GOVERNANCE WATCH

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

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Governance
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Centre for Social Change
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Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal
Media Monitoring Report

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is a research initiative led by Kathmandu-based NGO Centre for Social Change (CSC). 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 mechanisms, 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 interests are focused. Here is how the methods have defined the major governance areas selected by this report including major indicators and types of events:

Governance areas	Definition
Natural resource governance	Norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources and climate are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens (including women, men, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities) participate in and benefit from the management of natural resources.
Development governance	Governance of social and infrastructure development through appropriate procedures comprising policy formulation, program design, budgetary allocation, and administrative reforms parallel to annual targets and/or short-term, mid-term and long-term goals and objectives set for social and economic development.
Ethnocultural governance	Accountability of authorities and government institutions to ensure rights, opportunities and security of all citizens, especially of historically marginalized and minority groups without imposing violence or discrimination on anyone based on their identity, culture, gender, region, language and ethnicity.
Political governance	Practices of federalism among different tiers/organs of governments and between the government and people.

Major Indicators

The media monitoring methods adopted have assessed the following major indicators to understand the four areas of governance and governance related conflicts while attempting to highlight major gaps and challenges existent within the federal governance system. Understanding effectiveness in formation as well as implementation of the indicators is the major focus of this report to derive governance related conflicts and also, relevant opportunities. Following is how the methods have defined the indicators:

Indicators	Definition
Legal and policy frameworks	Enforcement of laws and regulations, policies and procedures enacted by the legislative bodies in accordance with broader governance and societal reform.
Government bodies and mechanisms	Institutional arrangements of government bodies and autonomous bodies under federal structure and their interaction.
Roles and responsibilities	Power relations and functions of government bodies (both executing and implementing agencies) along with civil society, international bodies, media for fully functional of federal structure, better governance and rule of law.
Conflict resolution/ transformation	Existing mechanisms and provisions dedicated to resolving conflicts, providing access to justice and ensuring participation and representation of marginalized communities and indigenous people.

Event Types

The methods adopted for this study have segregated the recorded news and events recognizing influence or adoption of violence or nonviolence in strategies as display of resistance, attack or protest. Also, corruption or Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA)-related cases are separately categorized as they majorly signify legal actions or decisions, rather than being an event that is violent or nonviolent in nature. Also, to avoid data duplication, these cases are distinctly recorded.

