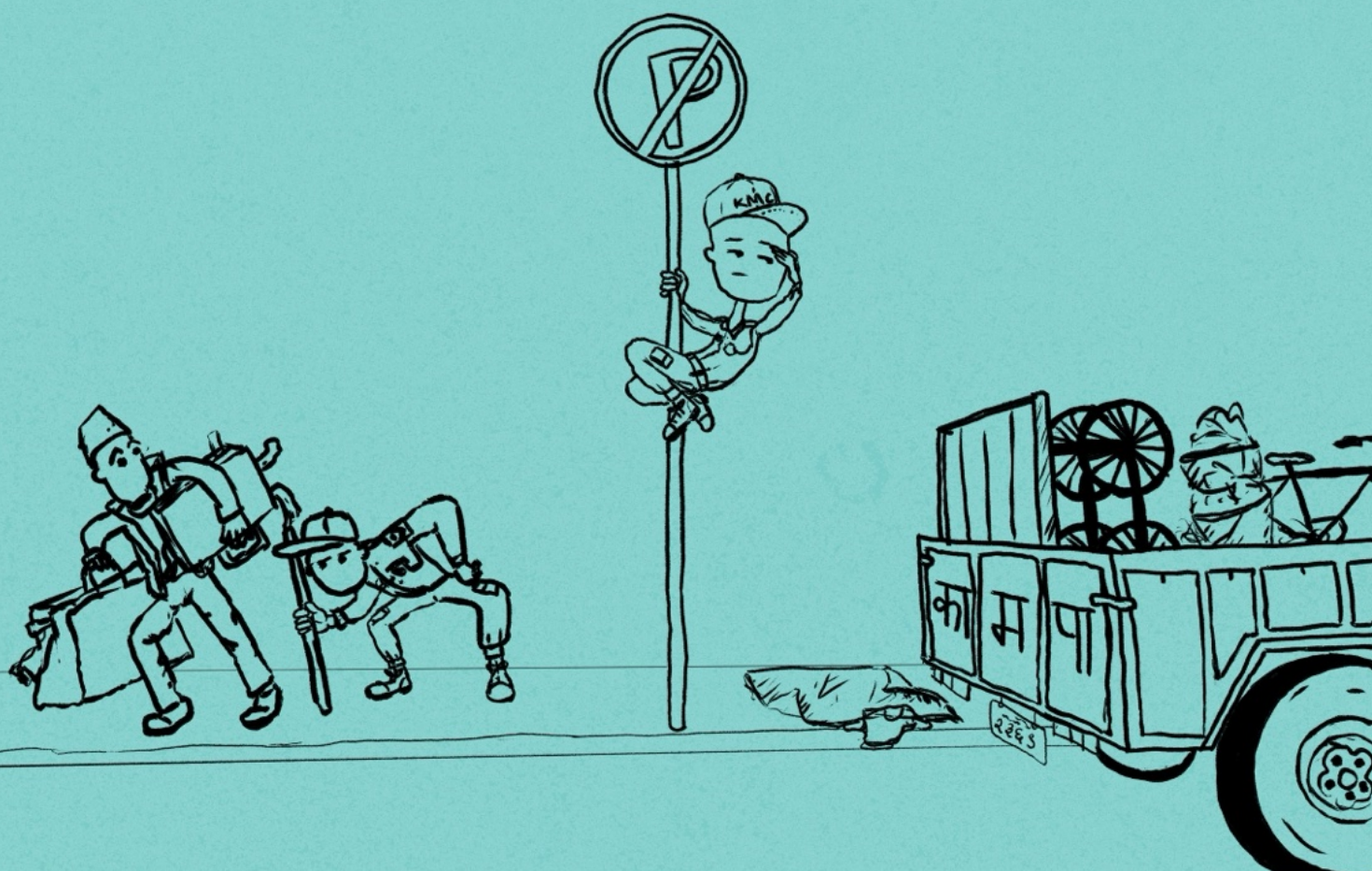# GOVERNANCE WATCH

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

ISSUE - 08
FEBRUARY 2024

Governance
Monitoring
Centre Nepal

Centre for Social Change
सामाजिक परिवर्तन केन्द्र

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is Centre for Social Change (CSC)'s flagship initiative, functional since 2020. Using a variety of investigative methods and the latest in qualitative & quantitative research tools, GMC Nepal is dedicated to strengthening the newly established federal democracy and empower its citizens through up-to-date information relating to the status of governance related conflicts and peace in Nepal.

While the first phase of this initiative successfully looked into the governance aspects of the Health, Education, and Migration sectors in Nepal, GMC Nepal Phase-II takes a closer look at the four major mutually non-exclusive arenas of governance conflicts in the Nepali federal context:

a. Natural Resource Conflicts
b. Development Conflicts
c. Ethnocultural Conflicts
d. Political Conflicts

The **'Governance Watch'**, a bi-monthly periodic report represents GMC Nepal's attempt to decipher major conflicts occurring within and beyond the federal structures and systems of Nepal.

