

SNGP Bridging Phase

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

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

Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

The district and province dialogue forums (*Sambad Samuhas*) under the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue program addressed eight contested issues this quarter. The issues included the systematization of Covid-19, empowerment, access to services for marginalized communities, and up-gradation of hospitals, among others.

The program also organized two practice-sharing workshops in Dhulikhel, Kathmandu, attended by more than 40 dialogue interlocutors and program coordinators of four partner organizations under the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue. The event focused on sharing experiences around key achievements, intentional and unintentional biases in facilitators and their impact on inclusivity, and dialogue forums for conflict transformation and strategic peacebuilding.

This quarter, the program established a provincial dialogue forum (*Sambad Samuha*) in the Sudurpaschim province. The dialogue forum comprises 13 members, with eight men and five women; one of the members represents people with disabilities. The number of provincial dialogue forums under the multi-stakeholder dialogue has reached 21.



Subnational Government Learning Event Marks the Closing of SNGP Phase I

The Foundation hosted a 'Subnational Government Learning Event' on March 22 to commemorate the end of phase I of its flagship Subnational Governance Program (SNGP). The interactive sessions at the event focused on key reflections from representatives of seven SNGP partner municipalities marking the historic first tenure of subnational government after federalism in Nepal.

Speaking at the event, the Australian Ambassador to Nepal, Felicity Volk, highlighted the efforts of the subnational governments during the Covid-19 pandemic. The ambassador also acknowledged the support of partner municipalities to the program. "At the heart of subnational governance and the program we are celebrating today are trusted coalitions and strong partnerships with our very important stakeholders. Under your leadership and guidance, the program has provided demand-driven support to enhance local systems, policies, and processes. It has also provided lessons on what solutions work and what success looks like, and these lessons will be invaluable as we look ahead and refine the SNGP moving into phase two".

Along with sharing their key lessons and experiences of the first phase, representatives from the partner municipalities also discussed and shared suggestions for incoming local government representatives at the event.

STABILITY

Policy Dialogue on Strengthening Local Level PFM



To further the efforts toward clarifying functional and jurisdictional overlaps in implementing the new federal governance system, the program held a federal-level policy dialogue on local level public finance management (PFM). Earlier, the program partner National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) had conducted an assessment on the challenges and gaps/overlaps in the roles and responsibilities of the federal, provincial, and local governments in strengthening PFM at the local level.

Informed by the assessment report, the policy dialogue brought together stakeholders from the three tiers of the government to discuss the gaps within the existing provisions, including the Local Government Operations Act (LGoA), Intergovernmental Fiscal Arrangement Act, implementation-level hurdles, and the way forward for addressing the challenges to ensure effective PFM at the local level. Local government expert Mr. Krishna Prasad Sapkota facilitated the session, and the Under-secretary of Public Procurement Monitoring Office (PPMO) Subas Shivakoti presented the issue paper at the event. Representatives from the federal assembly, Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Office of Auditor General (OAG), National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission (NNRFC), provincial assemblies, local government, development partners (DPs), media houses, and civil society participated in the event.

The association will update the assessment report with recommendations from the policy dialogue and share it with the three tiers of government for further policy deliberations.

Similarly, NARMIN also finalized a study on municipal committees' functional status and capacity. It highlights the challenges for local-level government in operationalizing municipal committees and provides recommendations on strengthening the committees' functioning. NARMIN has published the findings in their quarterly bulletin for dissemination to local governments.

For Better Coordination in the Planning and Budgeting Process



With support from NARMIN, the program conducted an interactive session to facilitate better coordination between the National Planning Commission (NPC), Province Policy and Planning Commissions (PPC), and National Natural Resource and Fiscal Commission (NNRFC), and local governments for the upcoming planning and budgeting process. Chairperson of NNRFC, Balananda Paudel, facilitated the session where the representatives of local governments shared their experiences. The representatives of all participating institutions discussed

the possibilities of revisiting the existing legal provisions and mechanisms to make the upcoming budgeting process efficient and effective. They emphasized the need for integrated planning systems and project banks to strengthen coordination, collaboration, and cooperation among all three tiers of government. The event, held in collaboration with Bagmati province's PPC, ended with the participants jointly declaring a 13-point action point to smoothen the planning and budgeting process for the upcoming budget cycle and strengthen intergovernmental coordination in the budgeting process.