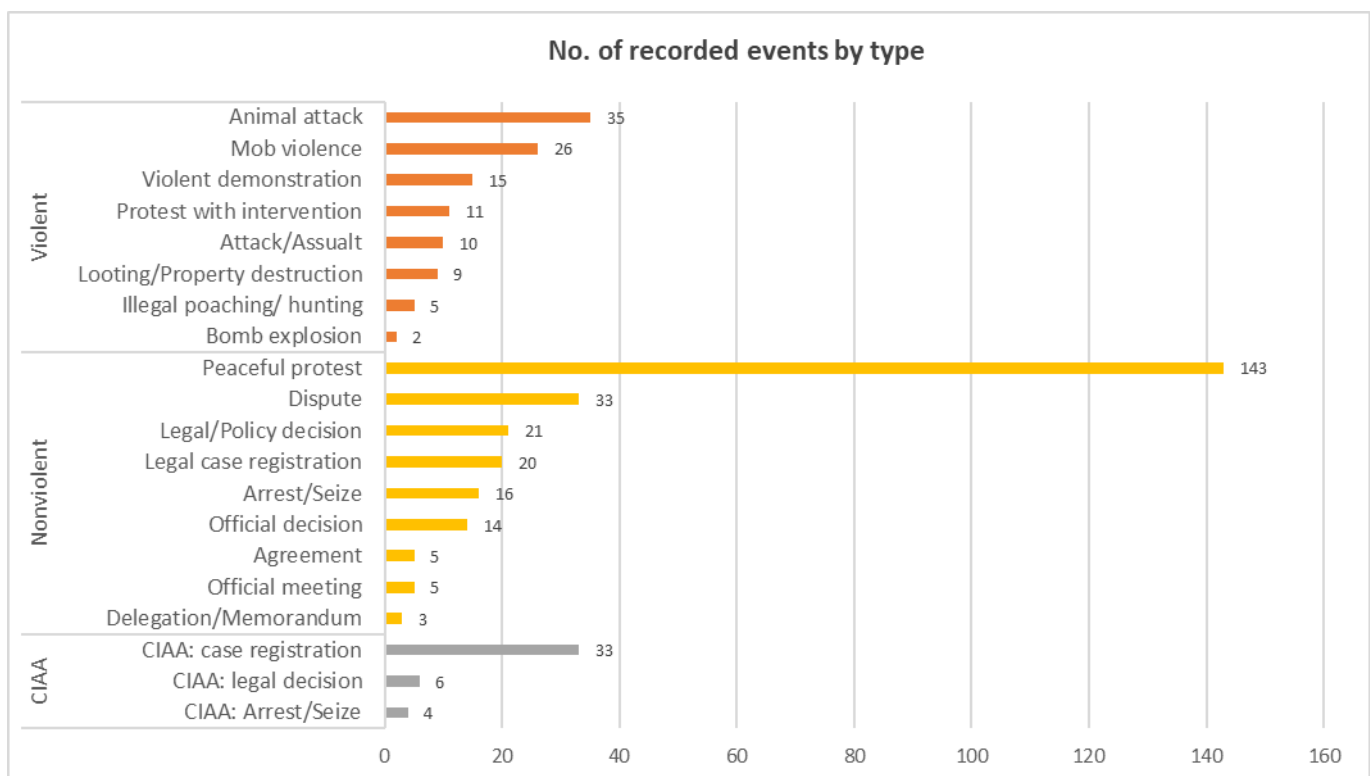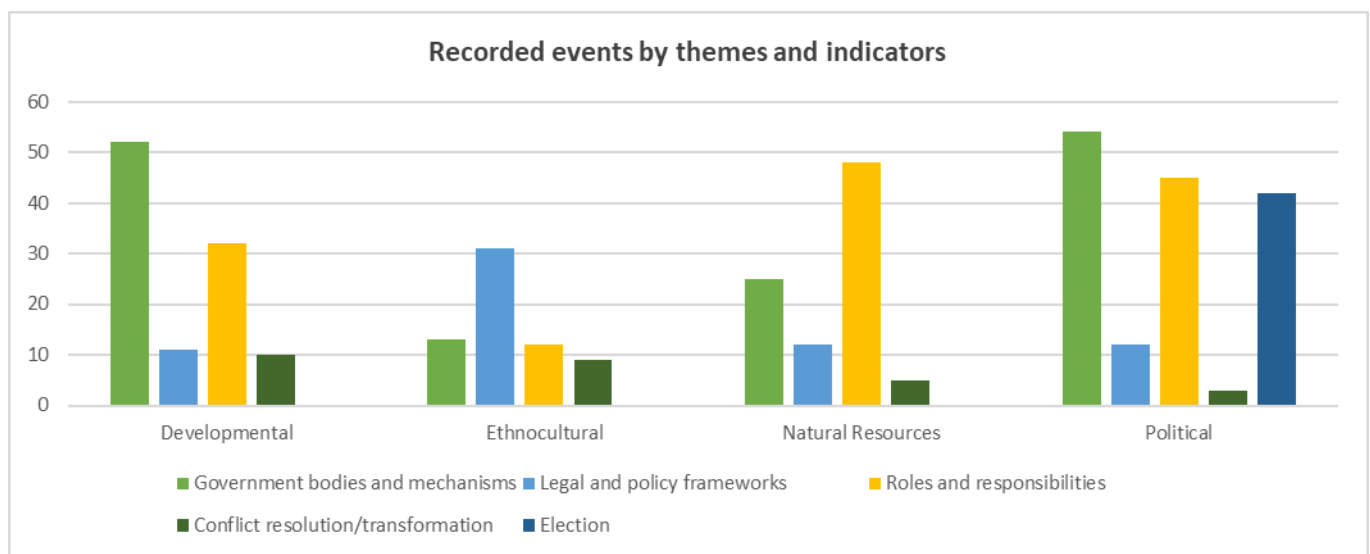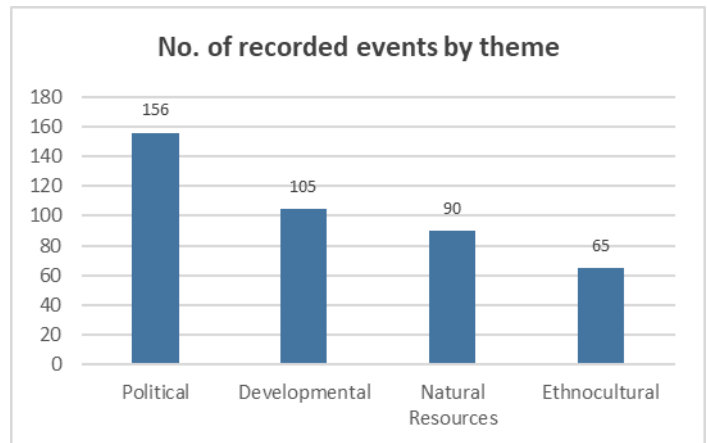| Event Categories	Definition
Nonviolent events	Governance conflicts where actors display resistance, disagreements, demands, etc. without using physical force or causing harm or damage.
Violent events	Governance conflicts where actors use physical force/ arms or cause harm or damage to display resistance, disagreements, demands, etc.
Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA)- relevant events	Corruption or CIAA related cases are recorded as separate category of events. Such cases are mostly legal concerns that are important determinants of governance conflicts as they display unrest among actors and triggers of such conflicts.