Through vigilant media monitoring method, this report analyzes the changing dynamics of governance conflicts and elements associated with them, recognizing a crucial role of media in reflecting where latest developments and nation-wide interests are focused. To identify such occurrences at national, provincial, and local levels conflicts, this report fundamentally assesses four indicators- legal and policy frameworks, government bodies and mechanisms, through rigorous monitoring of news and events reported by five national daily newspaper sources- The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur Daily, Annapurna Post, Online Khabar and Seto Pati.

This report thus highlights key governance conflicts observed in the previous two months and a set of recommendations as potential avenues to resolve those conflicts.
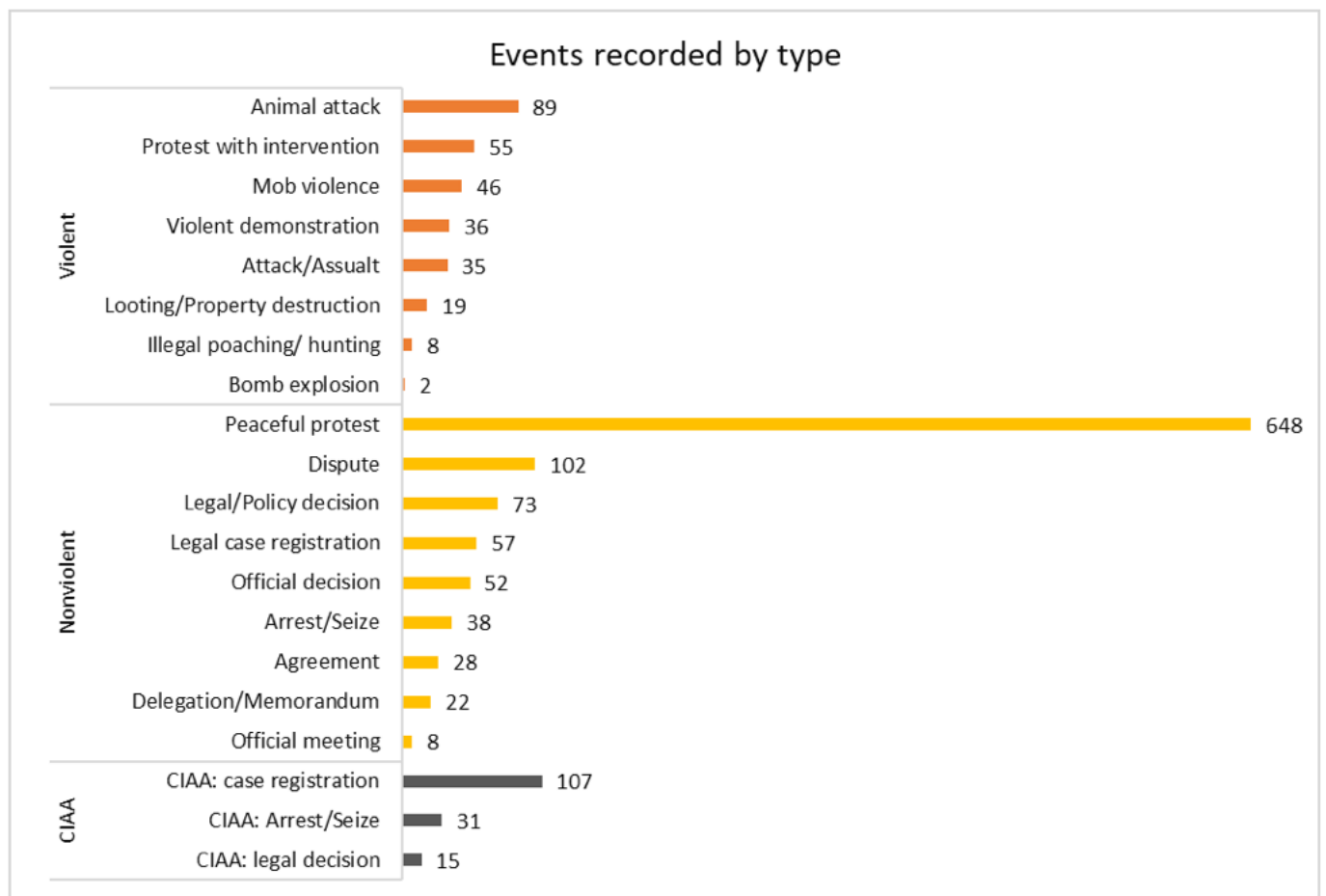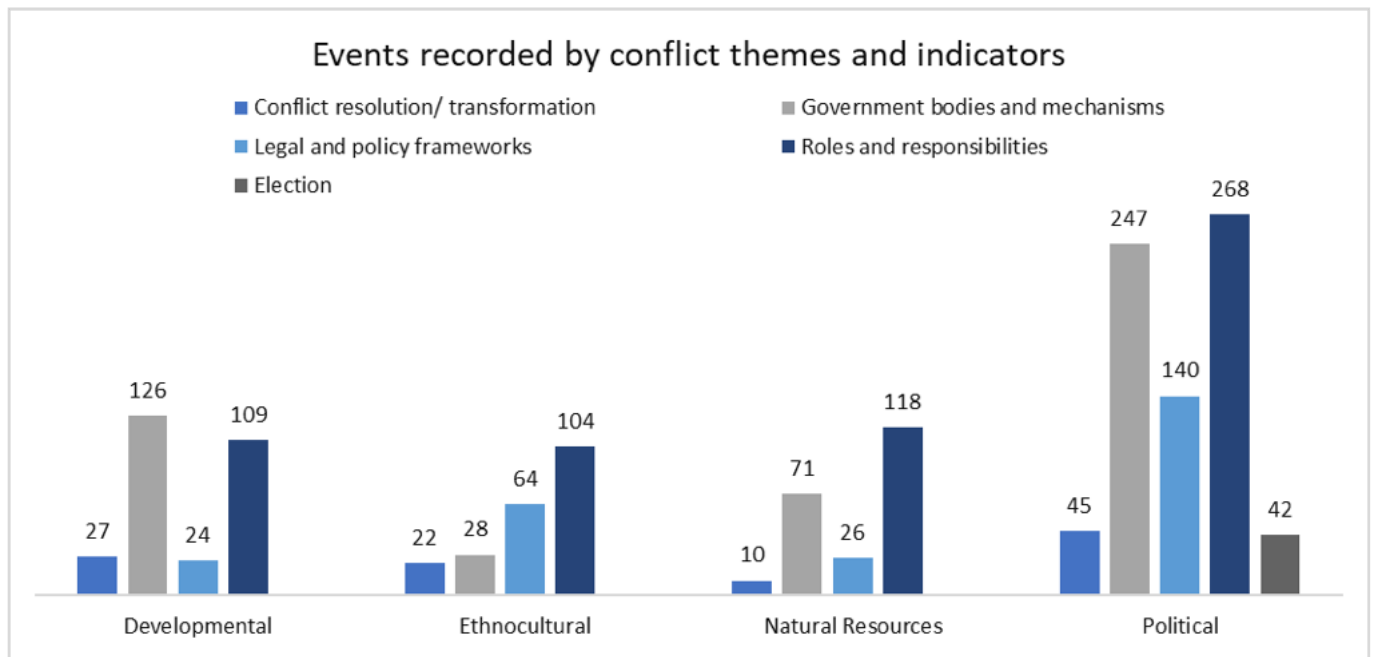
Note: This report may explain multiple occurrences of the governance conflicts by highlighting only specific news and events. Hence, the governance conflicts may not be limited to examples specified in this report.

