local businesses, yet they procure furniture for the municipal office from Pokhara. How can they promote local businesses when they overlook us? Is there compensation involved in purchasing from an urban center, or is it a matter of mistrust in local enterprises?"

– A furniture business owner, Beni, Myagdi district.

Interactions from Gorkha district exemplified these issues through the expressed frustration of local entrepreneurs over the lack of dedicated programs to support local businesses, insufficient monitoring of local markets, and the ineffectiveness of existing advocacy and/or mediation mechanisms like the Chamber of Commerce. Another prominent issue reported was the monopolization of the annual district festival "Gorkha Mahotsav" in Gorkha Municipality by external businesses, mostly bringing in imported goods for making the stalls more attractive. Instead of fostering local economic growth, festival contracts were often awarded to groups and companies from other districts, sidelining local entrepreneurs' needs and depriving them of potential economic benefits.

Farmers and agriculture-based small businesses run by local entrepreneurs expressed dissatisfactions with Provincial government's policy on promoting local businesses, citing insufficient funds, and inadequate or weak market connections. The agricultural sector is seen as neglected, with middlemen dominating the price of the agriproducts due to weak links between producers and markets. This led to a growing perception that provincial governments are unproductive to the challenges faced by local agriculture-based businesses.

> *"Many small-scale businesses in Nepal rely on agriculture and its products, with the provincial government responsible for promoting the agriculture sector and addressing its key issues. However, instead of focusing on improving agricultural production and establishing markets for domestic products, provincial governments prioritize subsidies for their own supporters. Farmers, meanwhile, need access to larger markets beyond their small towns and villages."*

> - A farmer from Nawalpur district.

Case Example:

The tourism sector in Mustang is experiencing a division in perspective due to recent infrastructural developmental works, particularly the new construction of roads connecting major touristic destinations within Mustang district. Historically, this place's majestic flora and fauna invites a good number of international tourists every year. Traditional tourism in Mustang revolves around trekking routes, teahouses and the allure of its unique culture, breathtaking natural beauty, and ethnic diversity. However, recent developmental work has diversified the district's tourism appeal. Mustang is now a popular destination for adventure rides and religious tourism, attracting an increasing number of visitors from India and Nepal. This shift has brought about new infrastructure developments, such as roads, hotels, resorts and shops catering to the evolving tourism demands. These changes, while opening new opportunities, have disrupted the traditional tourism model.

Key issues include roads intersecting trekking routes and the migration of entire villages, leaving sections of trekking trails abandoned. For instance, many visitors now bypass intermediate stops to head directly to prominent destinations like Upper Mustang, Marpha and Muktinath Temple. This has not only reduced foot traffic for traditional businesses, but also led to increased waste and environmental strain, underscoring the need for revised trekking routes.

Traditional tourism businesses are dissatisfied with these disruptions and criticize the government for its lack of proactive management in balancing the sector's competing demands. They argue that the government has not done enough to preserve the traditional trekking experience while accommodating the new wave of tourism. On the other hand, businesses that have embraced the new tourism trends are relatively satisfied with the opportunities created. However, they also believe that the district has the potential to manage both traditional and modern tourism effectively, provided the government adopts a serious and strategic approach.

3.2.5. Perception of Favoritism

Favoritism remained a major issue of dissatisfaction across various sectors, regions and communities in Gandaki Province, with political favoritism being particularly pervasive. In the Terai region, within Kawasoti Municipality of Nawalpur district, dissatisfaction was largely tied to political favoritism.

Respondents across the Gandaki Province widely perceive that the governance system is overly politicized, hindering equitable access to opportunities and services. A deeply ingrained belief persists among the public that navigating government processes requires personal or political connections with officials.

This dissatisfaction was most apparent at the local level, where issues of bias often emerged during the distribution of resources such as monetary aid, skill development programs, agricultural subsidies, business support, training sessions, budget allocations and disaster relief. Respondents reported that appointments to local-level positions and contractual employees, including schoolteachers, health professionals, and members of users' groups and management committees were often determined by personal relations or political affiliations rather than merit or community needs. Furthermore, concerns were raised regarding the lack of impartiality within Judicial Committees, which is perceived as being heavily influenced by political parties. This political interference has contributed to declining public confidence in local justice mechanisms, reinforcing the perception that decision-making is guided by political interests rather than fairness and accountability.

> *"I often hear about training programs and subsidies offered by local governments, but I have never been invited to participate or benefited from any of them. It seems they only invite their own people to take advantage of the skills and allowances offered during the program."*
>
> *– A sentiment commonly expressed by respondents during FGDs.*

Among marginalized social groups- Dalit, Muslim and indigenous communities in Gorkha and Myagdi expressed dissatisfaction with continued discrimination in resource allocation and employment opportunities. Many reported that despite legal provisions for inclusion, they still face barriers in accessing government programs and services. Women in rural municipalities raised concerns about limited political and economic opportunities, stating that while they are encouraged to participate in governance, they are often excluded from decision-making processes. A CSO leader from Machhapuchchhre municipality shared,

> *"During the 2015 earthquake, my house was severely damaged. The government surveyed the affected areas and included our home in the relief quota. However, despite numerous requests, we never received the promised aid. On one occasion, my mother visited the ward office to inquire about the relief. Shockingly, the elected representative bluntly told her that we would not receive any assistance because we had voted for another candidate in the local and general elections. At that time, I was working in India and could not personally intervene."*

Political groups, including opposition parties, activists and CSOs, raised strong dissatisfaction over political favoritism and lack of inclusivity in decision-making. Respondents, representatives of CSOs, believe that government contracts, development projects and funding allocations are based on political affiliations rather than merit or community needs. Opposition party leaders and activists voiced frustration over the government's failure to address corruption and mismanagement, which they claim has eroded public trust. Similarly, CSOs in Kaski reported feeling excluded from policy discussions and governance processes, limiting their ability to advocate for the needs of local communities.

> *"The local government does not allocate budgets for social development fairly. Instead, they either spend the funds themselves or distribute them among their own affiliates. Even civil society organizations are affected by this politicization, deepening divisions within civil society and ultimately shrinking civic space."*
>
> - A CSO leader in Pokhara, Kaski District.

While the perception of favoritism was frequently validated in resource distribution, the situation appeared different regarding administrative services at the local level. In ward offices, citizens often found elected representatives and administrative staff accessible and supportive. This proximity and responsiveness have created a more favorable experience for people dealing with local governments compared to Provincial and Federal government offices, which are more distant- both physically and administratively, from the citizens they serve.

3.3. Expression of Dissatisfaction

Citizens across the Gandaki Province expressed their dissatisfactions through diverse channels, ranging from traditional methods of communication to modern digital platforms.