Media Outlets Monitored:

The Kathmandu Post/ Kantipur Daily/ Annapurna Post/ Online Khabar/ SetoPati.

A Cumulative Snapshot of Recorded News and Events
Media Coverage: October 2022 - May 2023

Starting from month of October 2022 to May 2023, in the past eight months, a total of 416 events have been recorded under this media monitoring initiative under GMC Nepal. Below is a numeric snapshot of the observations so far.

Event Type	Events Recorded
Violent	111
Nonviolent	262
CIAA	43
Total Recorded Events	416

No. of recorded events by theme

Recorded events by themes and indicators
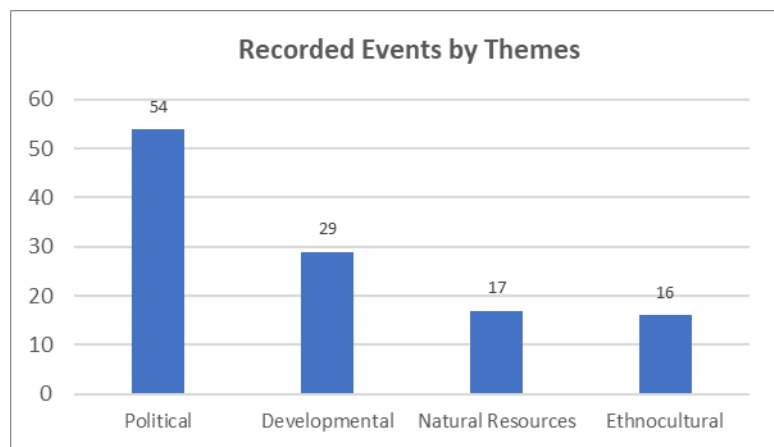

