Strategic Policy Recommendations

Based on One Year of Monitoring in the Sectors of Health, Education, and Migration

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Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal
Centre for Social Change

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is a research initiative launched by Kathmandu-based non-profit making social think-tank *Centre for Social Change*.

GMC Nepal was created with the aim of building an enabling environment to foster state-society relationships in young federal Nepal through the transparent, fluid, and accessible transfer of accurate and up-to-date information between all stakeholders. It works to boost this engagement by shedding light on the Government's policies, laws, and execution programs within three key areas – Health, Education,and Migration – through advanced qualitative research, quantitative statistical tools, media monitoring, interviews, consultations, and survey data analysis methods.

GMC Nepal has been venturing in this governance monitoring research since October 2020, and has published various documents consolidating its findings, including nine issues of its principal thematic report series titled 'Governance at a Glance,' supplemental reports, infographics, op-ed articles, blog posts, andsocial media engagement.

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Key Highlights

- Adoption into the federal governance framework introduced by the 2015 Constitution needs to be prioritized so other policy concerns are handled by appropriate stakeholders.

- Lack of adequately detailed recordkeeping and database management across sectors has led to unclear mechanizations of policy failures.

- There is an urgent need to place the focus on marginalized communities with regards to health, education, and migration governance, as some communities face challenges unique to them.

- The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed a lack of emergency preparedness and crisis management channels across sectors, that should be addressed as soon as possible.

The following pages of this document represent concise summaries of the main, overarching findings in each of the three key areas of GMC Nepal's research presented as recommendations for policymakers and other influential stakeholders in the concerned sectors of Health, Education, and Migration.

Governance Sector

Health

In GMC Nepal's examination of health governance since October 2020, measures of public health systems, service delivery, service quality, personnel availability, and health indicators such as disease prevalence, malnutrition, mortality rates, and hygiene awareness were used to gauge the country's health status. Additionally, the added layer of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic context further presented the need for a unified front on Public Health management in the country. Key historic challenges, such as persistent poverty, corruption, geographical difficulties, economic inequalities, and social injustices were exacerbated by the pandemic, leading to further complex governance challenges in the health sector.

GMC Nepal's endorsed most pressing policy recommendations in the health sector are as follows.

Recordkeeping and Database Management

The need for an accurate and up-to-date monitoring mechanisms of key diseases, treatment methods, follow-up guidelines, and medical profiles were prevalent before the onset of the pandemic. However, the ineffective recordkeeping of Covid-19 cases, resulting deaths, tests, vaccination monitoring, and contact tracing methods have further exposed the need for more effective information management. Health systems concerns like the availability of adequate number of hospitals, doctors, ICU beds, etc. tend to be underreported or over-extrapolated without good recordkeeping practices.

Effective Information Dissemination

The Covid-19 pandemic also shed light on the ineffective spread of public health awareness. Information related to symptoms, preventative measures, social protection protocols, and treatment processes were found to be haphazardly disseminated, leading to widespread confusion and panic among citizens, particularly during the lockdown phases, and contributed to the spread of harmful misinformation, suggestion of dangerous malpractices, and fake news related to infection and mortality rates. Similarly, awareness campaigns fighting against social stigma towards certain health conditions should also be prioritized.

Expansion of Healthcare Services

The readjustment of the structural delineations within the health sector to the current federal framework has not reflected an ideal adjustment. There is an urgent need for major policies, written and enforced at the federal level, to be reconsidered to customize and fit the provincial and local healthcare needs across jurisdictions. Relevant stakeholders involved in public health across the three tiers of the government should be involved in the categorization of central, provincial, and local health concerns and their corresponding levels of urgency to ensure effective service delivery in various areas.

Integration of Unique Needs of Marginalized Communities

Certain communities or groups within the general population face social pressures, stigmatization, and lack of social support to pursue treatments or preventative care for health concerns unique to them. Examples include menstrual health concerns faced by women, unique health challenges associated with physical disabilities, and social ostracization faced by mental health patients. Policymakers should thus include members of marginalized communities in the decision-making tables to ensure their representative healthcare needs are met.

Transparency in Policymaking Process

Health indicators targets and multi-year plans endorsed by the government have historically been found to be too ambitious at the design stages and ineffective at the implementation stages. Additionally, key details surrounding decisions made in the preparation of the annual budget have also reflected unclear prioritization of different health concerns. The government should thus be more transparent in their assessment of the state of the country's state of health, available resources, and its prioritization of issues.

Governance Sector

Education

The Constitution declares equal access to education as one of the fundamental rights of all citizens and establishes free and compulsory basic education (Grades 0-9). Secondary public education (Grades 9-12) is also free. Even though public education falls under the jurisdiction of the local government tier, implementation issues have caused continued friction between old unitary and newly introduced federal stakeholders, which have also been exacerbated by educational disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. GMC Nepal's research thus comes at a critical time for the education sector, as new and old challenges have compounded to redefine the policymaking landscape.

GMC Nepal's endorsed most pressing policy recommendations in the education sector are as follows.