Formal methods of expressing dissatisfactions included submitting demand letters, issuing press releases and filing complaints through suggestion boxes or ward offices. The primary grievance mechanism was often the ward office, with issues frequently raised through acquaintances with ward members. Tole-level meetings were also common, setting agendas and consolidating community voices to be presented to the Local Government. These channels provided a structured approach for citizens to communicate their concerns to the Local Governments and other government institutions. Beyond formal channels, people also expressed their grievances through media engagement, direct engagement with authorities, and other grassroots and informal actions.

However, despite these efforts, there was a shared perception that their concerns were not adequately addressed by authorities, leading to frustration and disillusionment.

While modes of expression and their effectiveness varied by context, common trends and barriers emerged, as outlined.

3.3.1. Media Engagement

Media, particularly social media, has become a crucial platform for expressing dissatisfactions. Traditional outlets like newspapers and radio are still prevalent to engage journalists and highlight pressing issues. Due to their influence, journalists are often contacted directly by citizens to raise awareness of grievances. However, platforms such as Facebook have gained prominence as direct and accessible tools for raising concerns.

For individuals without direct access to those in power, social media has served to voice their grievances. For individuals with or without direct access to those in power, it was also implied as a means to communicate with wider mass regarding their concerns, aware public, and garner support from the public.

> *A resident of Kaski district shared, "The municipal office is right across the road from my house, and I regularly meet officials to discuss community needs. But sometimes, I prefer posting on Facebook because public posts attract attention beyond my locality and put pressure on leaders."*

Despite its advantages, respondents expressed concerns about the risk of misinformation and disinformation through social media platforms. While social media enables rapid information dissemination to a wide audience, it is also vulnerable to false or misleading content. Respondents noted that posts containing hate speech, vulgarity, and sharp criticism tend to gain more traction than constructive feedback or awareness efforts.

Recognizing these challenges, individuals, including local leaders, stressed the importance of verifying information before sharing it. As one political leader from Hupsekot Rural Municipality in Nawalpur district stated,

> *"I only post concerns on social media when I have sufficient evidence to verify them."*

3.3.2. Direct Engagement with Authorities

Direct engagement with authorities was a common way for citizens to express their dissatisfactions. This included one-on-one and group discussions, participation in Public Hearings, and round table talks with stakeholders. Lobbying, whether individually or through coalitions with opposition parties, further amplified their voices. While these interactions created opportunities for dialogue, many viewed them as performative, with authorities often failing to follow through on promises.

Across the Gandaki Province, Public Hearings were widely seen as symbolic rather than substantive. A respondent from Machhapuchchhre Rural Municipality from Kaski district noted that such events are merely held "for show" and fail to attract public interest due to the perception that authorities routinely disregard the issues raised. Additionally, respondents pointed out that participation in these hearings was dominated by political party affiliates and cadres, limiting broader civic engagement.

Respondents shared that they frequently visited government offices to voice their concerns and grievances, with Ward Chairs being the most accessible local authority figures. Citizens also formed delegations or coalitions to meet decision-makers directly. When political parties aligned with citizen grievances, they acted as intermediaries, channeling complaints to the relevant authorities.

Public events, where leaders were invited and pressured to respond to demands, also served as key advocacy opportunities. However, while these actions helped draw attention to grievances, they often escalated tensions between citizens and authorities without leading to meaningful resolutions.

3.3.3. Grassroots and Informal Actions

In many municipalities, informal networks served as vital platforms for expressing dissatisfactions and mobilizing collective action. Community spaces, such as tea shops and neighborhood gatherings, function as forums where residents discuss issues, strategize, and organize responses. At the *tole* (neighborhood) level, group discussions were common, with participants setting agendas and appointing coordinators to formally present grievances to authorities. Grassroots actions often included awareness campaigns, banner-making, and rallies designed to amplify concerns. Public demonstrations remained a powerful means for communities to express dissatisfactions, ranging from peaceful rallies and marches to more aggressive actions like padlocking government offices. For example, farmers and other organized groups frequently demanded solutions through vocal advocacy, particularly when their concerns remain unaddressed. While these informal mechanisms are highly accessible and effective in fostering solidarity, they typically lack the formal authority needed to drive substantive policy changes. Additionally, political affiliations can undermine these efforts, as those who criticize ruling parties may face accusations of partisan bias, deepening divisions within communities.

Public demonstrations were more prevalent in urban centers of terai and hilly parts of Gandaki Province, such as Pokhara, Kawasoti, and Beni, than in mountainous areas like Mustang. Respondents from Mustang preferred to directly engage with authorities to express their concerns. This may be due to the diverse and more population in urban areas of terai and hill, while mountainous regions have less number but close-nit and communal populations.

Despite these challenges, grassroots mobilization remained a powerful tool for local advocacy. Communities sometimes form alliances across political lines to address shared concerns. Businesses, too, have organized small groups to safeguard their interests, using these networks to collectively voice the challenges faced by local entrepreneurs.

3.4. Consequences to Expression of Dissatisfaction

Citizens who voiced their concerns, particularly on social media, sometime faced harassment, threats, or bullying, discouraging open discourse. While social media provided a powerful platform for expression, it also exposed users to political backlash, making many

hesitant to speak out. Critics of political leaders were frequently targeted with online abuse, hate speech, and direct threats, making it difficult to engage in meaningful discussions. A young student from Pokhara shared:

> *"After I shared a critic of a prominent political figure's actions on social media, I was inundated with harassment, including vulgar comments and personal attacks. Some accused me of being anti-nationalist, while others went so far as to question my character. I also received anonymous threats warning me to stay silent, alongside intimidation from individuals with known political affiliations. The hostility became so overwhelming that I was forced to temporarily deactivate my account."*

According to respondents, another major consequence is exclusion from resources and opportunities. A CSO representative from Kaski district shared:

> *"I was excluded from several programs and events after speaking out against the municipal chair during a public hearing. I was constantly under surveillance by political party cadres and also accused of being affiliated with an opposition party."*

There is also a real risk of job loss and even threats via phone calls. A ward member from Myagdi district explained:

> *"Political cadres refrain from criticizing party decisions because they risk losing their hard-earned positions or standing within the party. They also fear losing support from senior or higher-ranking members, which ultimately affects their political future."*

These repercussions create a climate of fear, deterring individuals from freely expressing their views. The cumulative effect of these consequences led to widespread self-censorship. Many individuals choose to remain silent rather than risk losing their jobs, reputations, or safety.

3.5. Dissatisfaction Handling Mechanisms

Several formal mechanisms exist for addressing public dissatisfaction, primarily at the local government level. These include public hearings, complaint mechanisms such as complaint boxes and help desks, and grievance systems within government institutions. The most used channel is the ward office, where concerns are often raised through personal connections with ward members or chairs. Additionally, Tole-level meetings serve as platforms for setting community agendas and consolidating voices before presenting them to local government authorities.

A municipal administrative officer explained the process:

> *"Individuals or groups, often through Tole committees, can submit complaints or demands at the ward level using demand or complaint*

letters. The ward committee reviews these submissions to determine whether they can be addressed locally. If not, the ward chair escalates the issue to municipal executive committee meetings. For larger concerns beyond the municipality's capacity, the matter is forwarded to the relevant ministries. The time required to address grievances depends on available resources, but the issue will eventually be addressed."