No. of recorded events by type

Overview of Recorded Events
Media Coverage: April 2023 - May 2023

In this 4th issue of 'Governance Watch' a total of 116 news and events were recorded that displayed governance conflicts in the areas of natural resources, development, ethnocultural and political governance. An overall observation of these recoded events that occurred in the months of April and May 2023, show that majority of the governance conflicts were nonviolent in nature and peaceful protests were the most adopted measure of civil resistance. Although the number of violent events were relatively less in numbers, it must be taken into consideration that violent governance conflicts are still prevalent and systematic efforts to tackle violent activities or potential violence are not adequate.
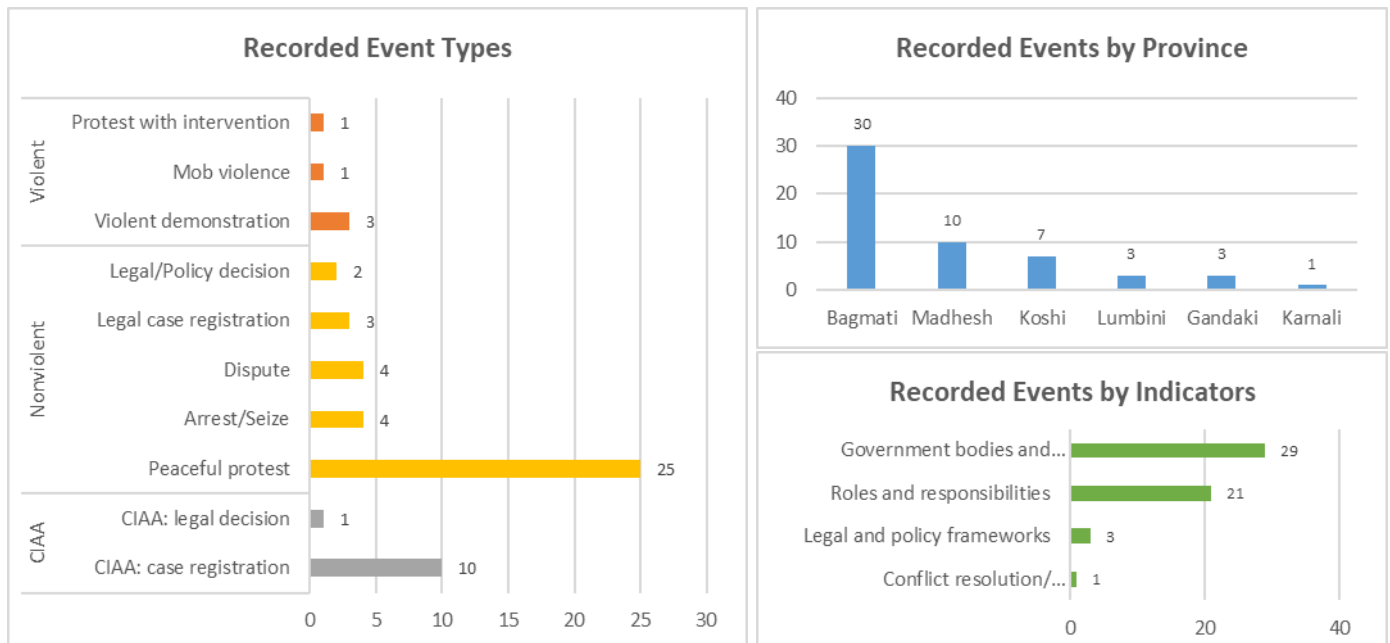
Conflicts triggered by political issues were mostly reported by media sources while ethnocultural conflicts were reported the least. However, coverage around ethnocultural issues are recorded higher as compared to previous months due to demands of ethnic groups to rename Koshi Province according to their ethnic/ cultural identity. Consistent to previous reporting, actors most involved in governance conflicts are civilians. However, it is important to note that civilians are not only instigators but are also affected by the consequences of conflicts. Greater civil unrest was observed among groups including displaced flood victims, squatters and locals affected by haphazard urban development plans and projects, previously forced laborers, ethnic and identity groups, groups awaiting citizenship law, to name a few. Although varied governance conflicts affecting diverse civilian groups were observed in the four areas of focus, news and events of conflict resolution were minimal. Furthermore, the CIAA relevant cases highlighted national level corruption where government officials were involved in illegally faking documents of Nepali citizens as refugees to enter United States. A graphical representation of this summary is presented as below:

Type of Events	No. of Events
Violent	13
Nonviolent	86
CIAA	17
Total Recorded Events	116

Recorded Events by Themes

- Political: 54
- Developmental: 29
- Natural Resources: 17
- Ethnocultural: 16

Actors Involved

- Civilians
- Government Body
- Political Party
- Security Forces
- Elected Representatives
- CSOs
- Advocates
- Civil Servants
- Private Sector (National)
- Civilians
- Wild Animals
- Judicial Body
- Ethnic/Caste group
- Judges
- Consumer Committee
- Civil Servants - Contractual
- Private Sector (International)
- Journalists

Political Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: April 2023 - May 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on political conflicts (April-May 2023)

Summary of Recorded Events

As presented above, the majority of the events recorded in the months of April and May 2023 were nonviolent (72.2% of total recorded events) in nature and Bagmati province observed the highest number of political events. Most of the conflicts were related to incoherent interactions between government bodies and disputes related to roles and responsibilities of related stakeholders. Lack of Civil Service policy and adjustment in relation to federal context, has been long-standing issue for all levels of government, impacting both the permanent and contractual employees. Additionally, CIAA-registered corruption charges against civil servants at local and central governments, and against the locally elected representatives have been recorded.

Demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, account for more than half of the total recorded political events. Protests were based on various issues, like civilians protesting against the political impunity for human trafficking done in disguise of Bhutanese refugees, CPN(UML)'s protest against government's decision to provide compensation to the then unqualified ex-combatants for integration into the Nepal army, hunger strike against provincial government for withholding land sales in order to develop Dang as the provincial capital, Nepal Bar Association demanding appointment of Chief Justice, Civil servants, gazette officers against the draft bill of the Civil Service Act and contractual employees agitation against the their removal, principal and teachers' agitation against the ad hoc transfer in the name of education improvement, and civilians protesting against police violence.

At the local level, civilians demonstrated against the Chief Administrative Officer's absence at the municipality office, due to a dispute between elected representatives and lack of government's concern towards it. Also, in one of the local units, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor were at conflict regarding inappropriate behavior of Mayor's personal assistance, leading to halt of executive meeting of the municipality. It was also observed that the local unit and the central government were in conflict with each other regarding the waste-management issue.