A Cumulative Snapshot of Recorded News and Events
Media Coverage: June 2022 - January 2024

Starting from month of June 2022 to January 2024, in the past 20 months, a total of 1471 events have been recorded under this media monitoring initiative under GMC Nepal. Here, is a numeric snapshot of the data gathered so far.

Event type	No. of events recorded
Violent	209
Nonviolent	1028
CIAA	153
Total recorded events	1471

Events recorded by conflict themes and indicators

- Conflict resolution/ transformation
- Government bodies and mechanisms
- Legal and policy frameworks
- Roles and responsibilities
- Election

Developmental: 27, 126, 24, 109
Ethnocultural: 22, 28, 64, 104
Natural Resources: 10, 71, 26, 118
Political: 45, 247, 140, 268, 42

Events recorded by type

Violent
- Animal attack: 89
- Protest with intervention: 55
- Mob violence: 46
- Violent demonstration: 36
- Attack/Assualt: 35
- Looting/Property destruction: 19
- Illegal poaching/ hunting: 8
- Bomb explosion: 2

Nonviolent
- Peaceful protest: 648
- Dispute: 102
- Legal/Policy decision: 73
- Legal case registration: 57
- Official decision: 52
- Arrest/Seize: 38
- Agreement: 28
- Delegation/Memorandum: 22
- Official meeting: 8