However, despite the presence of these mechanisms, their effectiveness remained limited due to systemic challenges and inefficiencies.

Public hearings, designed to provide citizens with a platform to voice concerns, often fail to serve their intended purpose. According to the respondents, these meetings were frequently dominated by individuals closely tied to political power, limiting genuine public participation. Elected representatives were often disengaged, reducing the impact of these forums. Many respondents expressed skepticism about their effectiveness, viewing them as symbolic gestures rather than substantive platforms for change. As a result, public interest in such hearings remained low, with widespread perceptions that authorities routinely disregard the concerns raised.

Moreover, respondents shared that political party affiliates and cadres often dominated these discussions, sidelining independent civic engagement. This further diminishes the inclusivity and credibility of public hearings as a grievance redressal mechanism.

Similarly, complaint mechanisms such as complaint boxes and help desks faced significant shortcomings. Respondents perceived that complaint boxes frequently go unmonitored, and even when they are checked, responses were often slow or non-existent. Help desks, while functional in less populated areas, struggled to manage the high volume of complaints in urban centers. In many local governments, the process of expressing dissatisfaction through these channels failed to yield timely or effective responses, eroding public trust in formal communication systems.

The absence of a strong, well-functioning formal grievance system at the local level exacerbates these challenges, leaving many communities without effective means of redress. While local leaders and government officials serve as intermediaries, they often fail to represent broader public concerns. Their role is typically limited to facilitating complaints rather than addressing their root causes. Farmers, for instance, experience fragmented relief efforts that lack systemic planning.

Many individuals and businesses turn to advocacy groups and cooperatives to voice their concerns. For example, the Amaltari Consumer's Group in Nawalpur district works on human-wildlife conflicts and buffer zone issues. Similarly, private businesses raise their concerns through non-governmental bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce & Industry, or local chambers. They play a vital role in promoting trade, commerce and industry by advocating for business-friendly policies, fostering networking opportunities and supporting economic growth. They also mediate business disputes, represent business interests, and provide policy recommendations

to the government on business-related challenges. However, they often have limited influence due to bureaucratic barriers and a lack of policy-level support.

Addressing major grievances often requires interventions at the Provincial and Federal policy level, a process that remains largely inaccessible to ordinary citizens and small-scale businesses. While some administrative improvements, such as streamlined birth, marriage, and death registration processes, and tax collection processes have been implemented, these reforms address routine services rather than tackling deeper systemic dissatisfaction. Systemic dissatisfaction is discontent among individuals or groups due to persistent structural issues within a system whether in governance, institutions, or society. Unlike isolated grievances, which arose from temporary problems, systemic dissatisfaction stemmed from deep-rooted inefficiencies, inequalities, and lack of accountability within the system.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Contributing factors	Description
Areas of Citizen Satisfaction	
• Proximity and accessibility of local governments • Efficiency in administrative service delivery • Visible and tangible development and expansion of local infrastructure • Responsiveness of local representatives towards public complaints • Proximity and accessibility of judicial committees • Reliable Crisis management	Citizens appreciated the increased accessibility of local governments, streamlined administrative processes, and visible improvements in infrastructure such as roads, electricity, drinking water, and healthcare services. The ability to access services locally, rather than traveling long distances, was frequently highlighted as a major improvement. Ward Chairs were consistently viewed as approachable and responsive, often engaging directly with communities to address concerns and resolving disputes. Access to justice through the establishment of Judicial Committees was positively recognized by bringing justice mechanisms closer to the people. Local governments were commended for their effective leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in mobilizing resources and managing relief efforts.
Areas of Citizen Dissatisfaction	
• Disconnection between government tiers and citizens • Governance inefficiencies (Excessive Federal Government Control) • Delays in drafting laws Exclusion and inequitable budget allocation • Favoritism (Trust Deficit) • Poor service delivery (absence of government officials, overcrowding, lack of staffs) • Lack of employment opportunities (Bleak job prospects) • Urban-rural development disparity • Poor project execution • Overemphasis on physical infrastructure over crucial areas like health and education • Heavy tax burden on local businesses • Inadequate civic engagement • Creation of a new elite • Lack of emphasis on production for revenue generation	Citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived disconnection between provincial and federal governments and their lack of relevance to local needs. Dissatisfaction stemmed from governance inefficiencies, unequal resource allocation that favored certain groups, slow public service delivery and bureaucratic hurdles in administrative processes. Overemphasis on infrastructure development at the expense of crucial areas like education and employment. Criticism towards education system for failing to meet job market demands, itself mired in politicization; taxation system felt burdensome due to multiple taxes at various levels and limited involvement of citizens in policy discussions and decision-making processes.

Contributing factors	Description
Expression of Dissatisfaction	
• Traditional grievance channels (formal complaints, demand letters, neighborhood meetings, suggestion boxes, and ward office submissions) • Use of traditional and social media; Direct engagement with authorities (public hearings, meetings, lobbying) as well as with journalists • Participation in public hearings, lobbying, delegation visits to offices • Grassroots mobilization (informal networks, protests, rallies, civil disobedience)	Citizens used various means to express dissatisfaction through a variety of formal and informal channels, including filing formal complaints, participating in public hearings, using social media, and engaging in grassroots mobilization. Public protests and media engagement were also common. Direct engagement with authorities, including public hearings, was prevalent but often perceived as ineffective, with authorities failing to act on the issues raised. In rural areas, political affiliations sometimes undermined the effectiveness of grassroots efforts, leading citizens to prefer direct dialogue with authorities. Despite these challenges, grassroots efforts were key to amplifying local grievances and fostering solidarity.
Consequences of Expressing Dissatisfaction	
• Harassment, threats, and online abuse particularly through social media platforms • Accusation, Defamation • Exclusion from resources and opportunities especially for critics of political leaders • Political backlash, Self-censorship • Persistent fear of job loss • Unsolicited monitoring, surveillance	Citizens who voiced their dissatisfaction, especially on social media, often faced significant repercussions such as harassment, threats, and bullying which discouraged open discourse. Critics of political figures were targeted with online abuse and intimidation, leading some to self-censor or deactivate their accounts. Others faced exclusion from resources, opportunities, and even jobs due to political backlash. These consequences created a climate of fear, further stifling free expression.
Dissatisfaction Handling Mechanisms	
• Formal grievance mechanisms (public hearings, complaint boxes, help desks) • Structured complaint review at different tiers of local government • Involvement of political party in public hearings • Dialogues between local leaders and government officials • Advocacy groups • Systemic inefficiencies and bureaucratic barriers • Lack of efforts from central government in addressing systemic dissatisfaction	Existing mechanisms like public hearings and help desks were criticized for being slow, ineffective, and politically influenced. Complaints were often addressed only when amplified by media or political entities. Public hearings were dominated by political affiliates, and complaint systems failed to provide timely responses. While ward offices and Tole-level meetings allowed citizens to voice concerns, many issues remained unresolved due to inadequate follow-up. Systemic dissatisfaction, stemming from deep-rooted inefficiencies and inequalities, requires interventions at the Provincial and Federal policy levels, which remain largely inaccessible to ordinary citizens. They remain unaddressed resulting in accountability gaps, inequalities, and structural inefficiencies.