Development Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: April 2023 - May 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on development related conflicts (April-May 2023)
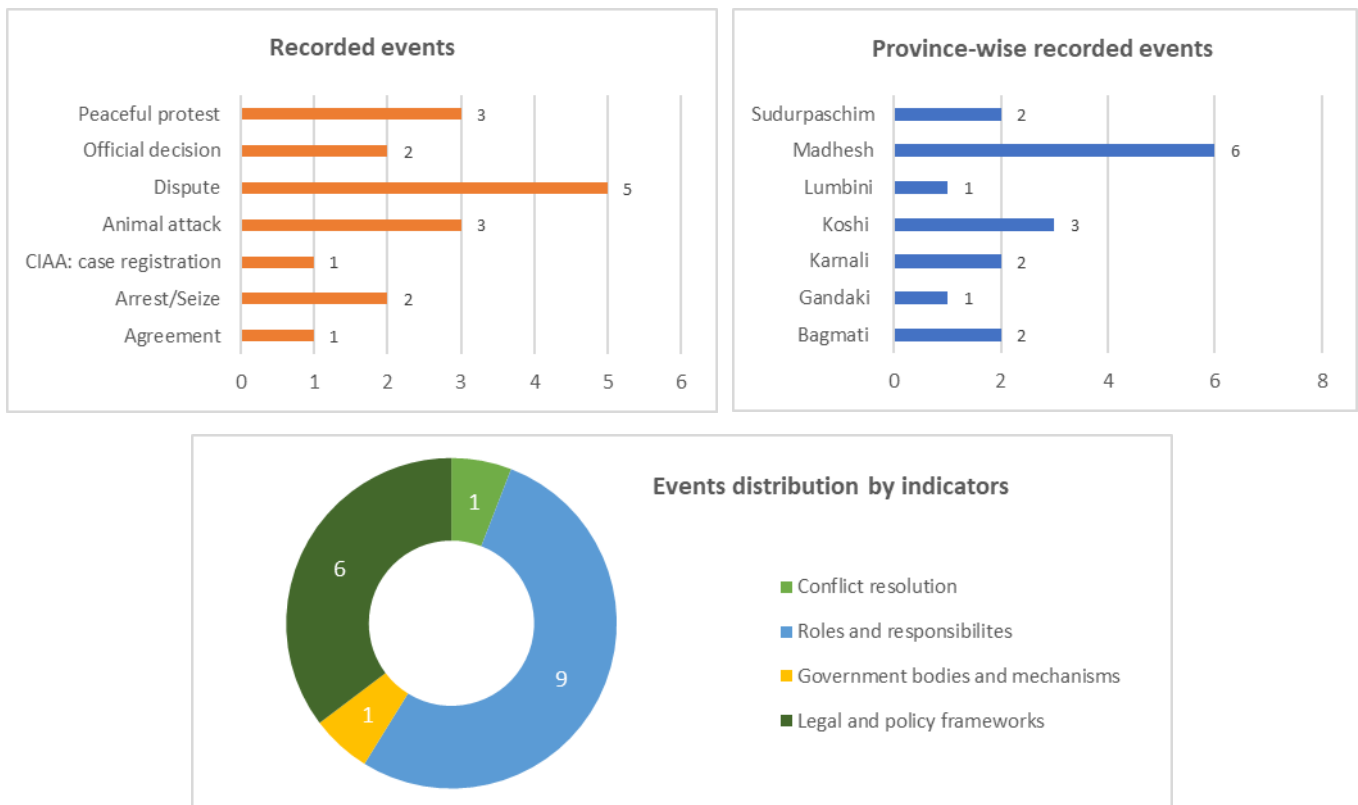
Summary of Recorded Events

In the months of April and May 2023, GMC Nepal monitored and recorded 29 conflict events; 22 nonviolent, 2 violent and 5 Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA) related events under development governance conflict. As per monitored news and events, most of the protests were centered around the issue of haphazard urban development strategies, delayed completion of infrastructure development project and poor quality of construction of retaining wall. On the other hand, violent cases upsurged when security forces engaged in the tussles related to demolition drive between the municipal bodies and locals.

During the monitoring period, Madhesh province observed the highest number of protests. Waste-management issues which is affected due to stranded road expansion, encroachment of land by the under-construction of irrigation sub-project at Bhaluwai river are the some of the reasons that fueled surge of civil protests. Likewise, news coverage also highlighted significant role of Commission for Abuse of Authority Investigation (CIAA) to control corruption in infrastructural development at the local levels.

While critically assessing the development conflict cases, poor practice of transparency of governing bodies over development governance, unparalleled planning and execution of enforcement agencies and inadequate interventions against the fraud stakeholders have triggered the spillover effects of irregularities at different layer and dysfunction of development project against the actual demands of local.