CIAA
- CIAA: case registration: 107
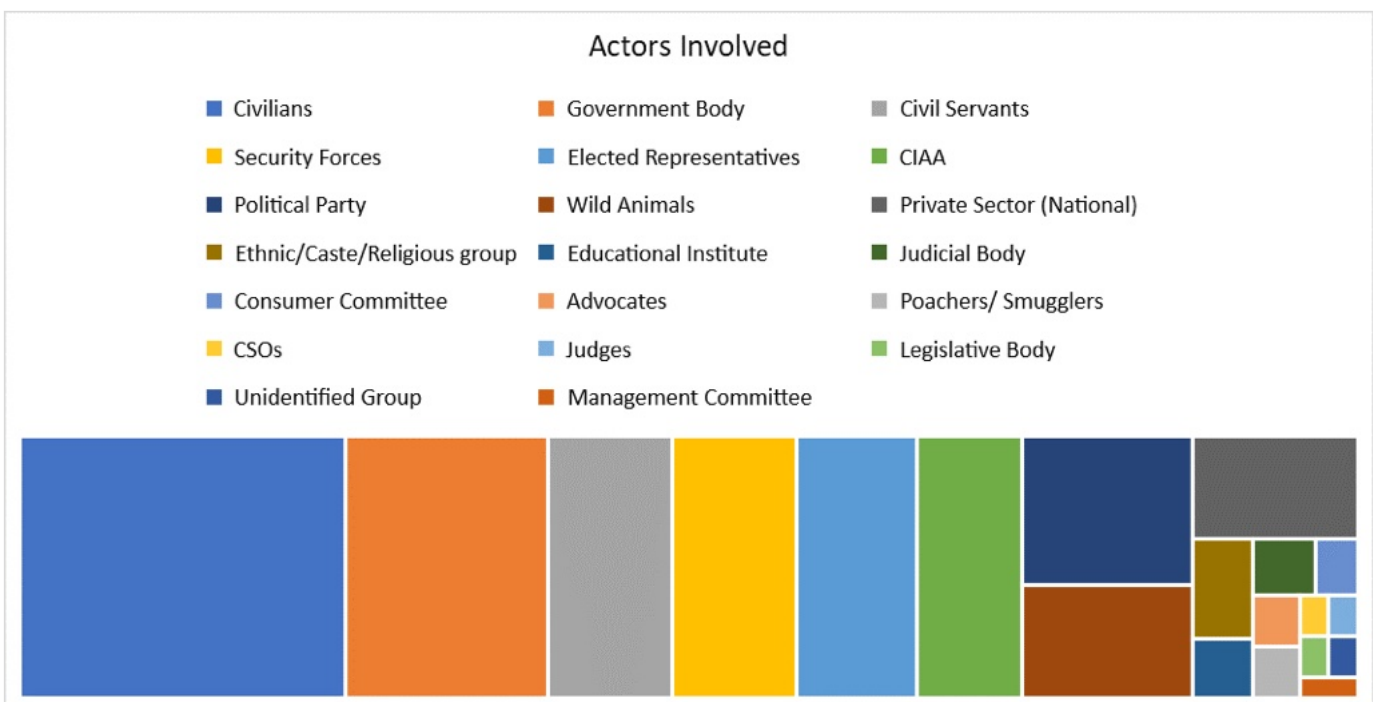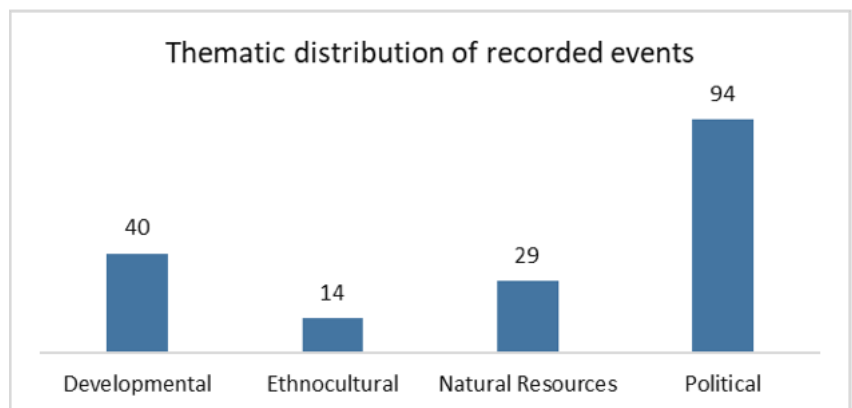- CIAA: Arrest/Seize: 31
- CIAA: legal decision: 15

Overview of Recorded Events
Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