4. Key Observations

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the key observations from the field study at Gandaki Province. It includes sources of dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction cycle, primary targets of the discontent, relationship of dissatisfaction with civic engagement/participation, governance mechanisms and social cohesion. Additionally, the study considers youth migration as a significant response to dissatisfaction, examining how the movement of young people- whether due to economic, social, or political reasons- serves as an ultimate expression of their discontent.

By addressing these interconnected factors, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of dissatisfaction within the studied context.

4.1. Sources of Dissatisfaction

Dissatisfaction is a complex phenomenon that arises from the interplay between lived experiences, observations, and preexisting attitudes and opinions. People form perceptions about governance, public services, and social systems based on their daily interactions and encounters, observations and preexisting attitudes. When citizens experience inefficiencies, delays, corruption, or poor service delivery, these encounters contribute to growing frustration.

In Nepal, after the transition to federal system in 2015, people had anticipated a significant improvement in their socioeconomic conditions. However, many found their status unchanged or, in some cases, even worsened. Citizens felt let down when governments failed to deliver the rapid reforms or tangible benefits as they had hoped. Citizens now feel disappointed due to persistent governance failures, lack of accountability, and slow progress in addressing critical socio-economic challenges. A journalist from Pokhara described the current public discontent in a sentence, "व्यवस्था परिवर्तन भयो तर स्थिति परिवर्तन भएन" *("The system changed but the situation did not")*. Also, as local governments failed to adequately support local businesses or regulate markets, it intensified economic hardships for the business community. These unmet expectations create a strong foundation for dissatisfaction.

Beyond personal experiences, personal observations of how government institutions function further reinforce negative perceptions. Citizens notice the unequal distribution of resources, favoritism in public offices, and the growing economic divide between urban and rural areas. Corruption, mismanagement of funds, and the luxurious lifestyles of elected officials further deepen public resentment. Additionally, Nepal's high youth migration rate serves as a visible indicator of dissatisfaction, as many young people see no future within the country and choose to seek opportunities abroad. These observations, even if not directly affecting an individual, contribute to a broader societal belief that the existing governance system is failing.

The study also suggests that preexisting attitudes and opinions often play a significant role in shaping how dissatisfaction manifests. Many citizens enter the political process with

high expectations from their leaders, believing that elections will bring rapid improvements. However, bureaucratic hurdles and financial constraints often slow progress, leading to frustration. It is further described in detail in the following sub-heading.

Promises vs Reality of elected officials

Public dissatisfaction with the government is closely tied to the lofty election promises made by political leaders. During campaigns, leaders presented grand agendas that raised public expectations. However, once elected, they encounter numerous obstacles, including, lack of relevant policies, limited authority and insufficient budgets. This is particularly evident at the local level, where inadequate funding severely restricted the implementation of planned development activities. As a result, elected officials often find themselves unable to meet the public's expectations, leading to frustration and reluctance in their roles.

> *"I was very eager to address the needs of the public when I first got elected, but over time, I've realized that not every demand can be fulfilled immediately. There are significant limitations we must work within. Our country faces economic challenges, and there are numerous obstacles to overcome. Elected officials don't have magic wands, and this reality needs to be effectively communicated to the public. If not, people will undoubtedly become angry with us."*
>
> *– An elected official from Beni Municipality, Myagdi District.*

Another recurring issue is the tension between the urgency of public demands and the time required for bureaucratic processes.

> *"The public often expects their issues to be resolved instantly, but it doesn't work that way. There are requirements to fulfill, policies to follow and documents to process, which naturally takes time. People need to be patient and considerate about these realities. Often, disputes arise between elected officials and administrative staff because elected representatives demand swift resolutions without fully considering the constraints of existing policies."*
>
> *– An administrative officer from Machhapuchchhre Municipality, Kaski District.*

The gap between election promises and post-election realities highlights the need for better communication between officials and the public, as well as a more transparent understanding of the systemic challenges faced by local governments.

4.2. Dissatisfaction Cycle

The study highlights that citizen dissatisfaction is not a static condition but a recurring cycle that progresses through distinct stages: isolated grievances, systemic grievances and persistent dissatisfaction. This cycle emerges when individual frustrations evolve into broader systemic issues due to inadequate grievance-handling mechanisms.

Stages of the dissatisfaction cycle

The dissatisfaction cycle typically begins with isolated grievances, where individuals or specific groups experience dissatisfaction due to unmet needs, service failures, or perceived injustices. These grievances may initially be personal or localized, but if they remain unresolved, they accumulate and expand into systemic grievances. At this stage, frustration deepens as individuals seek redress but encounter barriers such as unclear complaint procedures, bureaucratic inefficiency, or lack of accountability. These systemic barriers prevent the effective resolution of concerns, making citizens feel increasingly alienated from governance. When grievances remain unaddressed over time, they evolve into persistent dissatisfaction. This stage is marked by widespread frustration, where individuals feel powerless or believe that raising their concerns is futile. At this point, many disengage from political and civic participation, while others may resort to more radical measures such as protests or unrest to make their voices heard.

The transition between these stages is fueled by the repeated failure of grievance-handling systems and the perception that authorities are either unwilling or incapable of addressing concerns.

The failure of grievance-handling mechanisms

At the core of the dissatisfaction cycle is the failure of grievance-handling mechanisms, which were reported to be inefficient, slow, and subject to political interference. Public hearings and forums, intended to serve as citizen engagement platforms, were often regarded as performative rather than action oriented. Respondents in Gandaki Province reported that while concerns were frequently raised in these forums, follow-up actions were rare. Similarly, mechanisms such as suggestion boxes and help desks remain ineffective, as complaints often go unchecked or take an unreasonably long time to be resolved. Furthermore, grievance redressal often relies on intermediaries such as political parties, media, and civil society organizations. In many cases, grievances only gain attention when these intermediaries amplify them, rather than being acknowledged through institutionalized mechanisms. This means that many concerns remain unheard unless they align with the interests of influential actors.

Evidence from Gandaki Province illustrates these shortcomings. Respondents reported that complaints submitted through official channels frequently go unacknowledged or take months to resolve. In many cases, grievances are only addressed when protests, political parties, and media pressure force authorities to act. This reactive approach to governance discourages citizens from engaging with formal institutions, as they see little hope for redress. When government mechanisms fail to address issues proactively, dissatisfaction festers and escalates.