The Chief Minister of Bagmati Province, Mr. Rajendra Prasad Pandey, vice-chair of NPC, vice-chairs of the PPC of all seven provinces, mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons of District Coordination Committees, representatives of PPCs, and local governments experts attended the event.

STABILITY

- The program, in collaboration with the National Assembly (NA), organized an orientation program for the newly elected NA parliamentarians. The residential orientation focused on parliament's legislative exercises, processes and procedures, functions, ethics, international practices, and the role of parliaments in strengthening inclusive practices.
- The program conducted a Local Election Round Table where the participants discussed the challenges for women in securing election tickets for executive positions and required interventions to ensure more elected women representation in decision-making roles. Members of the election commission, women mayors and deputy mayors, and political party leaders participated in the event organized in coordination with the National Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (NFPPD) and National Concern and Coordination Committee (NCCC) of the National Assembly.

Other Highlights

HEALTH SECURITY

Five Partner Municipalities Endorse Health Policies



This quarter, five partner municipalities took significant steps toward strengthening the public health system and services. Mithila Municipal Assembly endorsed the Comprehensive Local Public Health Act; the municipality had finalized the act with technical support from SNGP. To make the Act inclusive, the program emphasized the participation of women, marginalized communities, and people with disabilities (PwDs) during the drafting process. The inclusive process helped gain ownership from diverse stakeholders within the municipality.

Similarly, three partner municipalities – Tansen, Waling, and Tikapur – passed the Local Health and Sanitation Regulation through municipal executive meetings. And Damak municipality endorsed the Health Institution (Standard) Guideline at the municipal executive meeting.

The program partner, the National Federation of Disabled Nepal (NFDN), reviewed these health policies and provided inputs for better disability inclusion.

Bringing Public Health Discourse to the Public

In partnership with the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters -Nepal (ACORAB), the program brought various issues and topics of local-level health governance to the public through the radio program Hamro Palika. This quarter ACORAB broadcasted five episodes on health governance through the community radio stations under the Community Information Network (CIN). Three out of the four episodes addressed the importance and need for local health policies and regulations and the state of their implementation. One episode highlighted the Health and Sanitation Regulations of Tikapur municipality. Another episode focused on the role of local government in enhancing service delivery in the health sector through the enhancement of health institutions.

The association also hosted a virtual roundtable interaction on the importance of health policies and regulations for effective public health service. The interactive session brought together health officials from municipalities (SNGP partners and others), rural municipalities, medical professionals, and members of CSOs working in the health sector. Representatives of three partner municipalities, Damak, Birendranagar, and Tikapur, shared their respective municipality's work on health policies and highlighted the importance of such guiding documents, especially during a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. They also talked about the various activities/interventions each municipality undertook to ensure effective prevention and protection measures for the public to combat Covid-19 at the local level.

Other Highlights

- In partnership with Public Policy Pathshala, the program completed mapping health entitlements available for the citizens at the local level in all seven partner municipalities. The mapping will further help the municipalities in the Mid-term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) drafting and review processes.
- This quarter, the program assessed the potential of public-private partnership (PPP) initiatives in the health sector at three partner municipalities – Waling, Tansen, and Birendranagar. In the meetings held at each municipality, the local representatives discussed hospital waste management at private hospitals and clinics and partnerships with private medical colleges for specialized facilities/services.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Infrastructure Development for Local Economic Sustainability

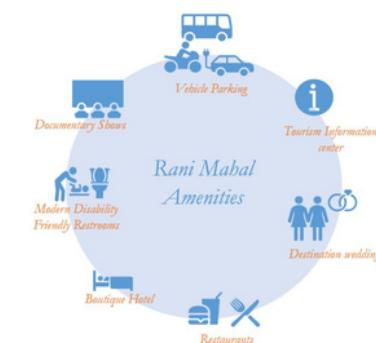


Figure 2 Service Amenities in the Rani Mahal Conservation and Management Project

Under its support towards infrastructure development and economic sustainability at the local level, SNGP provided technical assistance to Tansen municipality for two PPP projects. The program partner VRock & Co. provided project management support to the municipality for the Rani Mahal tourism project and a highway refreshment center. The support for the Rani Mahal project also included establishing coordination between two local governments as a certain land area within the project fell under Begnaskali Rural Municipality. The two local governments have decided to jointly develop the project with revenue sharing mechanism.