This 8th issue of 'Governance Watch', encapsulates a total of 177 news and events related to governance conflicts in the areas of natural resources, development, ethnocultural and political governance in Nepal. The majority of these governance conflicts, i.e., 113 cases were nonviolent in nature, and 44 events ensued violent consequences. It is important to note that the number of these violent events have increased in number when compared to the last issue of 'Governance Watch'. Although relatively less in numbers, it is an increment nonetheless, which shows a compromise of human and ecological security and peaceful governance. These events need tangible and timely solutions to ensure peaceful governance in the four governance areas focused on by this study.
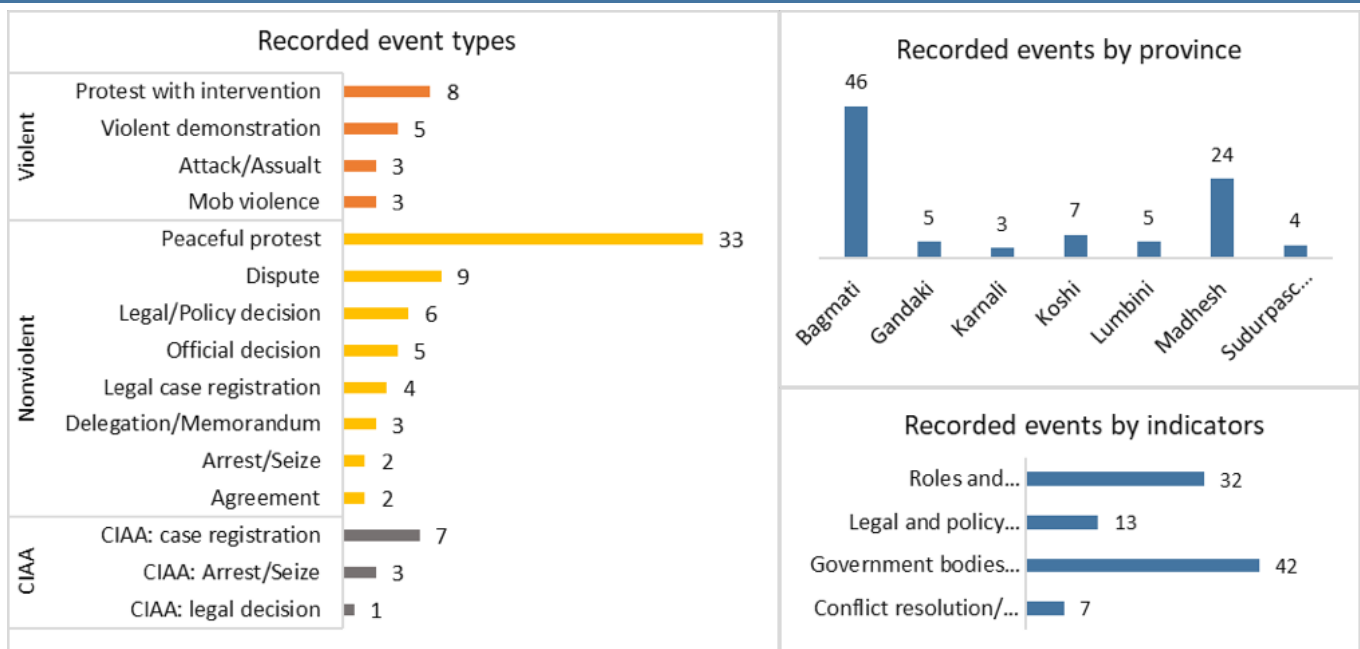
Furthermore, in this reporting period, 20 events were cases related to Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA), against political and government actors (comprising local, provincial and central levels) involved in illicit and corrupt activities. However, this indication alone is not sufficient to conclude the overall context and consequences of corruption related activities and its relevant actors and areas in Nepal. Further analysis of cases and events from multiple sources are important to corroborate this finding. Lastly, records under this reporting period shows civilians, government and civil servants as the three major actors involved in governance conflicts in the four areas of study. Detailed breakdown of these observations are provided in upcoming sections. Meanwhile, graphical representation of this summary is presented as below:

Type of events	No. of events
Violent	44
Nonviolent	113
CIAA	20
Total	177

Thematic distribution of recorded events

Actors Involved

Political Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

Recorded event types

Violent
- Protest with intervention — 8
- Violent demonstration — 5
- Attack/Assualt — 3
- Mob violence — 3

Nonviolent
- Peaceful protest — 33
- Dispute — 9
- Legal/Policy decision — 6
- Official decision — 5
- Legal case registration — 4
- Delegation/Memorandum — 3
- Arrest/Seize — 2
- Agreement — 2

CIAA
- CIAA: case registration — 7
- CIAA: Arrest/Seize — 3
- CIAA: legal decision — 1

Recorded events by province
- Bagmati — 46
- Gandaki — 5
- Karnali — 3
- Koshi — 7
- Lumbini — 5
- Madhesh — 24
- Sudurpasc... — 4

Recorded events by indicators
- Roles and... — 32
- Legal and policy... — 13
- Government bodies... — 42
- Conflict resolution/... — 7

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on political governance conflicts (December 2023-January 2024)