Role of social media

The rise of social media has transformed the way grievances are expressed, offering an alternative platform for citizens to voice their concerns. In Gandaki province, digital platforms have become powerful tools for mobilizing public sentiment and pressuring authorities to

act. However, social media also presents significant challenges that can further entrench the dissatisfaction cycle. On one hand, social media allows grievances to gain rapid visibility, compelling governments to respond more quickly. On the other hand, the unregulated nature of online discourse facilitates the spread of misinformation, which can amplify negative sentiments and deepen distrust in governance. Many issues are misrepresented or exaggerated, leading to heightened polarization and reactive governance, where authorities respond only when social media outcry reaches a critical level rather than addressing concerns through systematic and institutionalized mechanisms.

While social media enhances visibility, it does not replace formal grievance-handling mechanisms. Without structural improvements to these systems, online expressions of dissatisfaction may serve only to reinforce public frustration rather than lead to meaningful policy changes. Governments that fail to engage proactively with digital platforms risk further alienating their citizens, exacerbating public discontent.

Consequences of persistent dissatisfaction

The long-term effects of an unresolved grievances are profound and far-reaching. One of the most significant consequences is the erosion of trust in governance. When grievances are continuously ignored, citizens become increasingly cynical about the effectiveness of government institutions, leading to widespread disengagement. Over time, this results in declining political participation, as people lose faith in elections and other democratic processes, believing that change is unattainable.

In extreme cases, persistent dissatisfaction can escalate into social unrest and polarization. When nonviolent attempts to express concerns are met with resistance or indifference, some individuals may resort to protests, strikes, or even violent demonstrations. A respondent from the study noted:

> *"The growing public sentiment towards the possibility of return of Monarchy in Nepal is an example of chronic civilian dissatisfaction."*

This statement highlights how unresolved grievances can fuel political shifts and weaken democratic institutions. When dissatisfaction becomes widespread, it not only threatens governance stability but also deepens societal divisions, making reconciliation and reform more challenging.

4.3. People in Power and Authority

As observed in the study areas of Gandaki Province, a significant portion of grievances were directed towards authorities at government offices. Citizens' dissatisfactions towards powerholders in government was mainly rooted in the perception that they failed to meet public expectations and perform their roles effectively. Elected representatives and government officials were often seen as lacking in transparency, often prioritizing personal or political interests over the needs of the people. This dissatisfaction was particularly pronounced at the local government level, where unequal and non-transparent distribution

of resources has become a major concern. Many citizens felt excluded from opportunities such as development services, grants, and training programs due to favoritism and unfair practices. In addition, those without access to or good relationships with powerholders often expressed their frustration through social media or other limited channels, leading to diminished face-to-face interactions. The notion that individual capacity and behavior of powerholders significantly impact governance further intensifies such public dissatisfactions, as many perceive the ones in leadership positions as unwilling or incapable of addressing their grievances effectively.

A CSO leader from Pokhara shared sharp criticisms of Nepal's political landscape, stating:

> *"I believe the leaders deliberately encourage youth migration so they can maintain control over an aging population." The leader further remarked on the growing public disillusionment with traditional political parties and their leadership: "People are deeply frustrated with the existing political parties, which has fueled the rise of alternative politics in Nepal. In recent local elections, many independent candidates contested, with some even competing in provincial and federal assemblies. We have also seen the emergence of new political parties driven by public demand for fresh, young leadership. A prime example is Balen Shah, the current Mayor of Kathmandu, who ran as an independent candidate and garnered immense support from the youth. He has become a symbol of the dissatisfaction felt by Nepalese youth, both at home and abroad." The leader didn't hold back in criticizing the state of governance: "The country is effectively being ruled by 'gundas,' and the prevailing condition is one of 'dadagiri.'"*

Also, dissatisfaction towards powerholders manifested in various forms- oppositional, group-based, and individual perceptions and experiences.

Oppositional dissatisfaction arose from political or ideological differences and was expressed through resistance or discontent. This included opposition political parties challenging the ruling government, criticizing policies, and proposing alternative governance approaches. Additionally, election candidates who have lost or contested results questioned the fairness of the process or continued to advocate for their political agendas. Direct resistance also emerged from individuals or groups opposing specific laws, policies, or governance decisions due to ideological disagreements.

Group-based dissatisfaction was experienced collectively within social, political, or economic groups that share common grievances. Members of marginalized communities, economic groups or activist groups experienced dissatisfaction through systemic inequalities, economic disparities, or political exclusion. For example,

> *"We supported and voted for the current municipal chairman, but after being elected, he has ignored our demands and needs. This has left us frustrated and disappointed. As a result, we now feel more connected to*

the opposition party leader, who listens to us and actively addresses our concerns."

<div align="right">- A youth leader from Mustang District.</div>

Additionally, identity-based group dissatisfaction stemmed from caste-based and gender-based discrimination, particularly in relation to political participation and economic inequality. For instance, a member of the Dalit community expressed frustration over resistance to affirmative action in local governance:

"It is disheartening to hear that many people oppose the quota system in local governments, which provides reserved seats for Dalits, women, and Dalit women. They argue that candidates elected through these provisions are neither qualified nor competent. As a member of the Dalit community, I find such discussions deeply disappointing."

<div align="right">- A resident of Myagdi district.</div>

Individual dissatisfaction, based on personal perceptions and experiences, stemmed from encounters with injustice, inequality, poor governance, or poor public services. Unlike group-based dissatisfaction, this form may not always lead to collective action, but can influence personal attitudes, decision-making, and contribute to broader societal discontent over time.

4.4. Inadequate Civic Engagement and Participation

It was observed in the study areas of Gandaki Province, citizen dissatisfaction significantly contributes to a lack of civic engagement, creating a cycle where citizens become increasingly disengaged from political and social processes. A significant gap in civic engagement exists where dissatisfaction breeds slowly, especially when governments fail to meaningfully involve citizens in decision-making processes. This minimal interaction between powerholders and the public creates a disconnect, leaving citizens feeling excluded from governance and democratic processes. Incidences of people losing interest in local elections, town hall meetings, and community decisions is particularly noticeable among the youth, who feel that their voices are unheard, and concerns are overlooked by local leaders. People often feel that local leaders are out of touch with their needs, and the lack of accountability in governance has led to an increased perception of corruption or negligence among officials. This also leads to non-compliance with government notices and initiatives. Moreover, prolonged dissatisfaction undermines governance both in the short and long term by eroding public trust, diminishing cooperation, and weakening institutional effectiveness.

This phenomenon is compounded by the tendency of some local governments to become politicized where proposals and feedback from opposition groups and CSOs are frequently ignored, reinforcing perceptions that the government is unresponsive and elitist. While this may benefit those in power in the short term, it shrinks the civic space in the long run. Furthermore, local contributions from NGOs and CSOs are frequently overlooked unless they are tied to influential connections, which discourages community-driven initiatives. This lack of inclusivity and responsiveness undermines trust in governance, weakens social

cohesion, perpetuating a cycle of disengagement, creating a less vibrant and robust civic life. CSOs are important actors in society that advocate for human rights, provide services, and hold governments accountable, yet they are facing increasing restrictions that hinder their ability to operate freely, ultimately shrinking civic space. Over time, such lack of engagement, along with broken promises, fuels a deeper sense of alienation from the government, which further discourages civic participation.