Natural Resources Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: April 2023 - May 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on natural resources related conflicts (April-May 2023)
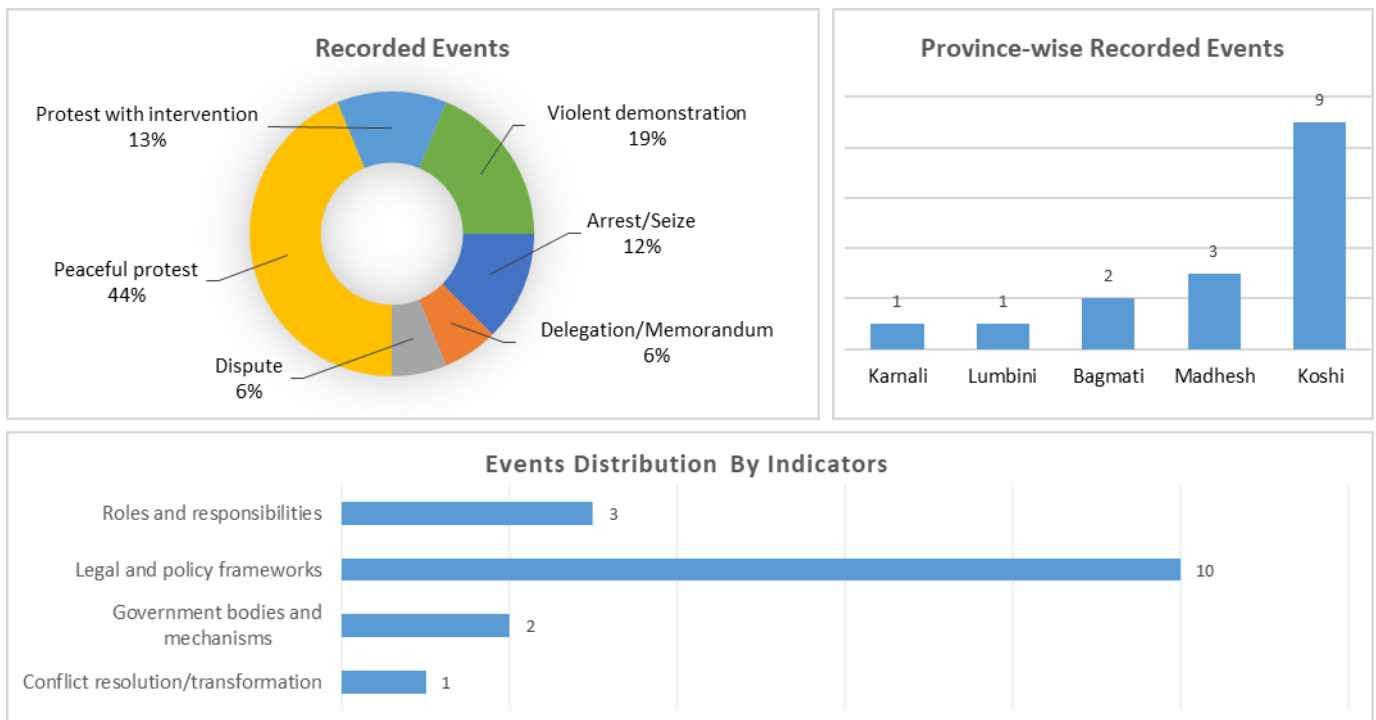
Summary of Recorded Events

In the months of April and May 2023, a total of 17 news and events recorded were relevant to Natural resource governance conflict. Among these events, 3 events where civilians were attacked by wild animals were recorded as violent events. Consistent to previous reporting, human-wildlife conflict continues to be a major governance issue as locals have continuously urged local representatives for protection from wild animal attacks. Despite such requests and cases, a lack of responsiveness from government authorities has been reported to address this issue in favor of both animals and humans.

On the other hand, the nonviolent events recorded in the past two months comprised of civil protests urging protection of natural resources. To be specific, demonstrations by locals from Birgunj Metropolis calling the government's attention towards severe pollution of Sirsiya river by industrial activities started from Birgunj and journeyed to the capital city Kathmandu. Also, locals from Pokhara, including engineers, conservation workers, and youth groups, protested on the streets against the construction of the embankment near Phewa Lake for commercial purposes and demanded protection of wetland areas. Civil resistance also included demonstration from civilians at the Parliament House in Kathmandu, who were displaced during the establishment of Royal Sukhaphanta Wildlife Reserve in 2058 B.S without compensation. In another case of displacement, displaced flood victims who had been residing in the forest area near Jumla Road, Surkhet since 2071 B.S were reportedly in the process of being evacuated by the local government, without provision of any concrete alternatives.

In other cases, arrest/ seize during illegal logging and trades of timber, over extraction of river-based minerals, and disputes regarding poorly planned government projects that directly impact the lives of locals and sustainability of natural resources were reported by the media sources.