Summary of events recorded

The majority of the recorded events during December 2023 and January 2024 (68% of the total recorded events under the political governance were nonviolent in nature. Bagmati Province witnessed the highest number these conflicts followed by the Madhesh Province. The total recorded conflicts/ disputes can be broadly categorized into those between citizens and the government, and intergovernmental conflicts, comprising both vertical and horizontal dynamics of the three tiers.
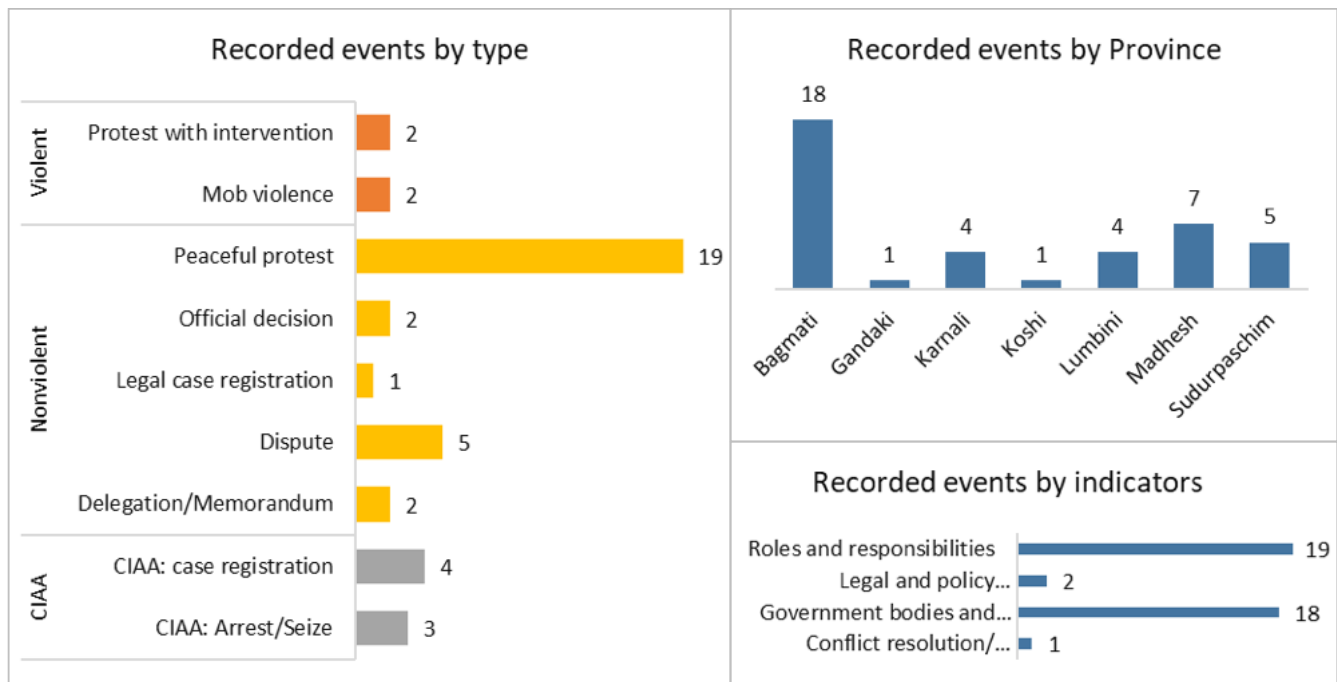
This report highlights clashes between the civilians and the state on multiple issues. It includes demands of land ownership documents by the landless residents of Tikapur, employees' protests regarding university allowances and public protest against limitations on public demonstrations in designated "prohibited areas", reflecting frustrations over unresponsive authorities and limitations on freedom of expression. In a more serious account of these clashes, confrontations over hospital management in Barathawa and police actions during demonstrations in Lalitpur resulted in civilian casualties.

On this note, internal conflicts within government bodies are also evident in this reporting period. For instance, disagreements between the Lumbini state's Speaker and Chief Minister delayed the civil servant bill. Also, ousting of Lumbini Hospital Development Committee's chairperson created legal dispute with the provincial government. Furthermore, the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority expressed disapproval of the special court's ruling over corruption related case. Even local municipalities weren't immune to governance conflicts. Mayors in Rautahat faced accusations of irregularities and protests on the matter lead to office closures. Also, hiring practices of Tikapur Municipality highlighted lack of transparency and adherence to proper procedures. Additionally, assault of a government employee, Tandukar, by a higher-ranking official, Deputy Secretary Gayre, exposed inappropriate conducts of officials.

Tensions between federal and provincial government continued as the Madhesh province continued its demand of adjustments of civil servants and Nepal Police. This issue still underscores the autonomy desired by provincial governments.

Development Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on development governance conflicts (December 2023-January 2024)
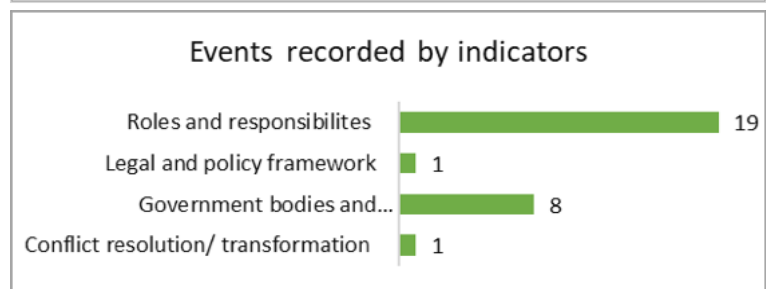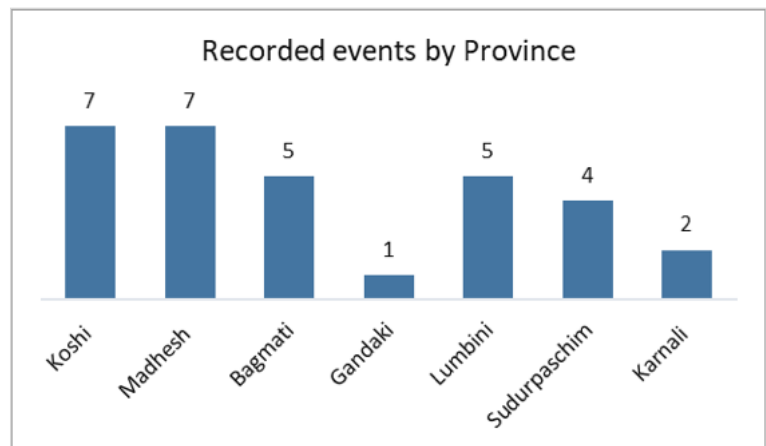
Summary of events recorded