In Bhimeswor municipality, the program has provided management advisory support for two projects -- Bhimeswhor Multipurpose Commercial Building and Kiwi Processing Plan.

This quarter the program partner shared the Expression of Interest (EoI) evaluation guidelines and advised on the way forward for upcoming phases of the procurement process for the multipurpose building project.

Other Highlights

- Two SNGP partner municipalities, Waling and Tikapur, passed their respective Local Industry Management Rules to help implement the Industry Management Act (initially designed and technically supported under SNGP Phase I). The program had conducted a three-day workshop at each municipality to provide hands-on support to facilitate effective rules for implementing the Act.
- Four partner municipalities –Tansen, Waling, Damak, and Tikapur – have completed drafting the Local Economic Development (LED) strategies after conducting the necessary stakeholder consultations.
- In the last quarter, the program had initiated support to four municipalities (Bardhaghat, Beni, Belkotgadhi, and Sandhikharka) to develop the Mid-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) with technical assistance from the partner organization Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN). This quarter, MuAN finalized the draft MTEF after consultation with MoFAGA. The municipalities will deliberate on the draft before submitting it to the respective municipal assembly for endorsement.

GEDSI

GEDSI Policies Endorsement by Partner Municipalities

Six out of seven partner municipalities have endorsed the GEDSI policies for which SNGP had provided technical assistance and support. With support from partner organizations, the program conducted a series of thorough assessments and consultations with the representatives and other stakeholders at these municipalities. The program extended the demand-based policy support as mentioned below

- GEDSI policy for Damak, Tansen and Birendranagar
- GEDSI guideline for Waling
- Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) guidelines for Mithila, Tikapur, and Bhimeswor*

To further strengthen inclusion at the policy level, program partners Center for Dalit Women Nepal (CDWN) and the National Federation of the Disabled - Nepal (NFDN) jointly worked to provide inputs to make the policies more disabled-friendly. The inputs were based on the assessments carried out by the organizations.

(*Bhimeswor hasn't endorsed the guideline)

DWRs Organize Advocacy Workshops



Dalit women representatives (DWRs), who are part of the SNGP mentorship program, conducted two municipal level (five such workshops were conducted in the last quarter) and seven district level workshops this quarter. Through such workshops, the mentees aim to advocate for increased representation of Dalit women in the upcoming elections. At the workshops, the DWRs talked about their experiences and achievements working as ward members and the challenges they faced working in politics. Out of the 21 mentees, 19 have been promoted to higher positions within their political parties after the recent party conventions.

Disability Inclusion Initiatives

- The program partner NFDN in coordination with MOFAGA, held a federal-level consultation on Disabled Friendly Local Governance Procedure. At the event, representatives from organizations for people with disabilities, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare, and PwDs provided their inputs and opinion on the issue; NFDN submitted the feedback collected at the event to MoFAGA to update the existing procedure.
- This quarter, the Disability Inclusion (DI) advocacy forums of SNGP, with support from NFDN, organized ward-level advocacy programs on disability-inclusive budgeting and planning in Damak, Bhimeshwar, and Tansen. In Damak, the advocacy forum and participants from the organizations of people with disabilities suggested inclusive ward budget proposals for employment training for PwDs. The ward representatives committed to forming ward-level committees for PwDs to coordinate during budget and planning.

Int'l Women's Month: Women in Leadership Campaign



This quarter the program marked the International Women's Month with the 'Women in Leadership' campaign to encourage more participation of women in governance and leadership. The campaign included various initiatives that informed the citizens, policymakers, and development organizations to address the gender gap in leadership positions.

In collaboration with the partner organization Voices of Women Media (VOW), the program produced and launched the second volumes of two 'Women in Leadership' booklets. One encompasses the data on women at the decision-making level in different professions. The other features short bios on 18 elected heads of local governments who are women, including highlights of their first tenure's work. Seven featured women launched the two booklets at the Celebrating Women in Leadership event held on March 25.

The event also included a roundtable discussion of the featured mayors and chairpersons on their experiences, achievements, and concerns for women aspiring for leadership roles in politics and governance. It also hosted a panel discussion on the representation of women from marginalized communities in government and politics, challenges of women in politics, including the media's portrayal of women in politics.

The campaign also produced videos capturing the leadership journey of the elected women representatives of the first local governments under the federal system in Nepal.