Ethnocultural Governance Conflicts
Media Coverage: April 2023 - May 2023

Figures: Snapshot of recorded events on ethnocultural conflicts (April-May 2023)

Summary of Recorded Events

In April and May 2023, 16 events (12 nonviolent events and 2 violent events) were registered under ethnocultural governance conflict. These events incorporate conflicts related to gender and caste-based discrimination, demands for Dalit rights reform, issues and negligence towards forced labor; constitutional dispute regarding citizenship provisions, and disputes about naming of Koshi Province, which are elaborated as below.

Contrary to reporting of previous months, during the past two months, a relatively greater number of ethnocultural conflicts have been reported by the media. According to the reports, Koshi province has been the epicenter of these ethnocultural tensions in the country after the Provincial Assembly designated 'Koshi' as the official name of Province 1 on March 2. This decision subsequently sparked numerous protests and widespread dissatisfaction among various factions of the population. Primarily, the pro-identity group (Limbuwan/Kirat) emerged at the forefront of these protests, demanding a change in the name and advocated for a name that reflected their cultural or ethnic identity. The protests grew increasingly intense, and due to the intervention of security forces, what began as peaceful demonstrations eventually turned into physical altercations.

Additionally, multiple protests were observed concerning issues of Haruwa–charuwa, a forced-labor system based on debt bondage. Civilians who were previously forced into such labour system staged protests against lack of support from government for their re-integration and re-establishment into the society. Although the government of Nepal has eliminated all forms of bonded labor, they still need support from the government to aid their transition to a more stable and independent life. Also, citizenship bill and its politicization have reportedly resulted in many people being deprived of basic rights. Hence, protests were observed demanding the finalization and implementation of the citizenship bill. Another significant protest was organized demanding strict implementation of laws against caste-based discrimination to justly eliminate the historical and systematic marginalization grounded on castes.

Key Recommendations

From the 116 events recorded in the months of April and May 2023, some major factors were identified that have evidently triggered governance conflict in the four areas focused by the study. As potential responses to address these ongoing conflicts, following recommendations are derived as way forward.

Political governance

- Central government needs to prioritize the enactment of Civil Service Act, that provides a framework for adjustment of civil servants and further guidelines for provincial and local governments in employee recruitment and management processes.

- Government needs to timely address the challenges and issues faced by ex-combatants and victims of armed conflicts and needs to be conflict-sensitive to incorporate their demands.

- Political parties need to strategize conflict resolution mechanisms so that their political conflicts do not extend to impact valuable time and efforts of local bodies, civil servants and civilians.

Development governance

- Local government must prioritize concrete financial planning, effective implementation of high-level reporting and should maintain budget transparency to lower the risks of irregularities during the lifecycle of government built infrastructures.

- Development conflict related grievance handling mechanisms are necessary to be established at the local levels to lower the escalation of development governance conflicts.

- Enhancement of fair competition and strong implementation of high standard of integrity of infrastructure investment controls the play of multiple stakeholders to foster development governance at each layer of governing structures.

Natural resources governance

- Wildlife attacks, illegal timber trades and poaching and hunting cases have been consistently recorded in currents as well as preceding months of this study. Hence, distinct guidelines and strict laws need to be enforced by responsible authorities to adequately address the existing human-nature conflict and promote human-nature symbiosis.

- Strict implementation of natural resources and environmental laws and policies must be ensured to prohibit damage or exploitation of natural resources and needs to be urgently addressed among federal, provincial and local governments.

- Government must have strict crisis coping mechanisms to address the plights of civilians affected and displaced by natural disasters or climate emergencies.

Ethnocultural governance

- The government plays a crucial role in reintegrating previously forced laborers into society. Hence, a comprehensive plan that addresses their specific needs and provides necessary support for their successful reintegration must be employed.

- It should be taken into consideration that security forces' interventions even during peaceful protests can often escalate to violent turn of events. Thus, such interventions should be deployed as a last resort to control protests with greater emphasis on promoting peaceful resolution.

- Instances of caste based discriminations should be treated with utmost seriousness by government entities prioritizing implementation of existing laws and policies that address such incidents effectively.

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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