In the past two months (December 2023-January 2024), GMC Nepal monitored and recorded 40 news events under development governance conflicts. These events revealed that majority of the news events emphasized on highlighting citizen's dissatisfaction over the government regulatory mechanisms against street vendor, open public space , public service delivery, like access to Melamchi water supply and public frustrations over road beautification project and abandoned road construction projects . Addition to it, the news coverage showed overwhelming demonstrations conducted by local businessmen against the actions taken by Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City to regulate unmanaged parking spaces at Newroad. Also, dispute between the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and private sector representatives and labors in industrial areas (including Bara, Rupandehi and Kathmandu) continues since NEA cut off the power supply of industries who refused to pay power tariff.

In conclusion, the majority of news coverage spotlighted the gaps in the ecosystem between government bodies, law enforcing agencies and citizens to achieve sustainable infrastructural development. In absence of close coordination and partnership, the purpose of infrastructure development planning like parking management and regulation of street vendor became core of conflict between enforcing agency and consumers. Hence, continuation of failure to achieve the goals of planned infrastructure project may obstruct Nepal from meeting the overall long-term goals of the country.

Natural Resources Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

Type of events	No. of events
Violent	**17**
Wild animal attack	12
Illegal poaching/hunting	2
Looting/Property destruction	3
Nonviolent	**10**
Arrest/Seize	1
Peaceful protest	2
Legal/Policy decision	2
Delegation/Memorandum	1
Dispute	4
CIAA	**2**
CIAA: case registration	1
CIAA: Arrest/Seize	1
Total Recorded Events	29

Recorded events by Province

Events recorded by indicators

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on natural resources governance conflicts (December 2023-January 2024)

Summary of events recorded

During the period of December 2023 and January 2024, a total of 29 recorded news and events were relevant to Natural resource governance conflicts. In relevance to the previous report, an upsurge in occurrence of violent events triggered by wild animal attacks is observed. Consequences of these events extended from property damages to deep injuries to death of individuals. On the other hand, events of illegal hunting of rhinos and poachers' traps meticulously highlight the recurring nature of human-wildlife conflict. Furthermore, this report spotlights the incidents inside Chitwan National Park where poachers have hunted rhinos by creating scaffolding inside the National Park. On this matter, Director General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, Sindhu Prasad Dhungana, said that the report submitted by the coordination team on the case suggested strengthening security arrangements and patrolling. So, on a positive note, a team of Nepal Army, Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police and National Park was deployed in coordination with the Central Wildlife Crime Control Unit. According to the law, a fine of up to Rs 1 million and imprisonment of up to 15 years can be imposed on those found killing a rare wild rhino or dealing with its parts.
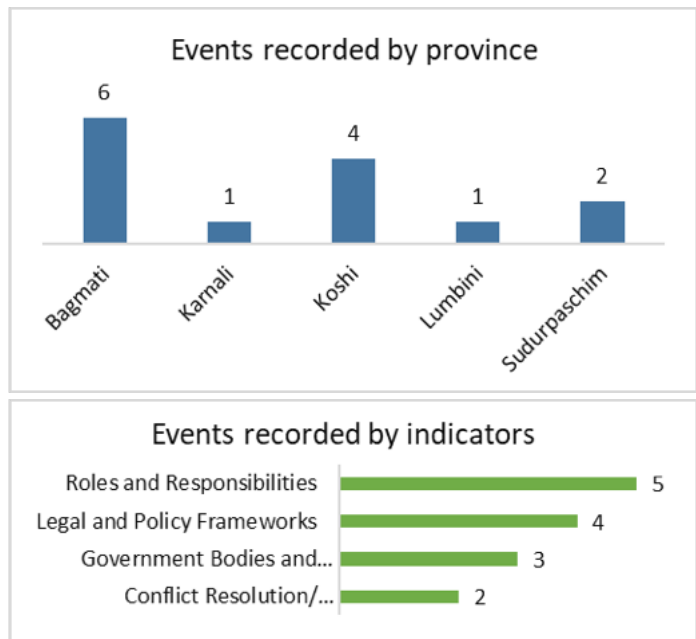
While repeated occurrence and rise in recording of these events yet again highlight a major gap in effective and timely response from government authorities in addressing long withstanding human-nature conflict, the Chitwan National Park case can be considered as prospects of commendable actions.

Likewise, repetitive recordings of over extraction of river-based materials show consequences of the conflicts in the form of local level disputes among local representative, private contractors and civilians and nonviolent demonstrations from civilians. Furthermore, this report shows that matters entailing acquisition of resources through illegal consumption or trade of forest products, soil, land etc. were processed by the CIAA.