4.5. Social Cohesion and Dissatisfaction

Social harmony in the context of Gandaki Province presents a complex picture. While on the surface, a sense of peaceful coexistence prevails, deeper internal divisions persist, often rooted in political, social, and economic factors. Despite some socio-cultural and religious tensions, social harmony is largely maintained within communities. However, while interpersonal relationships remain generally amicable, growing political and economic pressures are increasingly straining social cohesion.

Political intolerance, compounded by a lack of understanding of party behavior, significantly hinders unity. It is crucial to acknowledge that political factors disrupt harmony more significantly than cultural or communal differences, highlighting the profound influence of politics on social unity. Discrimination against women, Dalits, and marginalized communities continues to be prevalent, undermining true social cohesion. Social polarization is on the rise, driven by dissatisfaction and unequal access to opportunities, exacerbating divisions within society.

A focus group discussion (FGD) participant from Kaski district shared:

"In Kathmandu, political leaders frequently criticize one another, engage in political battles, and unite whenever it serves their interests. However, local politics is different. At the community level, once political rivals stand against each other, they remain so for a long time, constantly undermining each other's ideology and work. Unity is rare. Sometimes, even family members and neighbors with differing political beliefs stop speaking to one another. We are used to seeing top leaders clash and then reconcile, when necessary, often to form a government. But at the local level, such deep divisions are disheartening."

The eroding social cohesion and harmony is often manifested through incidences of vandalism and mass public demonstrations, growing social divisions and polarization in the study areas. The recent incident in Kawasoti of Nawalpur district where the property of a local representative was vandalized following the tragic death of laborers is indictive of the intensity of social unrest in the area. This act of vandalism, while targeting an elected official, reflects broader frustrations with the local governance and systemic issues affecting the community. These voices of discontent are symptomatic of deeper dissatisfactions particularly of marginal groups and, if left unrecognized, could seriously undermine social cohesion and harmony within municipalities. Localized frustrations may evolve into widespread anger, potentially culminating in nationwide demonstrations or revolutions.

Moreover, the lack of job opportunities, economic stagnation, and political disengagement also have far-reaching effects on social cohesion as it creates social divisions. As frustration mounts, various community groups, notably young people, may feel that they are being treated unfairly or equitably, which could lead to social divisions. This can bring about alienation or isolation, further deepening the divide between the public and local authorities.

When citizens feel that their leaders and the system of governance have failed them, the social cohesion within the community weakens. Growing resentment leads to divides in society, straining relationships and disrupting unity. People are less likely to work together on local issues or engage in any collective efforts. This dissatisfaction erodes social cohesion and trust in governance, contributing to deeper fragmentation. It is such division that undermines the social fabric, making it more difficult for government, particularly local government to address vital concerns such as poverty, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development.

4.6. Inefficient Governance Mechanisms

The dissatisfaction with structural governance mechanisms initiated from inefficiencies in how roles and responsibilities were defined and executed across the three tiers of government, i.e. local, provincial, and federal. Overlapping responsibilities and unclear jurisdiction often lead to delays in decision-making and implementation. This confusion undermines the ability of these structures to respond effectively to citizens' needs. Furthermore, the politicization of public institutions erodes impartiality, as development projects and resource allocations are frequently influenced by political bias rather than objective criteria. Corruption, weak leadership, and the absence of accountability mechanisms further exacerbate public distrust in governance structures, making them appear ineffective and self-serving.

The persistent failure to address public dissatisfactions stems from a combination of ineffective citizen engagement, powerholders' reluctance, structural weaknesses and resource constraints. One key issue is the lack of meaningful dialogue between citizens and authorities. Citizens often fail to engage sincerely, as political biases and personal interests dilute their ability to hold powerholders accountable. As a college lecturer from Kawasoti Municipality from Nawalpur district observed, societal leaders' personal agendas and political agendas of political affiliation often undermine their moral authority to demand accountability. This lack of unified advocacy is particularly evident among farmers and marginalized groups, who struggle to organize and present their grievances effectively.

Structural inefficiencies further intensify these challenges. Political instability and frequent leadership changes at Provincial and Federal governments disrupt long-term planning and delay grievance resolution. Overlapping but unclear responsibilities among different government tiers and gaps in policy frameworks hinder coordinated responses. Even where laws and policies exist, weak implementation leaves citizens frustrated and distrustful of the system.

Resource and capacity constraints also play a critical role. Local governments often lack adequately trained staff, and the financial resources needed to manage grievances effectively. This shortage leaves many complaints unresolved or poorly addressed. Additionally, the

politicization of grievance agendas and grievance mechanisms erodes accountability, as representatives prioritize personal or partisan gains over public welfare. This, combined with widespread distrust towards the system, discourages citizens from engaging, perpetuating a cycle of unmet expectations and growing dissatisfaction.

Resource allocation practices contribute significantly to dissatisfaction, as citizens perceive widespread inequities in how resources are distributed. Proximity to decision-makers often determines resource allocation, creating disparities between regions and leaving marginalized communities underserved. Revenues generated from natural resources, such as national parks and conservation areas, rarely benefit the local communities that bear the environmental and social costs of these areas. This inequity is compounded by reduced budgets for local governments, which limit their ability to invest in public services. Taxation systems also fuel frustration, as taxes collected locally are often funneled to higher levels of government with minimal reinvestment at the grassroots level. This lack of financial federalism hampers the ability of local authorities to deliver meaningful development outcomes.

Case Example:

The conflict between the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and local governments within its jurisdiction has emerged as a significant source of dissatisfaction. ACAP, which encompasses 15 municipalities, aims to ensure environmental preservation, while local governments seek to promote development and economic growth. The dissatisfaction primarily stems from competing interests over revenue generation, natural resource extraction and governance authority. Local governments argue that ACAP's restrictions on resource extraction hinder their ability to collect revenue and meet community needs. The constitution grants them the right to tax and collect revenue from riverbed materials, an essential resource for local economies. However, the current conservation regulations enforced by ACAP prevent these municipalities from exercising this constitutional right, leading to frustration among local officials.

Municipalities such as Gharpajhong, Varagung Muktichhetra and Macchapuchhre have reported significant dissatisfaction due to ACAP's policies. These areas particularly feel the impact of restrictions on development, as they accuse ACAP of hindering essential projects and depriving them of rightful opportunities for growth. In Gharpajhong, for example, farmers are concerned about the rising riverbed levels, which increase the risk of flooding and damage to their farmland. Despite this pressing concern, local governments are restricted from extracting riverbed materials, exacerbating dissatisfaction among residents and local leaders. The tension is further amplified by the perception that ACAP's stringent environmental regulations add bureaucratic hurdles to developmental projects. Local governments believe these requirements disproportionately affect their ability to implement necessary initiatives, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and accusations that ACAP is infringing on their rights and obstructing development.