Adjustment to the Federal Framework

The most pressing policy issue concerns the efficient adoption of the federal framework that establishes education governance powers within the jurisdictionof the local tier of government. All other recommendations outlined below are enveloped within this challenge. Friction between old and new stakeholders, from leadership at the ministry down to institutional administrators and deans, was most clearly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdowns, which were centrally announced without the consultation of provincial and local actors, even in areas with no recorded cases of the virus. For smooth structural adaptation to the federal framework, local level capacity building projectsshould be prioritized.

Capacity and Infrastructure Building Towards Digital Learning

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and its prevention protocols such as lockdowns, prohibitive orders, school closures, and social distancing, came the challenge of having to rethink education delivery methods. Many institutions relied on digital learning platforms. However, the switch to the online modality contributed to furthering disparities, as a select minority of urban populations had the technical knowhow, devices, infrastructure to support online learning. Going forward, digital learning tools are likely to play a larger role in education delivery, so the government should support its adoption and use.

Representation of Disadvantaged Social Groups in Records

Disparities in outcomes across different groups characterized by dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, etc. is known to favor existing inequities due to social power imbalances.

However, the exact extent of how these differences are manifested is not clearly known as official records favor geography-based recordkeeping practices. Given that research studies conducted by private and international stakeholders tend to be limited to a certain areas or timelines, and can be potentially biased in their research agendas, the government should enforce multidimensional recordkeeping practices.

Regular Teaching Trainings and Curricula Updates

Two primary motivations behind establishing the education sector under the local government jurisdiction were to provide closer hands-on teacher trainings and update old curricula to include elements of local history and languages. Experts have also posited that certain topics need to be given more attention in curricula, such as recent history, climate change, etc. Due to the slow adoption of the federal framework, this work has not progressed as planned, and should thus be among the top priorities of future education plans and policies.

Monitoring of Urban Education & Privatization

The growing trend of rapid privatization of sector over time. Increasing privatization education providers, particularly in urban centers, has weakened the reach of the government within the education without adequate government checks has led to the emergence of various structural issues including the undermining of students' right to education, promotion of low-quality learning, overemphasis on competitive examinations, etc. The government must monitor and study this phenomenon to ensure the absence of private sector corruption and meeting of officially endorsed standard.

Strategic Policy Recommendations   3

Migration

In the last five decades, Nepal has seen massive surges in volumes of domestic and international migration. These unprecedented increases, triggered by supportive policies, treaties, and more affordable travel, especially among migrant-workers seeking employment opportunities in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, has prompted researchers to look deeper into the problems faced by Nepali migrants at home and abroad. With an expanding list of human rights abuses faced by migrants, the growing role of remittance in the national economy, and disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, migration governance has become one of the key topics of discourse in the country.

GMC Nepal's endorsed most pressing policy recommendations in the migration sector are as follows.

Implementation and Monitoring of Existing Migrant Protection Laws

There have been several different laws, policies, and provisions created in the past two decades aiming to strengthen the position of migrants and ensure their protection against various concerns, such as predatory recruitment agencies, systemic corruption, human rights abuses, unsafe working conditions, etc.However, the enforcement of these policies has not been carried out efficiently, due to geographical difficulties, lack of international monitoring mechanisms, and Covid-19 disruptions. While the other policy recommendations outlined below are important to introduce, the government should primarily ensure the enforcement of laws and policies already in existence.

Strengthening Governance Systems

Unlike the case with the health and education sectors, there is no singular ministry or government body that exclusively oversees most of the concerns surrounding migration governance. Instead, poweris shared among various bodies, such as the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of HomeAffairs, etc. It is thus extremely important to streamline communication between these bodies and delineate specific responsibilities clearly so that operation is smooth and hassle-free, especially during times of crisis such as the pandemic.

Increasing Emergency and CrisisPeriod Preparedness

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a global crisis of migration management. In the Nepali context, there was a notable lack of cohesion and cooperation among different stakeholders to ensure protections guaranteed by policies are ensured, travel is freely available, and emergency evacuation processes are put in motion

where relevant. Moving forward, the pandemic can be considered a wake-up call forhigher emergency preparedness and crisis management protocols.

Climate Change Resilience

There has been a sharp increase in volumes of forced migration triggered by the effects of anthropogenic climate change in the past few decades. These effects have included extreme weather events, soil aridity, farm damage due to excessive flooding, and unreliable harvest due to irregular rainfalls. Economic shocks caused by such effects have also pushed several citizens to pursue employment abroad, triggering international migration. Given that Nepal is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, its effects are likely to become more pronounced in the coming decades. The government must thus establish climate change resilience policies keeping migration flows and volumesin consideration.

Development of Locally Initiated Migration Development Plans

Due to the sharp rise in migration flows, localized concerns such as municipal territorial management, registration processes, social service delivery (including schools, hospitals, election logistics, etc.) have become unregulated. A strong locally initiated migration management plan, where the central and provincial levels support local capacity building needs, is the need of the hour in many areas. This would also aid to improve migration recordkeeping and database management processes, which is currently reliant on labor approvals, educational no-objection letters, and similar documentation. Since such bureaucratic are much less systematic during internal migration, the government must develop registration processes to provide value data to shed light on facts that influence migration governance.

About Centre for Social Change

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.

For questions, collaborations, or further information please feel free to get in touch at:

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