Ethnocultural Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: December 2023 - January 2024

Type of events	No. of events
Violent	**4**
Attack/Assault	1
Protest with intervention	2
Violent demonstration	1
Nonviolent	**10**
Arrest/Seize	1
Dispute	1
Legal/Policy decision	2
Official decision	1
Peaceful protest	5
Total Recorded Events	14

Events recorded by province

6 — Bagmati
1 — Karnali
4 — Koshi
1 — Lumbini
2 — Sudurpaschim

Events recorded by indicators

Roles and Responsibilities — 5
Legal and Policy Frameworks — 4
Government Bodies and… — 3
Conflict Resolution/… — 2

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on ethnocultural governance conflicts (December 2023-January 2024)

Summary of events recorded

In the months of December 2023 and January 2024, a total of 14 ethnocultural governance conflicts were meticulously documented, comprising 10 non-violent incidents and 4 violent ones. Within this timeframe, the governance challenges in the ethnocultural context predominantly revolved around delivery of justice and demands of identity groups for renaming of Koshi Province. Continuing the narrative from the preceding bi-monthly report, in the heart-rending fate of Aarti Sah, who was found lifeless in her own home on May 21, 2023, further investigation and progress has occurred. This includes the Supreme Court overruling the Janakpur High court's decision to issue bail to Sah's husband, Moti Babu, and father-in-law, Madan Mohan Shah citing lack of evidence in the case. Supreme Court further ruled Sah's husband, to be imprisoned and her father-in-law to be released on bail.

Despite the prolonged wait for justice, some progress is seen in the past two months, notably with the Rukum District Court issuing its final verdict on the Soti incident that occurred on May 25, 2020. This tragic event, stemming from caste-based discrimination, resulted in the brutal deaths of six individuals. The court's ruling signifies restoration of justice, as it sentenced 24 individuals, including Dambar Bahadur Malla, the former ward president of Chaurjahari Municipality-8, to life imprisonment for their roles in the heinous act.

Furthermore, a recurring event was recorded on renaming of Province 1 as Koshi Province. Since the renaming on March 2nd, 2023, numerous protests have sparked widespread dissatisfaction with the decision. The pro-identity group (Limbuwan-Kirat) has been at the forefront of these demonstrations, who are advocating for a name that reflects their cultural and ethnic identity. The protests have included displaying of black flags, targeted to Chief Minister Karki, vandalizing his vehicle, disruption of transportation services, and a transport strike along the Mid-Hill Highway.

Key Recommendations

From 177 events recorded between December 2023 and January 2024, some key factors were identified that have evidently triggered governance conflict in the four governance areas. As potential responses to address these ongoing conflicts, following recommendations are derived as way forward-

Political governance

- Communication and grievance redressal mechanisms within government institutions needs improvement, allowing for open channels for employees and citizens to voice concerns and ensure prompt action on legitimate grievances.

- Constructive dialogue and collaboration between government bodies at all levels are necessary, including federal and provincial governments, to resolve conflicts like legal disputes arising from the Supreme Court's decisions or disagreements between provincial authorities.

- Impartial and accountable law enforcement needs to be ensured by investigating and taking appropriate action against officers who violate the law, like the initial reluctance to register a police report in the alleged assault case.

Development governance

- Addressing coordination and communication gap between the NEA and private sectors is critical to strengthen synergy and foster enabling environment for both.

- Capacity building programs including high-quality planning, project design, feasibility studies, smooth operation of infrastructure financing, and project implementation is crucial at local level to complete the infrastructural project on time and within budget.

- Promotion of local partnership is essential to foster sustainability and ownership of the infrastructure development projects and transparency of infrastructure investment.

Natural resources governance

- The recurrence of human-wildlife conflicts with gradual increase in numbers call for attention of authorities in all three tiers of government. While loss and damage mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure wellbeing of civilians, protection and conservation efforts need to be strongly implemented to safeguard welfare of the wildlife.

- The repetitive noncompliance of environmental laws and policies displayed by government officials, private companies and also civilians need stricter attention from authorities to prohibit exploitation of natural resources. Especially, actions of government representatives need to be strictly monitored to stop their illicit involvement in corruption and illegal activities that encourages manipulation of policies and abuse of resources.

- The development initiatives, especially ones that involve partnership of government and private contractors need stricter monitoring mechanisms to avoid systemic corruption. Although civilians are displaying their frustrations through protests, the role of CIAA and the authorities need to be strengthened to illicit actions.

Ethnocultural governance

- Creating and maintaining an independent and fair judiciary system is significant for ensuring people trust and faith in the justice of a country. When the judiciary consistently delivers justice in the absence of bias or influence, the rule of law is upheld and public faith in the legal system is reinforced. Therefore, prioritizing reforms and investments to ensure the independence and fairness of the judicial system is crucial for the overall well-being of society and country as well.

- Addressing the dissatisfaction within the pro-identity group requires concrete efforts to facilitate meaningful negotiation and dialogue that is aimed at reaching a conclusive resolution. The tensions have been ongoing since the renaming of Province 1 to "Koshi", highlighting the need for a sustainable, long-term solution to this dissatisfaction. It is imperious to proactively engage with all stakeholders involved, listen to their grievances, and work towards finding mutually agreeable solutions that respect cultural identities while ensuring social harmony and stability.

About CSC

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.

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