This case illustrates the complex dynamics between environmental preservation goals and developmental needs, resulting in a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction among local governments and communities within the Annapurna Conservation Area.

4.7. Youth Migration – The Ultimate Expression of Dissatisfaction

The study found that dissatisfaction among individuals manifests in three interconnected states- hopelessness, rebellion, and escape from the context. These states are not mutually exclusive; rather, individuals or groups may experience them at different times or even simultaneously, with escape often emerging as the final state.

A growing sense of hopelessness has taken root among many, fostering the belief that meaningful change is unattainable. This sentiment is frequently expressed through the phrase *"Bhanera ke garne?"* which translates to *"What's the point?"* - reflecting deep frustration and the perception that efforts for change are futile due to systemic challenges.

Others, however, channel their dissatisfaction into rebellion, actively resisting existing issues through advocacy, lobbying, community mobilization, awareness campaigns, social work, civil disobedience, or public demonstrations. Meanwhile, some choose to escape altogether, opting for out-migration as a means of removing themselves from the context.

In Nepal, youth are increasingly turning to migration as a way to escape their circumstances. Their decision to leave is shaped by various experiences of dissatisfaction-personal struggles, observed realities, and preexisting attitudes, which are described in detail below. The outflow of young people seeking employment and higher education abroad has become one of Nepal's most pressing socio-economic challenges.

Youth leaving Nepal symbolizes that there is not much that they can do here in Nepal creating a public dissatisfaction. Respondents shared that many young Nepalese migrate due to high unemployment, low wages and limited career prospects, reflecting dissatisfaction with the economy. Additionally, their departure underscores dissatisfaction with inadequate public services, including poor-quality education, limited healthcare access and insufficient government support for entrepreneurship.

> *"There are no promising job opportunities in Nepal. We cannot earn enough to maintain a decent standard of living. While we lacked access to quality education, we don't want the same for our children. I want to secure my family's health and education, but that is impossible if I stay in Nepal. Migration is not a choice- it is a necessity for us."*
>
> - A resident of Gorkha district.

This trend is rooted in the country's lack of both small- and large-scale industries capable of generating suitable and sustainable employment. As a result, working abroad is widely perceived as essential for achieving financial stability. This sentiment is not only confined to young people, but many communities now view migration as a necessity for economic security and ensuring livelihood. The mass exodus of the youth has left villages and towns largely depopulated, fueling dissatisfactions over the nation's inability to retain its economically productive population. It has deprived Nepal of its skilled workforce ad professionals, contributing to human capital flight.

Out-migration of youth has also become a source of dissatisfaction. The absence of youth in communities has significant repercussions on development initiatives. The reduced youth presence weakens community engagement in development and governance, making it harder to execute local projects effectively. An administrative officer from Kaski District highlighted the challenges:

> *"Our communities lack enough people to participate in user groups for local development projects. A single person can't be in multiple groups, but with so few people left, we have no choice but to overlook this issue. As a result, user groups handover projects to contractors, who often rely on foreign labor, especially from India. This practice inflates project costs or compromises their quality."*

Youth migration has profound social consequences, leaving behind children, women, and the elderly in villages. This imbalance disrupts family dynamics, often leading to conflicts. One respondent expressed the gravity of this issue with a stark observation:

> *"In our village, there aren't enough people to take the sick people to the hospital or even to perform cremation rites for the deceased. Family members living abroad often cannot return in time to see their loved ones during illness or even attend their funerals. This is becoming a serious concern for our community and reflects the broader societal impact of migration."*

Additionally, the absence of young and educated individuals has eroded accountability in local governance. As one respondent noted:

> *"With fewer educated people remaining in communities, there's no one to hold local leaders accountable. This creates space for leaders to act as they please. Meanwhile, the pressure to migrate abroad influences young people, even if they wish to stay, making them question their decision to remain."*

The pressure to migrate often comes from families and peers, creating a social expectation that staying behind is not a viable option.

While many young people return from abroad with valuable skills and knowledge, they often feel neglected by all three tiers of governments. The lack of programs or platforms for entrepreneurship, innovation, or employment leaves them disillusioned. The inability to integrate these returnees into local economies exacerbates the cycle of dissatisfaction and migration.

A student from Machhapuchchhre Municipality in Kaski described the personal impact of this trend:

> *"I don't believe there are many good job opportunities here in Nepal. Even if we manage to find one, the income is barely enough to sustain a family with the rising cost of living. My elder brother worked in Pokhara and Kathmandu before eventually going abroad. Now, my family, including my brother, encourages me to do the same."*

Addressing these challenges require urgent action to create sustainable employment opportunities, foster local economic growth, and build a future where young people see staying in Nepal as a viable and rewarding choice.

Table 2. Summary of Key Observations

Sources of dissatisfaction

Dissatisfaction stems from unmet expectations after the 2015 federal transition, as citizens anticipated socioeconomic improvements but faced persistent governance failures and issues like corruption, inefficiencies, delays, and lack of accountability. Observations of unequal resource distribution and unequal access to development programs, bureaucratic inefficiencies that dissuades entrepreneurs, and high youth migration deepen public frustration. Political leaders' unfulfilled election promises, coupled with local governments' financial and administrative constraints, widen the gap between public expectations and reality. Poor communication and slow bureaucratic processes exacerbate the disconnect, leaving citizens disillusioned with the lack of meaningful change.

Dissatisfaction cycle

The dissatisfaction cycle begins with isolated grievances. If unaddressed, they escalate into systemic grievances fueled by the frustration over ineffective complaint mechanisms, bureaucratic delays, and political interference. Over time, this leads to persistent dissatisfaction, where citizens disengage from civic participation and resort to protests bearing radical demands. Social media amplifies grievances but also spreads misinformation, which coupled with the lack of institutional and proactive responsiveness worsens public frustration. Ultimately, prolonged dissatisfaction erodes trust in democracy, risks social unrest, and can even trigger radical political shifts, as seen in some calls for a return to monarchy.

People in power and authority

Grievances were directed towards authorities at government offices, who are perceived as self-serving, nontransparent, and ineffective in addressing citizens' needs. Frustration towards powerholders and authorities stems from unequal resource distribution, favoritism in services, and systemic exclusion, particularly at local levels, driving many to express grievances through social media rather than formal channels. This discontent manifests in various forms - political opposition challenging governance thorough ideological resistance, marginalized groups protesting discrimination, and individuals reacting to poor services - fueling a broader demand for alternative leadership as seen in the rise of independent figures at like Kathmandu's Mayor Balen Shah. The erosion of trust in traditional power structures reflects growing public discontent with the existing governance system.

Inadequate civic engagement and participation

Citizen dissatisfaction leads to an increase in civic disengagement, as people, especially youth, feel excluded from decision-making and distrustful of unresponsive, disconnected, and unaccountable local governments. When authorities ignore public input, dismiss opposition voices, and favor politically connected groups, it fuels perceptions of elitism and corruption. This shrinking civic space discourages community participation, weakens social cohesion, and perpetuates disengagement, ultimately undermining governance and democratic processes. Without meaningful inclusion, dissatisfaction deepens, creating long-term damage to Nepal's civic life.

Social cohesion and dissatisfaction

The study reveals that while Gandaki Province maintains surface-level social harmony, underlying political and economic tensions erode true cohesion and makes its frail. Political intolerance and discrimination against marginalized groups fuel alienation and polarization, with local rivalries creating deeper divisions than national-level conflicts. Governance failures and economic frustrations can escalate into social unrest, weakening community trust and collective action. Without addressing these systemic grievances, the erosion of social cohesion threatens to undermine development efforts and destabilize local governance.

Inefficient governance mechanisms

Structural inefficiencies in Nepal's three-tier governance system, marked by overlapping responsibilities, politicization of institutions, and weak accountability breed citizen dissatisfaction. Resource constraints, inequitable distribution (where proximity to power dictates allocations), and policy gaps erode trust, particularly when local governments lack funds despite generating revenue from natural resources. A stark example is the conflict between the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and local municipalities, where conservation rules block revenue-generating activities like riverbed extraction, fueling grievances that environmental priorities override community development needs. These systemic failures perpetuate a cycle of disengagement and distrust in governance.

Youth migration- the ultimate expression of dissatisfaction

Nepal's youth migration crisis reflects deep dissatisfaction with systemic failures, as young people face unemployment, poor wages, and lack of opportunities, viewing migration as their only viable option. This mass exodus drains communities of skilled workers, weakens local governance accountability, and disrupts social structures, leaving behind vulnerable groups struggling with healthcare, development projects, and even funeral rites. Despite returnees bringing skills, the absence of reintegration programs and economic incentives perpetuates the cycle, with families pressuring youth to leave rather than endure Nepal's stagnant prospects. Without urgent reforms to create jobs and improve living standards, this brain drain will continue eroding the country's social and economic fabric.

5. Recommendations

Following policy recommendations are made to address the core dissatisfactions within Nepal's federal structure.

1. **Strengthen intergovernmental cooperation:** Addressing citizens' chronic dissatisfactions in Nepal requires combined and sustained efforts from all three tiers of government within Nepal's federal structure. To achieve this, it is essential to clearly define the legal and operational roles of Local, Provincial, and Federal governments and effectively communicate these to the public, elected leaders, and government officials. Such action will assist to manage public expectations, enhance governance efficiency, and ensure fair allocation of power and resources based on defined roles.

2. **Improve public service delivery:** Poor public service delivery lies at the core of citizens dissatisfaction in Nepal. To address this, the government should establish comprehensive service quality standards with regular monitoring, implement performance metrics for all government offices with mandatory public reporting, and create systematic citizen feedback mechanisms across all public services delivered by all three tiers of governments. This is particularly pertinent in healthcare, education, and infrastructure development sector.

3. **Reform grievance handling mechanisms:** There is an urgent need for the comprehensive reform of the existing grievance handling mechanisms, focusing on establishing a standardized, digitally tracked complaint system across all government levels with dedicated local units and protected whistleblower policies. The system would feature mandatory response timelines, trained staff, and transparent processes to ensure effective resolution of citizen complaints. It is also needed to ensure the independence of grievance handling mechanisms by improving their efficiency and increasing public awareness about how to use them effectively. Transparent, accountable, and responsive systems are essential to restoring trust in governance and preventing dissatisfaction from escalating into broader social and political instability. Policy-level interventions must be designed to ensure that citizen concerns are not only heard but also addressed in a meaningful and timely manner.

4. **Strengthen local economic development:** A robust local economic development initiative is suggested, centered on comprehensive business support programs with streamlined registration and one-window service systems, alongside dedicated funding for entrepreneurs and market monitoring to protect local producers. The government should also ensure to reduce bureaucratic hurdles while providing financial and systemic support to foster local business growth.

5. **Reform taxation system:** It is also suggested to reform the current taxation system by streamlining tax collection to prevent duplication, ensuring transparency in tax revenue usage, implementing progressive tax structures to support small businesses, and establishing clear tax-sharing guidelines across different government levels.

6. **Enhance youth retention programs:** It is also suggested to promote youth retention by integrating education with job markets, fixing wages based on the changed context, establishing local startup incubation centers, developing market-driven skills training programs, and creating initiatives to leverage the expertise of returning migrants.

7. **Strengthen anti-favoritism measures:** Anti-favoritism measures should be directed towards building citizens' trust over government institutions as well as people in power. It is also highly recommended to strengthen anti-favoritism measures by ensuring transparency in resource allocation, implementing merit-based selection systems, establishing independent oversight, and mandating public disclosure of selection criteria and beneficiaries.

8. **Enhance civic engagement:** It is recommended to enhance civic engagement by establishing formal and informal citizen participation mechanisms, regular public consultations, participatory budgeting at local levels, and continuous dialogue platforms between citizens and the government. It needs to be further supported by establishing structured platforms for direct citizen engagement in governance processes, such as participatory budgeting and public consultations. Encourage regular community dialogues and feedback mechanisms to bridge the gap between citizens and authorities. Strengthen CSOs by ensuring their independence and protecting civic space from political interference.

Centre for Social Change
सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

Centre for Social Change (CSC) is a non-profit making social think-tank based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Since its establishment in 2015, CSC has been actively working to bring positive transformation in the socio-political dynamics of Nepali society through involvements in the fields of research, development practice, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. CSC's current works are focused on issues surround conflict transformation, peacebuilding, democracy and governance, migration, labor and employment, civic space, civil society development, public policy, climate change, and social development.

Contact Information:
Gahanapokhari Marg-5, Kathmandu
Tel: (977) 98 41370224
Email: contact@socialchange.org.np
Website: www.socialchange.org.np

Purak Asia is a societal catalyst that is building a vibrant ecosystem of citizens, their representatives and opinion leaders to drive transformative change through dialogue and action for impact. Purak distills its learnings and experiences of working extensively with a broad spectrum of civic organizations and actively participating in social movements to build a strong knowledge base, objectively analyze Nepal's socioeconomic and political realities, create enabling networks and partnerships, and establish convening spaces and platforms to empower citizens to become drivers of change in their own right. Purak's work spans political analysis, solution-led policy analysis, offering convening spaces, expanding knowledge frontiers and fostering civil society ecosystems.

Contact Information:
77 Kumwar Marg, Kathmandu-31, Nepal
Tel: (977) 1 4564599
Email: info@purakasia.org
Website: www.purakasia.org